

## DANVILLE 02: Roanoke Sentinel

- 01: Roanoke Sentinel (1819-1822)
  - 02: Roanoke Sentinel (1822-1827)
  - 03: The Telegraph (1827-1830)
  - 04: The Independent Statesman and Roanoke Commercial Gazette (1830-1831)
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The second newspaper published in Danville was, like the first, 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 in Petersburg to the north. As a result, the four successive iterations of the weekly became evermore Whig in their politics and so suffered after 1830.

The new weekly – the *Roanoke Sentinel* – was first issued on August 7, 1819, or about two months after the closing of its predecessor, the *Danville Courier*. Its proprietor was James Lanier (261), who apparently had a hand in publishing the town's weekly papers until 1831. He was a merchant planter and lawyer who came to Danville from Brunswick County sometime between 1816 and 1818. From his arrival, he led efforts there to build a small village (then about 50 buildings and 400 people) into a regional commercial center; such a grand plan clearly needed a mercantile advertiser to cultivate business, and the *Courier* was the result. It issued from June 1818 to June 1819, published by Elhanan W. Reinhart (351), who was brought to Danville for that purpose by merchants there, of whom Lanier was one. When their contract with Reinhart expired, Lanier apparently handled the reorganization of this vital advertising venture, resulting in publication of the new *Sentinel* that August under his management.

As only the eighth number of the *Sentinel* has survived (September 25, 1819), it is difficult to discern the substance of its content or any problems accompanying its publication. Still, it is clear that Lanier had a deep commitment to this journalistic venture, as he immediately sought, and was granted, the post of postmaster for Danville, so allowing him ready access to the existing national information-distribution system; he retained that post throughout his association with the *Sentinel*. But reprintings of pieces from the *Sentinel* also evince his growing interest in political affairs, especially as they related to Danville's development. In the years before the 1824 election, Lanier supported John Quincy Adams for president over Virginia's newly-appointed favorite son, William H. Crawford of Georgia, because of the Treasury Secretary's backing of the Bank of the United States, which largely ignored small locales such as Danville. So at the end of March 1822, Lanier conveyed the *Sentinel* to Thomas H. Clark and John Connor, apparently anticipating his forthcoming (unsuccessful) campaigns for the U.S. Congress as an anti-Jackson candidate.

With the issue of April 6, 1822, the *Sentinel* appeared under the corporate name of Clark & Connor. Just who John Connor was and how long he remained associated with the weekly is uncertain; it may be that he was the trade partner to the editor Clark, as Reinhart had been in Danville's first weekly. In contrast, Clark was well-known and widely respected; he was a Colonel in the Virginia militia then, after having risen to the rank of Captain during the War of 1812 in the 7th Virginia Regiment; during his proprietorship of the *Sentinel*, he would be

further promoted to brigadier general; his rank shows him for a conservative figure in the county, an unsurprising turn as Clark was also a son of a Revolutionary War hero, Captain William Clark, who had served in Virginia's Assembly as a Federalist. Clark followed Lanier's course advocating for Danville's economic development and against political innovation:

"The ROANOKE SENTINEL will be devoted to the general diffusion of intelligence—Agricultural and commercial; religious and moral; political and literary—and to the maintenance and preservation of our happy Republican systems of government; both against the anarchical "Advocates of State Rights," and the no less dangerous supporters of "construction by implication." Being devoted to the State and Federal governments alike, they would view, with equal alarm, the passage of either beyond its allotted orbit.—They are for preserving the balance as directed by our Fathers of the Revolution, unwilling that either the State or Federal scale should preponderate—believing, as they do, that on the due maintenance of this equipoise, the liberty and happiness of the people of this country essentially depend."

Only two numbers of Clark's weekly are known to survive today. The first for June 21, 1823 (vol. 2, no. 12) indicates that Connor had retired by that date, suggesting another one-year contract with the journal's mercantile backers. The second for December 8, 1827 (vol. 5, no. 51) shows Clark altered his paper's title to *The Telegraph* sometime during that four-year interval without having changed its numbering or suspending its publication.

The ensuing transition for Danville's mercantile advertiser resulted from Clark's death on November 9, 1829. Absent any extant issues after December 1827, any assessment of the fate of the *Telegraph* is purely conjectural. Yet the conservative, Whig paper that followed the established course of the *Sentinel* and the *Telegraph* was conducted by James Lanier, the *Sentinel's* first proprietor; his *Independent Statesman and Roanoke Commercial Gazette* appeared on May 14, 1830 – a quick turnaround suggesting that Lanier had helped keep Clark's paper afloat until its assets could be sold to him (and a partner named Cabaniss) by the general's estate, so making the *Statesman* a continuation rather than a successor. Still, the only issue known extant is that for July 23, 1830 (vol. 1, no. 11), leaving an end date for Lanier's new journal unknown once again. Another Whig journal issued there in June 1831 (the *Danville Reporter*), suggesting that the *Statesman* closed in late 1830 or early 1831, but a definitive date cannot be assigned without more evidence. So it seems that the continuum from the *Sentinel* to the *Statesman* ended in the winter of 1830-31.

The *Independent Statesman* was Lanier's last journalistic venture. By 1830, he had served on the Pittsylvania County Court for nearly a decade, so acting as Danville's resident justice. As a result, he was a pivotal figure in obtaining a city charter for the town from the General Assembly in 1832, and was elected as Danville's first mayor in 1833. Thereafter, he focused on his law practice, dying in his Danville home in 1856.

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Sources: LCCN No. 85-025259, 86-071581, 86-071582, 86-071568; Brigham II: 1112; Cappon 416, 420, 395; Clement, *Pittsylvania County*; Aaron, *Pittsylvania County*; newspaper notices in [Washington] *National Intelligencer* (1818-1831).