

CHARLESTOWN 01: Charlestown Patriot

01: Charlestown Patriot (1803-1804)

The first newspaper published in Charlestown is one whose existence can only be discerned from references to that journal found in newspapers elsewhere in the country. As a result, little can be said definitively about its origin, conduct, or closure, although the period when it was issued provides modern observers with some context and probabilities.

Until 1835, Charlestown was home to a single newspaper, one that served as the journal of record for Jefferson County. The county itself was formed by an act of the General Assembly in January 1801 by splitting off the eastern third of Berkeley County, a region on the west bank of the Potomac River from Harpers Ferry north. With Charlestown situated near the center of the new county, it was named as the county's seat in that act.

At that time, the northern Shenandoah Valley was served by two papers from the Berkeley seat of Martinsburg – one Federalist and one Republican. The dominant journal was the Federalist weekly of John Alburtis (004), *The Berkeley Intelligencer*; his paper first issued in April 1799 to counter the *Potomac Guardian* of the Jeffersonian publisher, Nathaniel Willis (449); the ensuing depletion of his revenues forced Willis to sell his decade-old paper that November to Armstrong Charlton (088). Charlton recast the paper as the *Republican Atlas* in April 1800, adding William Brown (058) as a partner; this was a strange alliance, as Brown was a brother to Matthew Brown (057), an incendiary Federalist editor from Baltimore, who was then also senior partner in the *Alexandria Advertiser*, a new partisan daily there. So this pairing was probably doomed from the start by their conflicting political views. Sometime in summer 1801, Charlton sold his interest in the paper to Brown and departed Martinsburg; Brown's subsequent attempt to turn the *Atlas* into a Federalist journal was stymied by the presence of Alburtis's larger weekly, now called *The Berkeley and Jefferson Intelligencer*.

With Alburtis asserting that his paper was the journal of record for Jefferson County as well as Berkeley, Brown closed the *Atlas* in November 1801 and moved his press to Charlestown to serve the new county's government; he would conduct a printing office there until April 1809. The first known reference to the *Charlestown Patriot* is in Alburtis's paper for March 18, 1803, little more than a year into Brown's residence there. That concurrence indicates that Brown printed the new journal, but it appears that he did not edit it. The latest known reference to the *Patriot* is in *Kline's Carlisle (Penn.) Weekly Gazette* of November 30, 1804, which reprinted an article from the issue of November 12th; that article reported on the "bilious fever" then raging in Jefferson County and ended with an attack on Federalists:

"Those who ascribe the prevalence of the disease to the more immediate operation [sic] of the Almighty, will not be at a loss to find the causes of his wrath. The horrid profanation of his name, of his titles, of his attributes; the disrespect of his ordinances, and the partial neglect of the magistracy in the suppression of vice and immorality; all this combined with the daily slanders issued from the self stiled [sic] federal presses, as well as from interested individuals, against the virtuous and honest administration of our government, will furnish a sufficient

reason why the blasphemy, the discontentedness, and perverseness [sic] of the federalists, should call down the divine displeasure upon our citizens."

Such a vicious anti-Federalist commentary surely would not have come from Brown's pen, so indicating that he was the printer in an arrangement here with at least one Republican editor. That would also be the case when Brown later printed the *Farmers' Repository* there for Richard Williams in 1808 and 1809.

The above citations appear to stand as bookends for the published run of the *Charlestown Patriot*, even as the dates for its birth and death cannot be determined without surviving issues. It may be that the journal began publication much earlier than the March 1803 reference suggests, perhaps as early as the spring of 1802, once Brown was settled in the town. But the mid-November 1804 reference seems to come just before its demise or, at least, before its transformation into Charleston's next paper – the *Farmers' Register*. That journal has been assigned an 1804 date as well, from the mutilated copy of the only issue of that weekly ever recorded, now lost. That chronological proximity suggests a simple change in name between the two publications; however, absent evidence for a succession between the *Patriot* and the *Register*, each title needs to be listed separately in this Index.

Sources: Norona & Shetler 1189; Rice, "West Virginia Printers." Not in Library of Congress files.