

FINCASTLE 02: Herald of the Valley

- 01: Herald of the Valley (1820-1822)
 - 02: Herald of the Valley (1822-1823)
 - 03: Fincastle Mirror (1823-1825)
 - 04: The Mirror (1825-1829)
-

The second newspaper published in Fincastle did not issue until nearly twenty years after the first had ceased publication. Yet while that new journal was a mercantile advertiser, just as had been its predecessor, it was not the conservative weekly seen before. Rather, it was an advocate for democratizing both the state and federal governments, as was promoted then by Andrew Jackson of Tennessee.

In May 1820, printer Joseph F. Caldwell (073) moved to Fincastle from Winchester intent on starting a newspaper there. He had been part of a recent venture that gave Winchester's readers a vibrant alternative to the established and often-tedious journals of George McGlassin (287) and John Heiskell (210). However, *The Virginia Reformer and Herald of the Valley* that he printed for a partner named Russell (369) struggled through a single year of publication before the effort was abandoned in April 1820. Caldwell promptly decided that publishing a single paper in a market-town that lacked one was a better plan than issuing a third paper in a place with two others. His decision was informed by the prior experience of his elder brother James Caldwell (071); also a Winchester-trained printer, James had moved to Warrenton in 1817 to successfully publish Fauquier County's only journal, the *Palladium of Liberty*. As the southern Valley of Virginia then hosted few, if any, local papers, Fincastle seemed a viable locale for Caldwell to now follow his brother's lead.

Caldwell issued the first number of his new *Herald of the Valley* in Fincastle on July 8, 1820; it was a weekly that openly embraced the title and perspective of his late Winchester paper, one pressing for reforms that would reapportion power in Virginia according to population and not by property or wealth. Thus did the twenty-four-year-old founder bring the energy and drive of a new generation of American journalists to southwest Virginia; his generation would actively advocate for one side or the other of the country's emerging partisan divide, backing either the nationalistic programs of Henry Clay and the Whig Party or the states' rights localism of Andrew Jackson and the Democratic Party. Caldwell fell into the latter category, as would the apprentice he was apparently then training, Edgar W. Robinson (1804-49). Yet his chosen title also harkened back to Fincastle's first weekly and its function as a mercantile advertiser supporting the town's commerce. So Caldwell's *Herald* proved to be the right effort at the right time with its combination of political and business priorities.

Still, while having built a solid base for his new Fincastle journal, Caldwell seems to have felt constrained by the locale he had chosen. As the *Herald of the Valley* entered its third year of publication, he began laying the groundwork for leaving the Valley of Virginia. In the issue dated August 31, 1822, he announced that Robinson would become his partner with the ensuing issue. That change gave the eighteen-year-old a share of the paper's profits, monies that would enable him to purchase his master's share the following spring. With the issue of

May 24, 1823, Robinson became sole proprietor of the *Herald*, having acquired Caldwell's interest in the preceding week. Caldwell soon moved on to Lewisburg in Greenbrier County, some 50 mile to the west of Fincastle; by November, he had begun publishing a new weekly paper there: *The Palladium of Virginia and Pacific Monitor*.

Robinson's tenure as proprietor of Fincastle's only newspaper was twice that of Caldwell's, some six years. Over that time, he gave the weekly a more strident Jacksonian voice and a title of his choosing. On July 11, 1823, the first issue of its fourth volume, Robinson made the *Herald* over into the *Fincastle Mirror*, just six weeks after acquiring it. While that new title was shortened to *The Mirror* some two years later, Robinson's newspaper remained an important exemplar of populist democracy in western Virginia for the rest of his tenure.

That reputation seems to have brought Robinson an offer to edit a larger and more visible Jacksonian paper in the northern Valley. The *Winchester Virginian* had been established in November 1826 by Joseph H. Sherrard, a young Frederick County lawyer; as his journal now neared its fourth year in print, Sherrard apparently asked Robinson to succeed him in the *Virginian's* editorial chair. Thus, without much warning, Robinson closed his *Mirror* after the issue of October 3, 1829, promptly sold his printing office, and removed to Winchester. His association there with Sherrard would last until 1838, when he moved on to Washington to accept a patronage appointment in the Van Buren administration.

The unnamed buyers of Robinson's business would issue the succeeding *Virginia Patriot* on December 26, 1829; that weekly continued in varying guises and under several owners until about July 1858. While that paper succeeded Robinson's, it was not a continuation, despite its being described as such in some authoritative bibliographies. Rather, the *Virginia Patriot* was Fincastle's third weekly, faring well over its lifetime because its successive proprietors modeled the paper along the lines proven by Caldwell's *Herald* and Robinson's *Mirror*.

Sources: LCCN No. 83-026162 & 86-071587; Brigham II: 1113; Cappon 485 & 488; Morton, *Winchester*; Russell, *Winchester*; Rice, "West Virginia Printers."