

## DUMFRIES 02: Republican Journal

- 01: Republican Journal and Dumfries Advertiser (1795)
  - 02: Republican Journal and Dumfries Weekly Advertiser (1795-1796)
- 

The second newspaper published in Dumfries was built on the ruins of the first issued there by local Jeffersonians seeking to counter the political influence of Federalist journals issuing from the nearby towns of Alexandria and Fredericksburg. It also a mercantile advertiser that attempted to reinvigorate commerce in that fading colonial-era tobacco-port.

In May 1795, printer James Kempe (247) issued the first number of his *Republican Journal and Dumfries Weekly Advertiser*. An Irish émigré who arrived in Prince William County in late 1794 or early 1795, he was a refugee from Great Britain's "seditious libel" prosecutions. At that time, it had been eighteen months since the demise of the first newspaper issued there, *The Virginia Gazette and Agricultural Repository* of Charles Fierer (163), a result of his ongoing financial difficulties and declining health. Yet it had been just four months since the dispersal of Fierer's estate in January 1795. In that administrator's sale, Fierer's office was purchased by Col. Willoughby Tebbs (526), an influential Jeffersonian leader and veteran of the Revolutionary War. Tebbs conducted a law practice in Dumfries and was a determined advocate for the commercial development of the town, particularly given the mercantile potential of the county's proximity to the Potomac. It seems that Tebbs acquired that orphaned press intent on engaging a printer to produce a mercantile advertiser in support of that agenda. Kempe's new weekly made its appearance that May, printed on Fierer's old press, with Tebbs as an unnamed partner in the new firm of James Kempe & Company.

Still, both men's associations with the new *Republican Journal* were manifestly limited. In the winter of 1795-96, Tebbs conveyed his interest in the weekly to another prominent Prince William County Jeffersonian, Dr. Thomas Thornton (414), so creating the succeeding concern of Kempe & Thornton. The only son of a well-respected and like-named Episcopal clergyman in the county, Thornton brought a legitimacy to the paper similar to that instilled by Tebbs, even as Kempe remained a relative unknown there. Then in the following spring, Thornton bought Kempe's interest in the *Republican Journal*, and gave the paper a more insistently Republican voice than it had evinced in the Tebbs era. As Thornton was not a trained printer, it seems that Kempe became Thornton's employee with the transaction.

Despite Thornton's local reputation, he struggled to keep the *Republican Journal* afloat for the rest of 1796. He now faced intense competition from Fredericksburg's well-established *Virginia Herald*, published by Connecticut Federalist Timothy Green (194), as well as the continuing reluctance of merchants in the county, mostly Federalists, to advertise in a paper opposed to the Adams administration. So after issuing the November 3, 1796 number of his weekly, Thornton gave up the effort, closing the *Republican Journal* permanently. Dumfries would not host a newspaper again until after World War II.

Thornton returned to his medical practice and to managing his family's business pursuits as planters in Prince William County, dying there in 1817, never having been a part of the print trade again. Kempe also never again worked in the trade, conducting a retail business near

Manassas until he was obliged to leave Virginia after he had killed a Federalist justice on the county court in a duel in 1809. Tebbs did not live to see either of those later events, dying in Dumfries in 1803, not quite seven years after the demise of the paper he had founded.

---

Sources: LCCN nos. 94-055785 & 94-055784; Brigham II: 1113. Prince William County Court Records; Kempe Biography in *VA Genealogist* (1977); notices in [Fredericksburg] *Virginia Herald*.