

CHARLESTON 01: Kenhawa Spectator

- 01: Kenhawa Spectator (1820-1822)
 - 02: Western Courier (1822-1826)
 - 03: Western Virginian and Kanawha County Gazette (1826)
 - 04: Western Virginian (1826-1829)
 - 05: Western Register (1829-1830)
 - 06: Kanawha Register (1830)
 - 07: Kanawha Banner (1830-1835)
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The first journal published in Charleston was one that both reflected the growing economic importance of that place and reinforced the cultural values of its Presbyterian founders. As such, the *Kenhawa Spectator* became a solidly conservative voice in the western reaches of Virginia, one that was silenced only by the Jacksonian Revolution.

Founded in 1788, Charleston soon became the principal market town of the Kanawha River Valley and a key waypoint on the water routes west via the Ohio River. From its earliest days, the Kanawha County seat was a crucial center of salt production in the state, leading to the creation of the Kanawha Salt Company in 1818, which merged the many small salt-works there into a commercial colossus. A year before, coal was discovered nearby, which made the town a major supplier of that industrial commodity as well, just as the steamboat era dawned on the rivers of the West. These natural resources, among others, represented unprecedented commercial opportunities for many young American men. And new urban centers founded on those opportunities drew religious reformers to them as they grew.

In the fall of 1818, the Rev. Henry Ruffner started a preparatory school in Charleston – the Mercer Academy – at the behest of the Lexington Presbytery; among its first teachers was a Culpeper County lawyer named Herbert P. Gaines (176), a son-in-law of Ruffner's colleague, Rev. Francis Crutchfield, then pastor of the town's Presbyterian church. Gaines left Virginia before the War of 1812 to practice law and journalism in Ohio and Kentucky; he relocated to Charleston when his father-in-law moved there to establish St. John's Parish in support of Ruffner's school. While Gaines would practice law in Kanawha County until another removal in 1827, he was also a key figure in getting the Mercer Academy off the ground.

Yet Gaines was soon drawn away from that teaching post to a new journalistic venture. The rapid growth of Charleston in those same years, a result of the developing mining business, engendered an interest among the town's leaders to have a newspaper published there that could support further business growth – and Gaines's prior experience made him the resident best suited to undertake such a project. So in the summer of 1820, he withdrew from his teaching duties at Mercer Academy to refocus his energies on a new weekly, the *Kenhawa Spectator*. Gaines issued its first number on October 21, 1820, and continued to do so until June 1822. Local lore suggests that Gaines took on Mason Campbell (b. 1798), then the librarian at the Mercer Academy, as his editorial partner in early 1822, though the dearth of surviving numbers does not allow for a confirmation of that oral history. What is

clear is that Gaines sold the paper to Campbell in June 1822 after nearly two years as its proprietor in order to return to his legal practice full time. Campbell immediately recast the *Spectator* as the *Western Courier* and continued its publication until the summer of 1829, with a second recasting as the *Western Virginian and Kanawha County Gazette* in July 1826.

Sometime after the May 20, 1829 issue of the *Western Virginian*, Campbell sold his weekly to James M. Laidley (1809-86) and Alexander T. Laidley (1807-95), two brothers who were also nephews of the one-time Morgantown publisher John Osborne Laidley (258). The pair issued the first number of their recast *Western Register* on July 15, 1829. (That transfer date also corresponds with Gaines's departure from Charleston, suggesting that the attorney had retained at least partial interest in Campbell's paper after the initial 1822 sale.) The Laidleys changed the paper's name again – from *Western Register* to *Kanawha Register* – sometime before the issue of January 11, 1830, so recasting their weekly as more of a local paper and abandoning the regional identity projected by Gaines and Campbell alike.

Still, the Laidley brothers' tenure as proprietors of the weekly lasted little more than a year; with the issue of September 10, 1830, Campbell took back ownership of the paper from the pair, though now in conjunction with Ezra Walker (1802-53). The firm of Campbell & Walker retitled the paper once again and continued publishing their new *Kanawha Banner* until the spring of 1835. By 1830, however, the political environment had also been recast, with the Whig-inclined *Banner* now facing competition from Jacksonian journals in Morgantown, Clarksburg, and beyond. The partners also began experiencing supply problems, resulting in their suspending publication in January & February 1832 from a lack of paper for printing the weekly on. Meanwhile, Campbell had become heavily involved in both the salt business and steam-ship construction, endeavors that were more profitable than was the struggling *Kanawha Banner*. So with the March 19, 1835 issue, he retired from journalism completely to focus on his other business ventures. Walker attempted to continue alone, but sometime after the April 2, 1835 issue, he recognized the futility of such a continued effort and ceased publishing this lineal descendant of Charlestown's first newspaper.

Sources: LCCN Nos. 85-059851, 85-054129, 85-059881, 84-037804, 84-037803, 85-059882, & 84-037806; Brigham II: 1169; Norona & Shetler 1200, 1203, 1204, 1196, & 1193; Rice, "West Virginia Printers;" Atkinson, *Kanawha County*; Ambler, *History of Education in West Virginia*.