

## **FINCASTLE 01: Fincastle Weekly Advertiser**

01: The Herald of Virginia and Fincastle Weekly Advertiser (1800-1801)

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The first journal published in Fincastle issued from the first press office opened in Botetourt County. As with many other such initial efforts in Virginia, this was a mercantile advertiser with an avowedly Federalist viewpoint. It was also a family-backed paper and so connected to one of the county's largest weaving businesses.

David Ammen (008) was the youngest son of a large family that came to Botetourt County from Pennsylvania in 1786; his father, Durst, quickly became one of the county's largest landowners, while his eldest brother, John (009), soon opened a weaving mill that was the county's largest such operation in 1800. As the most junior son, Ammen turned to a skilled trade for his living; even though it is unknown where he learned the printing trade, it is clear that he had gained enough training to open a job-printing office in Fincastle by 1799, when he was twenty-four, and which he continued until about 1807.

The hotly-contested presidential election of 1800 appears to have been one of the primary motives for starting a weekly journal there that year; another was the need for a mercantile advertiser in a town then dependent on distant Lynchburg and Staunton papers to promote local businesses. So on March 7, 1800, Ammen issued the first number of his new *Herald of Virginia and Fincastle Weekly Advertiser*. Sometime in the winter of 1800-01, he shortened the paper's title to the *Fincastle Weekly Advertiser* and brought his brother John into the venture as a partner – apparently in an effort to shore up its finances.

The masthead of the brothers' newspaper carried the motto:

"Let it be impressed into your minds, let it be instilled into your Children, that the Liberty of the Press is the Palladium of our Civil and Religious rights."

It was, at once, an apparently non-controversial statement, while it also embraced a then common Federalist assertion of an anti-religious bias among their Jeffersonian opponents.

Such a perspective is reflected in the weekly's content. The handful of surviving numbers of the *Advertiser* evince little original material, outside of the doggerel poetry then customary in Virginia's smaller papers, verses that exhibited the talents of local writers. For the most part, Ammen seems to have simply reprinted items from Federalist papers in the North. In his choice of such items, he demonstrated a distinct disdain for William Duane, editor and publisher of the *Aurora General Advertiser* in Philadelphia, and James Thomson Callender, author of the notorious *The Prospect Before Us* (1800), both refugees from British sedition prosecutions who were then in the forefront of the journalistic campaign against President John Adams and his administration.

Only six numbers of Ammen's paper are known extant, so it is likely that his subscriber list was very small, perhaps as few as 200 individuals. Hence it is unsurprising that one of those few issues (that of May 8, 1801) carried a sharply-worded notice asking his subscribers to pay their arrearages by July 10, 1801, or else he would be compelled to close the weekly, a

clear indication of the indispensable nature of such revenue. Remarkably, the latest extant issue is one from that same date, indicating that Ammen did cease publishing the *Fincastle Weekly Advertiser* with that July issue, as he had warned in May, despite comments therein promising that he would print several pending items "in our next."

While Ammen did not attempt another paper in Fincastle, he did not shed his journalistic inclinations completely. He moved to Ohio in 1817, where he edited and published a series of similarly-small weekly journals between 1820 and 1845, before dying there in 1846.

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Sources: LCCN nos. 83-026155 & 83-026154; Brigham II: 1113=14; Stoner, *Seed-Bed of the Republic*.