

ALEXANDRIA 07: The Alexandrian

01: The Alexandrian: A Commercial, Agricultural and Literary Journal (1820-1821)

The Alexandrian was the commercialized successor to Alexandria's first literary journal, the *Columbian Telescope*. It was published by two young journeyman-printers, whose ambitions exceeded their financial resources, so leading to the demise of this and other such ventures.

The *Columbian Telescope* ceased publication in May 1820, when its sole proprietor, Samuel H. Davis (126), bought the *Winchester Republican* and relocated to that Shenandoah Valley town. As he had acquired the whole of that printing office, Davis left his Alexandria press behind, before selling it in September 1820 to two journeymen there – Henry Pittman (327) and Douglas Thomson (413). It appears that both men were fairly well-known in the town, and had been employed previously by either the *Alexandria Herald* of Nathaniel Rounsavell (367) and John Corse (106), or the *Alexandria Gazette* of Davis (briefly in 1819) and Samuel Snowden (393). Earlier that year, Thomson had formed a partnership with a man named Hawe (206) – likely Patrick J. Hawe, later managing editor of Leesburg's *Washingtonian* – to publish a collection of speeches by barrister Charles Phillips, an advocate for Irish rebels and English radicals in British courts. That project was the only one completed by the firm of Hawe & Thomson; the sale of the Davis press soon followed its July release, with Pittman convincing Thomson to join him in the new firm of Pittman & Thomson. Immediately, the pair proposed publication of a thrice-weekly mercantile paper using the Davis press; that project, however, did not come to fruition, likely a result of a lack of interest in a town that already supported two daily papers, whose content was regularly one-half advertisements.

Still, the new partners were not deterred, turning instead to a plan to resurrect the literary weekly that Davis had published between June 1819 and May 1820. But their version would be a thrice-weekly paper with advertising notices that had not been a part of the preceding journal (the *Columbian Telescope* relied on subscriptions alone). An unexpected inability to procure sufficient paper for the project delayed their planned November 1st start by two weeks; but once properly supplied, Pittman & Thomson began issuing *The Alexandrian: A Commercial, Agricultural, and Literary Journal* on November 16, 1820.

The fate of their new journal was doomed, however, within weeks. In February 1821, John Corse withdrew from his decade-long partnership with Nathaniel Rounsavell as publishers of the *Alexandria Herald*. The firm of Corse & Rounsavell was quickly succeeded by that of Rounsavell & Pittman. The change meant that Pittman was now essentially in competition with himself, and with Snowden's *Alexandria Gazette*, so potentially damaging the finances of each of his two partnerships. In this new mix, *The Alexandrian* was abandoned in short order, closing after just nineteen weeks (or 58 numbers) on March 31, 1821, with the assets of Pittman & Thomson being sold off to Rounsavell & Pittman to pay the older firm's debts.

While the closure likely benefitted Pittman, it apparently devastated Thomson financially, as he was declared an insolvent debtor in April 1823, just two years later, disappearing from public records after that event. The same fate befell Pittman in 1827. He was forced to buy Rounsavell's interest in the *Herald* in mid-1822, when his new partner resigned in ill health.

That purchase was financed by Corse, as had been Pittman's 1821 buy-in, and over the next four years, he found he could not retire the promissory notes held by Corse. Pittman was compelled to close the *Herald* in November 1826, and then was sued by Corse in 1827 for his unpaid debts, forcing him into bankruptcy as well. The impoverished Pittman attempted to kill Corse that December, and was tried for the crime a year later; he was acquitted from a lack of admissible (i.e. white) witnesses and fled to New Orleans, dying there in 1833.

Sources: LCCN No. 84-038753; Brigham II: 1106; Miller, *Artisans & Merchants*; notices in *Alexandria Herald* (1819-26) and the *Alexandria Gazette* (1819-33).