

CHARLOTTESVILLE 01: Central Gazette

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The first newspaper published in Charlottesville was a highly-local venture with a national reach – features it retained over its forty-year life. Issued originally as the *Central Gazette* with the support of an aging Thomas Jefferson, its transformation into the *Virginia Advocate* after his 1826 death reflects local responses to current events by his younger associates and admirers as they adapted Jefferson's ideas the needs of a new generation of Americans.

The birth of the *Central Gazette* in 1820 was tied to that of the University of Virginia, which absorbed the Central College at Charlottesville – so the origin of its title. The appearance of such a large-scale academic venture, no doubt, recommended the establishment of a press office there, but not necessarily of a weekly paper. At this time, Charlottesville was served primarily by papers published in Richmond and Staunton, a logical result of Virginia's main east-west post-road passing through the Albemarle County seat.

The only press conducted there previously had been that of James Hayes (207) in 1781. Then the state's public printer, Hayes was forced to move his Richmond office west when the state government abandoned their new capital during the invasion of British forces that spring; that removal led to a nine-month-long exile in Charlottesville, one that ended only after the General Assembly provided the means he needed to transport his press back to Richmond late that fall. While in Charlottesville, Hayes often lacked the supplies necessary to fulfill his official duties, and so printed only for the government, and did not execute any job-printing or newspaper work there. After his departure, Charlottesville relied on press offices in Staunton, Lynchburg, or Richmond for job-printing, as well as on the newspapers issued in those places, for nearly forty years.

The University Act of January 1819 changed Charlottesville's secondary status and ended its reliance on distant presses. As Jefferson oversaw construction of the institution's buildings and the hiring of its faculty, his friends and associates in Albemarle County started to make improvements in the town that would transform the rural village into an appropriate setting for a nationally-recognized university – and the *Central Gazette* was one of those projects.

Central Gazette

The key figures in this new venture were Clement P. (292) and John H. McKennie (293), the eldest sons of Matthew McKennie, a Fauquier County physician who died in Warrenton in 1812. By 1819, the brothers lived on large farms in eastern Albemarle County, along the Fauquier border, and so were neighbors to James Monroe, then the president of the United States. At the time of the University Act, one of the brothers (or maybe both) was close to completing a year-long partnership with James Caldwell (071) in publishing his struggling Warrenton weekly, the *Palladium of Liberty*. The *Palladium* received considerable support during that year from the Monroe administration, in the form of a license (one of three

given each state) to publish the laws enacted by Congress in their paper at the going advertising rate – a significant subsidy. It is unknown just how much the neighborly relations between Monroe and the McKennies influenced that grant, but at the end of their agreement, Caldwell had sufficient funds to buy McKennie's interest in the *Palladium*; in turn, the unidentified McKennie brother used the monies he garnered to launch the *Central Gazette* in Charlottesville the following winter.

When the *Central Gazette* was first issued on January 29, 1820 – just four days after the university formally gained title to its proposed site – the paper had become a family project. The new weekly was published by the firm of C. P. & J. H. McKennie. According to the 1820 federal industrial census, the brothers employed four journeymen in their office, who then produced and circulated about 400 copies of each issue, so realizing an annual-gross-revenue of about \$4000 – or about two-thirds of the cost of the university's first modest buildings. That quick success also seems tied to the country's thirst for stories about the new university that Jefferson was building in his retirement – both good and bad, depending on one's political perspective – which led to the *Gazette* being widely quoted throughout the United States on that subject. And it would continue to be such a key source for distant editors until the Civil War dawned. Yet the most practical consideration for the McKennies was likely that the *Gazette* now served as the journal-of-record for Albemarle County and its closest neighbors east of the Blue Ridge, which resulted in a steady stream of well-paying legal and business notices.

After the *Gazette's* first year, brother John withdrew from their concern, leaving Clement as the journal's sole proprietor. John soon sold his Albemarle County property and removed to Nelson County, and then to western Tennessee about 1824; there he speculated widely in recently-ceded native-lands in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama, a business that ended with his murder in 1835 at the hands either of displaced natives or of rival land speculators. Meanwhile, Clement remained in Albemarle County for the rest of his life and retained sole ownership of the *Central Gazette* until June 1827.

In 1824, McKennie's standing associations with Monroe and Jefferson meant that his paper supported the candidacy of William H. Crawford (born in adjacent Nelson County) over the more-popular Andrew Jackson. The controversial end to that election – when Clay threw his support to Adams to defeat Jackson in the House of Representatives – unleashed an effort to construct a coalition between the Crawfordites and the Jacksonians to oppose the new president's administration. McKennie responded to editorializing in the *Richmond Enquirer* favoring such a plan with a simple question: "Cui bono?" – Who benefits?

"If it is attempted, by the formation of leagues and establishment of covenants between the friends of the disappointed candidates, to create a systematic and trained band in opposition to the administration of Mr. Adams, we would reject the proffer with disdain. We did not advocate the pretensions of Mr. Adams to the Presidency—we do not approve his principles or his practice in all things—and yet we are not disposed to censure and condemn his course by anticipation. We will judge him as we would judge all others, without prejudice or affection—while we are at liberty to censure or approve his conduct as it shall be right or wrong. When

his claims are again properly brought before the people and it shall be necessary for the sovereign arbiters of this country to pass upon them, we will speak as becomes an advocate of truth and a sentinel of justice."

Yet over the ensuing year, McKennie began to recognize that his impartial course was out of step with his readers. Crawford's ill health meant Jackson would be the candidate favored by Democratic-Republicans in 1828. So, he moved to bring the editorial perspective of the *Gazette* more in line with that of his neighbors. In either 1825 or 1826, he brought in new editorial assistance in the form of a young Charlottesville lawyer named Thomas W. Gilmer (1802-44); Gilmer had taken a lead role in the town's reception for the Marquis de Lafayette in 1824, and after Adams's election, became a prominent figure among Albemarle County's Jacksonians. Eventually, Gilmer determined to take control of the *Gazette* in order to help effect Jackson's election in 1828. Apparently tiring of the continuing political controversy and anticipating a brutal election-year, McKennie decided that ceding control of his journal to Gilmer was an appropriate course. So in June 1827, McKennie sold both his press and his paper to his 25-year-old editor and retired permanently from journalism. After building a sizable house near the university, he shifted his focus to supplying books for the school's instructors and students; in 1834, he bought the town's principal bookstore and conducted that venture until his death in 1856; from about 1840 onward it was a business he held in partnership with his son Marcellus.

Virginia Advocate

After purchasing the *Central Gazette*, Gilmer made a formal break with its past, suspending publication of the weekly for about six weeks. During that interval, he issued a prospectus for a new *Virginia Advocate*, a journal that he would publish in conjunction with John A. G. Davis (1802-40), another young Charlottesville attorney who had attended the University's first classes in 1825. Gilmer and Davis told their potential subscribers that the paper would have a more proactive stance than had McKennie's reactive *Gazette*. Their weekly would.

"be conducted on independent and liberal principles—without becoming a passive instrument of party enthusiasts, it will bestow praise and censure where they are due, disdaining alike the blind zeal which acknowledges no error and its favorites, and that undiscerning hostility which can see no merit in an antagonist. Its columns will be assiduously devoted to an energetic system of State improvement, by which our country shall maintain the elevated rank which nature has assigned her among nations. Virginia has indulged too long in her lethargy.... It is time that the spirit of the ancient dominion had arisen from its lair, to slumber no more."

The first number of the *Virginia Advocate* was issued July 28th and continued, without a significant interruption, until 1861. That stability came from a three-part methodology that was adopted by Gilmer & Davis and sustained by the paper's ensuing proprietors: a core group of local investors, often unnamed, who employed young, energetic editorial writers (usually local attorneys) and mature, experienced printers to produce the weekly for them. Over the course of the next thirty-four years, several of those writers and printers emerged as proprietors of the *Advocate*, but always in the background were men in local political leadership who held the purse strings, so keeping the paper's political content in line with

local imperatives.

In this initial iteration of that pattern, editor-proprietors Gilmer and Davis were soon joined in Charlottesville by Elhanan W. Reinhart (351), a skilled printer who had published the first newspaper in Danville in 1819. Reinhart had fled Massachusetts in early 1827 for Baltimore after attempting a series of ill-fated Jacksonian journals in that Federalist bastion; there he was the proprietary face of the *Baltimore Republican*, representing an anonymous group of Jacksonian financiers. It seems that he took on only a three-month commitment to that new daily, a reasonably cautious choice given his recent experiences to the north; thus, he was available to conduct another Jacksonian press elsewhere effective about August 1st. Gilmer and Davis were clearly aware of his situation and apparently offered Reinhart a one-year agreement to manage the daily affairs of this established Charlottesville office. He accepted the offer, becoming the anonymous printer that made the firm of Gilmer & Davis viable.

During 1828, Gilmer, Davis, and Reinhart all relinquished their interests in the *Advocate*, so giving way to new proprietary alignments without interrupting publication of the weekly. In about May, when Jackson's victory was all but realized, Gilmer decided to return to his law practice, selling his share of the paper to Nicholas P. Trist (1800-74), another Charlottesville lawyer who had studied the law under Jefferson and then married his grand-daughter, so creating the firm of Davis, Trist & Co. In July, at the end of his year-long agreement, Reinhart turned over management of the office to another journeyman from Boston, Jefferson Clark (1799-1838), and turned to settling the tortured estate of his new wife's father, Dabney Minor, long a confidante of Jefferson; he also evidently increased the office's capacity in the transaction by having his old Danville press brought to Charlottesville. Then in November, immediately following Jackson's election, Davis and Trist sold both press and paper to a firm led by Francis "Frank" Carr (1784-1843), an Albemarle County physician with impeccable Republican credentials.

When Carr acquired the *Advocate*, the fifty-six-year-old doctor became its oldest proprietor to date, so representing the generation of Virginians who gave birth to that of Gilmer, Davis, and Trist. He may also have been a part of the group of local financiers behind the *Advocate* over the preceding two years. Untrained in the print trade, Carr conducted the weekly via a series of short-term arrangements with printers, whose names were masked by the Francis Carr & Co. moniker. First among those tradesmen was Clark, which secured the continuity of both his new press and paper; about a year later, Carr forged an alliance with T. G. Elliott (b. 1804), an enigmatic figure who seems to have been a county native who had trained on this press during the McKennie years. Sometime in summer 1830, however, Elliott left the office, forcing Carr to suspend publication after the *Advocate's* July 23, 1830 issue.

Elhanan Reinhart quickly came to the rescue. Carr sold him a controlling, majority interest in the paper, bringing the printer to the proprietary forefront of a newspaper for the first time since his return to Virginia. On August 6th, Reinhart resumed publication after missing just one number. This turn of events was not unwelcome, as his management of Dabney Minor's estate was not as rewarding as the printer had hoped. In doing so, he said,

"all of our airy castles, full-blown bubbles, and rainbow bowers, were quickly blown
"sky high" by the ordinary transactions involved in—one year a farmer! In that short

period elysian hopes were blighted, the scales removed from our eyes, the delusion of years dissipated, and our fever for farming cured. It now only remains for us to go earnestly to work, apply ourselves diligently to the business to which we were reared, solicit the indulgences of a generous public, and confide he implicitly and its liberality for support for ourselves and family. This we do with cheerfulness and fortitude; the one in the hope of retrieving the hundreds that have vanished, like the morning mist; the other, in the determination to endure the miseries of our vocation—miseries to us the more accumulated and formidable by reason of our deficient education and straitened circumstances."

Yet, despite Reinhart's concern over "the hundreds that have vanished," he had not been compelled to buy the entirety of the business, as Carr had been in 1828. Rather, it seems that Carr kept a minority interest in the *Advocate* until his death in 1843; his estate was one of several parties involved in a complicated 1855 chancery suit that attempted to resolve the intertwined financial interests of all of the *Advocate's* owners after Reinhart.

For the next year, according to one of his former Boston foes. Reinhart conducted "one of the most decided, and even violent Jackson papers in the Union." In mid-1831, his decade of editorial support for Jackson resulted in a patronage grant in Jackson's administration that brought his journalism career to an end. Anticipating his move to Washington, he sold his interest in the *Advocate* in mid-June to the partnership of Wilson M. Cary (1806-77) and Egbert R. Watson (1810-87), announcing that the pair would take control of the "Editorial Department" on August 1st. That notice stated that Cary & Watson had acquired a half-interest in the whole, showing that at least Carr, if not others, retained the other half. On the appointed date, Reinhart left Charlottesville to become a clerk in the General Land Office in Washington; for the rest of his life, Reinhart was an undeniable exemplar of the so-called "spoils system" and profited well from that role. So it is fitting that he died in April 1841 while still in that post before he could be removed by the new Whig administration of Harrison & Tyler.

Evolution

The new firm of Cary & Watson was much like that of the earlier Gilmer & Davis one – a pair of young Charlottesville lawyers whose interest in the *Advocate* was as a political platform for like-minded backers. At twenty-five, Cary was the older partner in the firm, and had been a university classmate of John A.G. Davis; the younger Watson, then just twenty-one, also attended the university and had served as James Monroe's personal secretary in the year before the former president moved to New York City in late 1830. Under their tenure, the *Advocate* began evolving from a Jacksonian to a Whig perspective, initiated what they saw as Jackson's flawed interpretations of Jeffersonian principles, even as they vigorously supported the president on tariffs and nullification. In October 1832, Cary left the concern, selling his share to William White Tompkins (1812-65), a lawyer who had been admitted to the Albemarle County bar alongside partner Watson in 1830. Tompkins was instrumental in fostering the *Advocate's* Whig evolution as the one constant in its life over the next seven years – the era of the rise of that new party's influence in both Virginia and the nation. He also became the longest serving proprietor to date in the process. as would his two

successors, opening a sixteen-year run of a consistent, legalistic, states' rights perspective.

In 1834, probably in August, at the end of his third year conducting the *Advocate*, Watson retired from journalism to focus on the law, a calling which led to many years of service as a justice of the chancery court. That change prompted John Hampden Pleasants (330), editor of the *Richmond Whig*, to publish a unsolicited testimonial for the newspaper (and so of Tompkins) in order to stabilize its subscription list after that retirement:

"This paper... Is conducted with a spirit and ability worthy of its location. It has the sagacity to see, the ability to expound, and the courage to maintain political truth, and to expose falsehood, delusion and hypocrisy. Such a journal, at such a point, at such an era, ought to be sustained with the liberality of patronage, proportioned to its ability, its independence, and its services....We call on the friends of State Rights and the opponents of usurpation to stand by those who deserve so eminently at their hands."

Evidently, Pleasants was aware of an ongoing effort by Thomas Jefferson Randolph (1792-1875), Jefferson's eldest grandson, to claim his grandfather's legacy as his own. As part of that effort, he had employed the Charlottesville press of Dr. Francis Carr to publish a highly-edited version of Jefferson's letters in 1829-30. Carr had brought printer James Alexander to Charlottesville to assist in that publication. Now, as the *Advocate* became a respected Whig journal, Randolph drew Alexander away from his new employer to publish a new weekly in competition with Tompkins offering a "correct" interpretation of Jefferson's principles from a decidedly Jacksonian outlook. The resulting *Jeffersonian Republican* issued its first number on October 21, 1835.

Tompkins responded to Randolph's challenge by adding an energetic young voice to his *Advocate* – Alexander Moseley (1806-81). He graduated from the university with honors in 1831, and had been practicing law in the counties around Albemarle since. Thus Tompkins already knew of his rhetorical abilities and so asked Moseley to join him in Charlottesville once Randolph's plan became known. He made the young writer his partner in the *Advocate* on October 9, 1835, two weeks before his competitor first issued. Together, they increased the pace of the *Advocate's* publication to twice-weekly that December, so challenging the *Republican* with twice the editorial content, as well as with twice the advertising space of the new journal weekly. The partners also evinced the independence that Pleasants spoke of by rejecting the candidacies of Henry Clay and Martin Van Buren alike for president in 1836 and backed Hugh Lawson White of Tennessee instead (as did Pleasants).

By spring 1836, Tompkins's response had solidified the *Advocate's* subscription base, and so he resumed the paper's former weekly pace that May. He was also evidently aware by then of his young partner's popularity with Whig editors everywhere, particularly with Pleasants in Richmond. As a result, he was unable to counter an offer made to Moseley that summer to become a partner in the *Richmond Whig*. Moseley left Charlottesville at the end of July to take up a role in the state capital that he rotated in and out of until his death in 1881.

Moseley's departure meant yet another reorganization of the *Advocate* office. Early that fall, Tompkins forged a partnership with one Robert C. Noel (1812-85), apparently a twenty-four-year-old journeyman printer. About that same time, he engaged Allan Bowie Magruder

(1811-85), another young Charlottesville lawyer, as the paper's editor. This arrangement seems to have remained in place until early 1840, when Tompkins finally retired. But in making Noel his partner, Tompkins also introduced the person whose name had the longest association with the *Advocate*.

On March 1, 1840, Noel assumed the majority interest in the business as Robert C. Noel & Co. In announcing the change, Noel introduced Lucian Minor (1802-58) as his new editor; while yet another Charlottesville lawyer, he was one with a William & Mary pedigree rather than a graduate of the university, as before. In that notice, Minor made the offer to "surrender an equal portion of his paper to both political parties by which the views and the arguments of the one side may be seen by the other," a clear challenge to the cross-town *Republican*. How long that extraordinary approach lasted is unclear, as it seems that by the fall, Minor had given way to a successor. William J. Shelton (b. 1818), a university graduate in 1840, would be editor of the *Advocate* off and on through at least 1845, when he retired to practice law full time; he relinquished his editorial chair at different times to Thomas Wood (1810-95), James C. Halsall (b. 1806) – once each – and William T. Early, Jr. (1817-74) twice, suggesting that Noel replaced his editors about every six months to keep his journal fresh. All four editors were lawyers practicing in the town; Early was partner to Magruder, Noel's first editor with Tompkins, while Wood was married to Halsall's sister, indicating that Noel drew from the same circle of allied political interests in Albemarle County. After 1845, though, the occupant of the *Advocate's* editorial chair is usually uncertain. Late that year, Noel sold an interest in the paper to James W. Saunders (1793 -1859), an older lawyer who was soon-to-be president of the Farmer's Bank of Virginia branch in Charlottesville, creating the firm of Noel & Saunders. Over the next four years, the identity of the weekly's editor was not reported, though they probably continued the prior system of employing young university graduates beginning their careers as lawyers there on short-term contracts.

In 1849, Noel retired from the journalism business to take up life as a gentleman farmer, so ending a thirteen year association with the *Advocate*. He sold the press office and paper to Orville S. Allen (1805-84), apparently the son of a successful Charlottesville merchant, as the firm of O. S. Allen & Co. The occupant of Allen's editorial chair also often went unreported, though it appears that John L. Cochran (1827-1910) was regularly so employed. Nineteenth-century town histories report that Cochran was the *Advocate's* editor for most the 1850s, while surviving accounts from the *Richmond Whig* suggest that he rotated in and out of that post, just as Shelton had in the 1840s. Those accounts indicate that Cochran both preceded and succeeded Virginius E. Shepherd (b. 1827), still another young Charlottesville lawyer, in that role; Shepherd held the seat in 1852 and gave way again to Cochran in February 1853; Cochran was reported as editor in November 1855 in an article about the first (and only) Richmond "Editors Convention," and again in March 1856 in a short comment printed in the *Richmond Whig*.

The Review

In March 1860, Allen followed the lead of his predecessor and retired from journalism to become a gentleman farmer. He sold his entire business to the new partnership of Peyton & Southall. Moses Green Peyton (1828-97) was a son of a wealthy Richmond merchant who

retired to Albemarle County; he was one of the university's first civil-engineering graduates in 1849 as well. James Cocke Southall (1827-97) was a son of Valentine Wood Southall, long the Commonwealth Attorney for Albemarle County. One nineteenth-century town history reports Southall succeeded Cochran as editor of the *Advocate* under Allen, which would then make this 1860 transition much like the first one in 1827 – the old proprietor sold his business to his editor, who brought in a partner to help finance the deal. Peyton's father, Bernard, was one of the state capital's largest merchants at his death; son Green inherited much of his wealth and so had the wherewithal to fund such a purchase. As with the earlier transition, Peyton and Southall suspended publication of the paper for about six weeks, and offered a prospectus for a weekly with a new name: *The Review*. That restyled paper made its appearance on April 13, 1860, exactly one year before the fall of Fort Sumter. In that year, few editors elsewhere noted the change in title, calling the paper the *Charlottesville Advocate*, as they always had.

The change seems to have been tied to the death of the Whig Party in Virginia in advance of the 1860 federal elections. Turning the *Advocate* into the *Review* was a way to distance the weekly from its past associations with the Northern anti-slavery Whigs who now offered Lincoln for the presidency. Thus Charlottesville's two papers supported the two Southern candidates: the *Review* supported former Whig John Bell of Tennessee, the Constitutional Union candidate, while the *Republican* backed John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky, the choice of Southern Democrats who favored secession. That November, Bell defeated Breckenridge by barely 150 votes in the state, making Virginia one of the three states who cast ballots for Bell in the Electoral College the ensuing February. Yet the small margin between Unionists and Secessionist in Virginia was erased in April 1861 when Lincoln called for troops as a response to Fort Sumter. Peyton and Southall evinced that erasure thusly:

“We through this journal have contended for the Union as a man contends for his life. We have encountered pecuniary injury, and the estrangement of valued friends, in the path of what we believed to be a duty to the welfare of the State, the interests of the American nation, and the cause of human liberty. And now while President Lincoln holds in suspense the uplifted gauge of battle, we warn him in the name of the former Union party in Virginia, that there are no divisions here now that the curtain has begun to rise.”

Still, as a self-identified Union paper, the *Review's* veracity and viability quickly evaporated; the paper closed shortly thereafter, perhaps as soon as May 1861; it had certainly gone into suspension by July, when Peyton enlisted in the Albemarle County Light Artillery Regiment. The *Jeffersonian Republican* succumbed as well, a result of war-time supply and labor problems, leaving Charlottesville without a journal for most of the war period.

After the war, Southall was the only partner to return to journalism, so demonstrating that he had been the driving force in the pairing with Peyton to issue the *Review*. In June 1865, he commenced publishing another paper, *The Semi-Weekly Chronicle*, apparently employing the tools he had used to publish the *Review* four years before. He was able to increase the frequency of publication in 1866, as reflected in its altered title, *The Tri-Weekly Chronicle*, before settling on *Charlottesville Chronicle* in 1868. Southall's decision to start this entirely

new journal with a new name evinces an outlook that the *Gazette/Advocate/Review* was very much an artifact of the antebellum past, and not a herald of the future.

Sources: LCCN No. 85-025230, 84-024689 & 95-079518; Brigham II: 1112; Cappon 256 & 271; annotated newspaper list in *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (1901: vol. VIII, no. 4); Wood, *Albemarle County*. newspaper accounts in the *Richmond Enquirer* (1820-74), the [Washington] *National Intelligencer* (1825-60), the *Richmond Whig* (1827-61), the [Washington] *United States' Telegraph* (1827-40), the *Boston Patriot* (1828), the *Alexandria Gazette* (1830-61), the *Essex [Haverhill] Gazette* (1830); genealogical material from the United States Decennial Census (1820-1890), the *Dictionary of American Biography*, the alumni records of the University of Virginia, and postings on Ancestry.com (September 2014).