

## ALEXANDRIA 04: American Literary Advertiser

01: American Literary Advertiser (1802)

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The *American Literary Advertiser* was a relatively short-lived journal that was transplanted to Alexandria from Washington in November 1802. It was the first publishing venture of the firm of James Lyon (274) and Richard Dinmore (139), two Jeffersonians then residing in the national capital, and reflected their political interests. This weekly survived for the duration of their partnership alone, dying when that arrangement ceased in mid-1804.

Most contemporaries saw the *Literary Advertiser* as simply an extension of Lyon's partisan ambitions, but the circumstances of its founding suggest that Dinmore was the driving force behind its publication. Trained as a physician in England, he was compelled to emigrate to America in the fall of 1797 after his published political writings made him subject to Britain's onerous sedition laws. After he landed in New York City, Dinmore moved on to the nascent national capital, where he opened a school and bookstore in May 1798. Dinmore's choice to promote the most recent European books on history and philosophy in his store promptly drew him to Washington's Jeffersonian circles, ones sympathetic to the liberalized political philosophies of the English émigré; in turn, these friendly patrons paved the way for him to express those views in newly-founded American publications.

Central to Dinmore's transition to journalism in 1800 was James Lyon, son of the Vermont publisher and congressman Matthew Lyon (1750-1822). The elder Lyon had been caned on the floor of the House by Roger Griswold, a Connecticut Federalist, for Lyon's disrespectful attitude toward his "social betters" in Congress; Lyon published an inflammatory pamphlet about the affair during his 1798 Congressional campaign and was promptly jailed under the Federalists' new Sedition Act; although he won reelection from his jail cell, his effectiveness was constrained, and he removed to Kentucky in 1801. Meanwhile, son James was invited by Jefferson and his leadership cadre to come to Virginia and inaugurate a series of new political papers supporting the Virginian's presidential candidacy, using his family's new-found prominence to draw financing. Once Jefferson's victory seemed assured in mid-1800, Lyon closed the paper he had opened in Richmond and relocated his press to Georgetown; there he issued a new series of his year-old *National Magazine*, now subtitled *Cabinet of the United States*. The move was Lyon's first in a series of enterprises designed to supplant the District's Federalist publishers; he wanted to add a daily paper, a bookstore and circulating library, a book- and job-printing office, and a paper mill to his existing weekly magazine.

It appears Dinmore was part of Lyon's plan from its start in September 1800, contributing to his magazine, although not credited directly with such until he assumed the editor's chair in October 1801. By then, Dinmore had replaced Lyon as the driving force behind the planned circulating library; the Englishman opened its doors in June 1801 at a location just off the President's Square. He also became one of the literary directors of Lyon's new Washington Printing and Bookselling Company that August. For the moment, the newspaper component was deferred in favor of the existing Jeffersonian journal of James D. Westcott (437), an

Alexandria publisher and bookseller who's *Times and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser* helped promote Lyon's ventures. The multiplicity of those ventures put considerable strain on his finances and evidently exhausted Dinmore's as well. Lyon had transferred ownership of the *Cabinet* to the new publishing firm in October 1801, when Dinmore assumed its editorial side; but now as the company's fiscal director, Lyon realized that he had to close that money-losing periodical in January 1802.

That March, the two formed a partnership, independent of Lyon's other projects, to offer the *American Literary Advertiser* in the place of the deceased *Cabinet*; the new weekly had a belle-lettrés perspective more attuned to Dinmore's academic leanings than to the partisan tastes of Lyon; it also promoted those works that were for sale in Dinmore's Washington bookstore and library. Such a literary focus was evidently a result of Lyon's divided interests, to which were now added duties as a confidential messenger for officials in the Jefferson administration, duties that often took him away from Washington. Hence, Dinmore was the new journal's day-to-day manager, making that literary perspective unsurprising; but Lyon's political notoriety and his continuing written contributions to the *Advertiser* made him the Federalists' target, and not the resident proprietor.

Still, Lyon had not given up on the idea of conducting a daily paper in the national capital, and Dinmore's steadfast presence allowed him to pursue that course, despite his recurrent absences. He would find an opportunity for such a venture in Alexandria. In the summer of 1802, J. D. Westcott's Alexandria paper began to have financial problems, a consequence of the dissolution of a partnership with his father and financier that May; by that fall, Westcott had been forced to shrink his five-year-old daily into a thrice-weekly *Columbian Advertiser*, and now was looking to sell it to a faithfully Republican buyer. Somehow Lyon convinced Dinmore that they should buy Westcott's troubled newspaper, despite his previous fiscal difficulties. Westcott sold them his subscriber list; they then moved their press office to Alexandria to publish the new *Alexandria Expositor and Columbian Advertiser*.

Lyon & Dinmore issued the first *Expositor* on Friday November 26, 1802, which continued uninterrupted for the next five years. In order to complete the transaction, however, they were forced to briefly suspend publishing their *American Literary Advertiser*, which should have issued its next number on Thursday November 25th, in the midst of the removal. That issue finally appeared on December 16, 1802, after the partners finished transporting their office across the Potomac.

Yet even as their Alexandria venture flourished, giving Lyon the stage he had long sought, he was looking for opportunities beyond the District of Columbia as well. Indeed, before the pair bought the *Columbian Advertiser*, Lyon had founded another newspaper in Savannah, Georgia, with Samuel Morse, a Republican printer from Connecticut. And then with the impending transfer of Louisiana Territory to the United States in December 1803, he proposed that they publish a new Lyon & Dinmore newspaper in New Orleans, a concept that came from his travels to the West carrying messages to James Wilkinson, the military governor there. Consequently, Lyon now regularly travelled a circuit from Washington to his father's new home in Kentucky, to New Orleans, to Savannah, and then back to the capital again, leaving the business of the Alexandria office to Dinmore.

This absentee relationship could not be continued indefinitely, and the *American Literary Advertiser* became a victim of that reality. On May 1, 1804, Lyon bought Dinmore's interest in their five-month-old New Orleans newspaper, and on August 27, 1804, Dinmore, in turn, bought Lyon's share of their *Alexandria Expositor*, bringing an end to the concern of Lyon & Dinmore. As the last known issue of the *Literary Advertiser* is that for Tuesday March 20, 1804, it is evident that its publication ceased with one of those two 1804 transactions, most likely the May one, as that sale required Lyon to become resident proprietor in New Orleans for the remainder of that year. So abandoned, it is reasonable to think that Dinmore would have closed the *Advertiser* at that time, in order to refocus his energies on the daily paper that he then purchased outright that August.

Remarkably, articles from the defunct weekly continued to appear in Republican journals for the rest of Jefferson's presidency, reprinted because of a continuing relevance. As they were signed pseudonymously, individual authors cannot be discerned with any certainty. But given Lyon's many absences, we can be fairly certain that those pieces evince Dinmore's influence over the *Advertiser's* content more than they do that of his prodigal partner. So it is also fairly certain that the immigrant Dinmore reflects contemporaneous attitudes better than does native-born Lyon, who remains the favored historical subject in this alliance.

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Sources: LCCN No. 86-071532; Brigham; Bryan, *National Capital*; Austin, *Matthew Lyon*; Ames, *National Intelligencer*; notices in *American Literary Advertiser* (1802-04); [Washington] *Centinel of Liberty* (1799-1801); [Washington] *National Intelligencer* (1801-13); and *Alexandria Expositor* (1802-07).