

## FREDERICKSBURG 01: Virginia Herald

- 01: The Virginia Herald and Fredericksburg Advertiser (1787-1795)
  - 02: The Virginia Herald and Fredericksburg & Falmouth Advertiser (1795-1797)
  - 03: The Virginia Herald (1797-1811)
  - 04: Virginia Herald (1812-1851)
- 

Fredericksburg's first newspaper was one of the longest-lived journals in the antebellum period of American history. That longevity was a result of the paper's support among the port-town's merchants, as well as its connections to the largest and best-funded network of printers in the country after the Revolution — the Green family of New England.

Timothy Green IV (194) was a fourth-generation printer from New London, Connecticut. His father, Timothy Green III (1737-96), conducted the *Connecticut Gazette* there from 1763 to 1795, succeeding his uncle, Timothy Green II (1703-63), who trained both father and son. These printers all descended from the first Green family printer, Samuel (1615-1702), who conducted the first printing press brought to New England from 1649 onward in Cambridge. By the time of the Revolution, the Green family had members conducting printing offices in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, and Maryland. After the war, the family's reach grew further still, with Timothy IV becoming an independent tradesman in Vermont in 1780 as a partner to his maternal uncle, Judah P. Spooner (1748-1807). Green returned to New London in 1783 to work again for his father and to plan for a new situation elsewhere, eventually settling on Virginia.

### Beginnings

Green came to Fredericksburg in late 1786. Initially, he established a printing office there, from which he began to lay the groundwork for a new weekly paper in the Rappahannock River port. Like all of the papers started in Virginia in the 1780s, Green's proposed weekly would be, first and foremost, a mercantile advertiser, a paper dependent on advertising revenue and not on government largess, as was usually the case with the pre-revolutionary *Virginia Gazettes* in Williamsburg. Indeed, it appears that the Green family was well aware of the immediate success of such papers founded in Alexandria in 1784 and in Norfolk and Petersburg in 1786. Those new weeklies made Fredericksburg the only Virginia fall-line port-town lacking such an advertiser, so making it the most logical place to find local merchant support for such a paper at that time.

Hence the first number of *The Virginia Herald and Fredericksburg Advertiser* issued on June 7, 1787. In doing so, Green bested a budding competitor. In the colonial era, Fredericksburg was secondary to the old tobacco port of Tappahannock in the Rappahannock River valley; Fredericksburg's growth during the war years made it into a larger and more vital place, so giving Green a potentially larger subscriber and advertiser base than that for another paper then proposed for Tappahannock by Henry Willcocks (444): *The Virginia Gazette & Hobb's Hole Advertiser*. Willcocks quickly recognized his disadvantage *vis-a-vis* Green, both in terms of local and outside support, and soon joined with the Maryland printer-publisher Matthias

Bartgis (024) to publish *The Virginia Gazette and Winchester Advertiser* in the Shenandoah Valley that May instead. Willcock's initiative was the first of several that Green would defeat during his thirty-two-year association with the *Virginia Herald*.

The new weekly was published by the firm of Timothy Green & Co., indicating that he had unnamed financial partners, probably familial ones given his non-Virginia origin. Such a foundation was a substantial and unprecedented one upon which to build a Virginia press at that time, providing Green an unequaled ability to deal with challenges of the economic ebb and flow seen in the early-Republic era. Moreover, his *Herald* put him at the center of the town's merchant community almost immediately. As a result it took only two years for him to shed his dependence on those financial partners, as evinced by the disappearance of the appended "& Co." from the paper's proprietary name with issue of July 23, 1789. Green was now the sole proprietor of the *Herald* and would remain so until 1812.

As a mercantile advertiser, the *Herald* evinced a perspective consistent with the opinions of Green's merchant patrons, so becoming an influential Federalist voice in Virginia when the political divisions of the 1790s emerged and deepened – as would the *Connecticut Gazette*, conducted now by his brother, Samuel III (1768-1859), and the *Maryland Gazette*, published by his second cousins Frederick (1750-1811) and Samuel (1757-1839) Green in Annapolis. That influence, combined with the quickening political debate, allowed him to publish his paper twice weekly (Wednesday and Friday) starting with the issue of May 8, 1795; that pace was the frequency that the *Herald* would retain through the rest of its life. That fall, Green also made a claim for his paper's regional representativeness by adding the name of neighboring port town of Falmouth to its title, making the paper now *The Virginia Herald and Fredericksburg & Falmouth Advertiser*. Still, his paper's reputation led editors elsewhere to quote Green and to reprint his articles under the simpler credit of the *Virginia Herald*. In August 1797, Green chose to formally adopt that shortened title as his own, while also sharpening his typography with a completely new dress, so claiming a statewide authority where he had only asserted a regional one before, while exhibiting his material success.

With that refitting, Green also abandoned the motto his paper had used in its masthead from its very first number: "*Quicquid agunt Homines, nostril est Farrago libelli.*" The line, taken from Juvenal's first Book of Satires, told the readers that "whatever men do [would] make up this little book." But now, Green implied that his paper would be the state's herald of Federalist principles, and not the bearer of items of general interest, as before.

Green's claim to a statewide authority had some truth in it. Virginia's other major Federalist journal – *The Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, published by Augustine Davis (119) in Richmond– was limited in its participation in the national political debate by its semi-official status as the state's journal-of-record, issued by its public printer, then Davis. Consequently, the *Virginia Herald* soon became the foremost Federalist paper in the upper South and, as such, it was trusted in December 1799 with the single longest and most detailed account of George Washington's death published before the 1840s.

## **Challenges**

However, Green and his *Herald* were challenged repeatedly by a series of Republican papers

issued in Fredericksburg from 1796 on; yet all of those efforts failed because they did not have the financial or societal base that Green had developed over the preceding decade.

The first of those challengers was the *Republican Citizen* of Lancelot A. Mullin (307); he was brought to Fredericksburg in early 1796 by Jeffersonians there to publish a weekly paper in support of Jefferson's presidential campaign that year; but once Adams defeated Jefferson, Mullin could not find support like that backing the *Herald*; so the *Citizen* was closed after 54 issues (June 1, 1796 to June 14 1797), and Mullin absconded with whatever funds he had on hand in September 1797, leaving his press behind.

The next challenge to Green was built on the ruins of the first by Robert Mercer (301), then Commonwealth Attorney in the Fredericksburg courts; he acquired the abandoned press and began publishing *The Genius of Liberty* just a month after Mullin had fled; his partner in the venture was George Carter (082), his wife's cousin and a nephew of her father, Landon Carter; with such solid backing, Mercer could increase the paper's frequency from a weekly to a twice-weekly pace in September 1798 by introducing a series of printers as successors to Carter as his partner; yet this challenge came to an abrupt end with Mercer's unexpected death in September 1800.

The ensuing challenge to Green was offered by another printer brought to Fredericksburg, James Walker (425); it appears that Walker was employed by Mercer at his death, and so became the logical choice among local Jeffersonians to succeed his employer in the midst of the heated 1800 presidential campaign; Walker acquired the office from Mercer's estate and resumed publication on October 14, 1800 with his renamed paper, *The Courier*; he continued it for slightly more than a year before local support for the effort evaporated, just as Mullin's had, forcing the paper's closure in November 1801.

Part of Walker's problem was Green, of course, but he was also faced with another paper appearing there; Philip Temple (409) was a major landowner in nearby Caroline County and his *Fredericksburgh News-Letter* attempted to chart a middle course between the strident political perspectives of the Republican *Courier* and the Federalist *Herald* starting in May 1801; the effort resulted in the demise of Walker's *Courier* in late 1801 and of his own *News-Letter* in spring 1802, so leaving the Fredericksburg area to the *Virginia Herald* alone once again.

It would be a year before another pro-Jefferson paper arose to take on Green. In May 1803, Samuel Chiles (092), a Caroline County planter with political ambitions, and Isham Burch (062), a printer from the Richmond offices of Meriwether Jones (242) and Samuel Pleasants (331), began publishing the *Virginia Express*. But their effort was soon in competition with Walker who resurrected his former journal as *The Apollo* that September in an apparent attempt to undercut Chiles & Burch in the same way that Temple had undercut him before. Thus financial constraints, brought on by the competition, killed both papers in March 1805, following Jefferson's second inauguration. Another Republican newspaper was attempted in Fredericksburg in 1811 by Gerard Banks (019), but his proposed *Impartial Observer* did not issue more than a prospectus number – an rapid abandonment that clearly recognized the ongoing futility of challenging Green's *Virginia Herald*.

Yet Green's business was tested by competitors that threatened his book-selling sideline,

and so the financial stability of the whole. In 1803, the Alexandria concern of Peter Cottom (107) and John A. Stewart (401) opened a branch store in Fredericksburg. As that business grew, Green decided in about 1808 to hire William F. Gray (192), brother of John (189) and Robert (190) Gray, Cottom & Stewart's largest rivals in Alexandria, to manage his bookstore. The move saved that part of his business and brought the viability of the Cottom & Stewart store into question. In late 1810, the two Alexandria booksellers closed their Fredericksburg branch (in advance of the dissolution of their lengthy partnership). Both Gray and Green moved quickly to fill the void created by their exit. Gray left Green's employ early in 1811 to start his own bookstore, while Green turned to his family network to bring Ebenezer P. Cady (070) to Fredericksburg to replace Gray; Cady had been part of his brother's *Connecticut Gazette* office in New London, and had acted as its owner between 1805 and 1808 when Green's younger brother settled their father's estate. Cady now came to Fredericksburg to become partner to Samuel's elder brother, arriving in August 1811; at the end of that year, the Connecticut natives formed the firm of Green & Cady, which issued their first number of the *Virginia Herald* on January 1, 1812. The combination proved to be a formidable one, making the *Herald* office into the town's largest bookstore, even with Gray's Alexandria connections and training. It also guaranteed that the *Virginia Herald* would survive the War of 1812, despite its forceful opposition to that conflict, and the reduction in advertising and subscription revenue that attended the decline of trade in Fredericksburg during the war.

### Successions

Green's new associations with Gray and Cady were also part of his explorations of potential successors as owner of the *Virginia Herald*. He was then approaching the age of fifty, and so planning for his retirement and/or his death. Gray and Cady were possible successors, as was James D. Harrow (204), the Fredericksburg native who Green had trained and who was now the foreman of Green's press. In these three, Green identified and employed talented young men in the same mold as those long associated with the Green family network. Yet only one of them could succeed him, a reality led to a series of arrangements between 1815 and 1820 that eventually allowed Green to retire.

Cady was "a strong Federalist" throughout his affiliation with Green and the *Virginia Herald*, making him a controversial figure during the war years, so much so that – as his daughter Mary would later remember – Cady was forced to sleep in the *Herald* office "with his pistols by his side, often being threatened with tar and feathers." It was a situation that also kept his wife and children in Connecticut until late in 1814, after Cady had finally redeemed his reputation through his service in a volunteer militia unit assembled after the burning of Washington that August. Thus after the war, Cady was ready to return to bookselling. The Green & Cady partnership dissolved at the end of June 1815, and Green essentially traded Cady for Gray at that time; Gray acquired a majority interest in the *Virginia Herald*, which was now reported as Gray's publication alone, though Green remained in the background, as did Harrow. Meanwhile, Cady took a majority interest in Gray's bookstore, apparently bringing Green's book stocks with him.

When Gray's two-year arrangement with Green expired at end of June 1817, the founder resumed a visible role as proprietor of the *Virginia Herald*, though as partner to his former

apprentice Harrow. The young printer was now Green's chosen successor, but outstanding notes and debts needed to be settled first. So when Green & Harrow dissolved their firm at the end of 1818, Green again became sole owner of the *Herald* for the first three numbers of 1819, while negotiations over Gray's acquisition of the paper were concluded. With the issue of January 13, 1819, Gray became sole proprietor of the *Herald* and Green retired from the printing trade entirely. Harrow was able to accumulate capital from the sale, and an ensuing year's labor as Gray's foreman added to that bounty. So at the end of January 1820, Gray sold the *Herald* and its office to Harrow, concluding the series of transactions that Green needed to transfer his long-lived journal to his chosen successor.

Gray eventually removed to Alexandria, where he practiced law; in that role, he went to Texas in 1835 as an agent for land speculators; he arrived in the midst of the independence movement there and so became an essential source for news accounts of events then; Gray settled in Houston after independence and served the Texas Supreme Court until his 1841 death. Cady converted his Fredericksburg business into a commission agency over time and eventually returned to the north, becoming the owner of a retail business in New York City before retiring to a farm in Connecticut. Green remained in the Fredericksburg area, with a home in town and a farm nearby in Spotsylvania; he died in Fredericksburg in 1851.

In the thirty-two-years that Harrow owned the *Virginia Herald*, it became less of a political paper and more of the mercantile one that had marked its birth in 1787. The paper did not see another challenger in Fredericksburg until 1847, one which took on the strident political tone that Harrow had abandoned. It seems that the printer had learned to be circumspect as a result of his association with the *Herald* during the War of 1812. At his death in 1851, one memorialist reported that Harrow "wrote but little, and that little never offensive or tinged with personality." It was a comment that suggests that the Virginia-born Harrow had been far better attuned to local sensibilities than were the two Connecticut-born printers who had preceded him, despite their obvious financial success. As a result, Harrow had cultivated "no enemies" as he had successfully "passed through life, infringing no one's rights, and no one disposed to trespass on his."

The *Virginia Herald* was sold in short order by Harrow's estate to Maj. J. Harrison Kelly, who conducted the venerable newspaper until 1876, despite a nearly four-year-long suspension wrought by the devastation that the Civil War visited on Fredericksburg in 1862.

---

Sources: LCCN nos. 84-024691, 84-024690, & 83-045421; Brigham II: 1116; Cappon 531; Kiessel, "The Green Family of Printers," (1950); Queznel, *Fredericksburg Checklist*; Quinn, *Fredericksburg*; Jett, *Minor Sketches of Major Folk*; Cady-Sturges, *Reminiscences of a Long Life*; *Diary of William Fairfax Gray* (1887); notices in *Virginia Herald* (1787-1851).