

DANVILLE 01: Danville Courier

01: Danville Courier (1818-1819)

The introduction of journalism into Danville was part of an effort to make this small town into the commercial center of the Roanoke River valley, a trans-shipment point for produce and goods traded to the north in Petersburg. The key figure in that introduction was James Lanier (261), later Danville's first mayor, who apparently had a hand in publishing the town's sole weekly newspaper, in its various guises, from 1818 to 1831.

The maiden paper was the *Danville Courier*, which issued its first number on June 7, 1818. Its proprietor was a young Pennsylvania-born printer named Elhanan W. Reinhart (351), for whom this weekly was his first independent venture in the trade. As someone who lacked any previous ties to Danville or Virginia, it is clear he had been invited to move to this very small town – then a rude village of about 50 structures and 400 people – by local leaders intent on expanding the town's commercial reach via a weekly mercantile advertiser. Such a purpose was clearly stated in the *Courier's* prospectus:

"Politics will not be the primary object of the *Courier*. It will be devoted to Religion and Commerce, Manufactures and internal Improvements. It will be diversified with gleanings from works of literature and science with selections of a nature instructive and amusing."

As only the third number of this paper has survived (June 20, 1818), it is difficult to discern the substance of its content or any problems that may have accompanied publication of the *Courier*. But the appearance of Danville's second newspaper in August of 1819 is suggestive. Reinhart's subsequent career is marked by his evolution into a noted Jacksonian publisher between 1823 and 1831, while Danville's business community came to embrace a decidedly anti-Jacksonian perspective. With another mercantile advertiser emerging there just over a year after the *Courier* began publication, it seems that Reinhart had agreed to a simple one-year contract in 1818 which expired in June 1819. Contemporary accounts indicate that he remained in Danville until 1822 and so printed the ensuing paper for its proprietor, James Lanier; as he was a merchant-planter and lawyer, it is not a stretch to suggest that he was among those who convinced Reinhart to relocate; then when the year-long pact expired, Reinhart became Lanier's employee printing the new weekly and remained so until Lanier passed the paper to other hands in April 1822 – the moment Reinhart left Danville.

This scenario is, of course, speculative, but it fits the known circumstances of the *Courier's* life. Some authorities suggest the two weekly papers issued simultaneously until the *Courier* closed sometime in 1820; but Danville was far too small of a place then to have supported two mercantile advertisers over that year of supposed concurrence. So it is most likely that the *Courier* published just from June to June, and was then closed while Lanier organized Danville's next newspaper: the *Roanoke Sentinel*.

Sources: LCCN No. 85-025245; Brigham II: 1112; Clement, *Pittsylvania County*; Aaron, *Pittsylvania County*; newspaper notices in [Washington] *National Intelligencer* (1818-1822).