

## LEESBURG 02: Impartial Journal

01: Impartial Journal (1803-1805)

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The second paper issued in Leesburg is known only by the reflections it produced in other papers in other places. With no extant copies and a meager trace in the historic record, the *Impartial Journal* was likely a paper with few subscribers that expired from fiscal problems.

In February 1803, an advertisement appeared in the *Republican Journal* of Matthias Bartgis (024) in Frederick, Maryland, soliciting subscribers for a new weekly in nearby Leesburg: the *Impartial Journal*. Over the next year, Bartgis printed many extracts from that paper along with biting comments on its Federalist orientation. In one of those reviews, Bartgis called the *Impartial Journal* a "little country paper" as he reported that its masthead carried

"the following motto – '*This paper is open to all parties*' – But in the last number we have received, the printer says he will publish for no party, unless —*they pay him!* ... This is what we call a printer's selling his press to the highest bidder."

Yet in all of those commentaries, Bartgis never identified the proprietor of Leesburg's new weekly. We only know of his identity from a marriage notice printed in the *Virginia Herald* of Timothy Green (194), the Federalist publisher in Fredericksburg. In December 1804, he reported the recent wedding of Valentine M. Mason (282), publisher of *Impartial Journal*, to Betsey Margrave of Lexington. Mason is readily recognized as a Presbyterian minister who served the Lexington Presbytery from 1806 to 1843. Accordingly, many nineteenth-century histories of the church offer clear views of Mason's life. He was born near Fredericksburg, so explaining the *Virginia Herald* notice; he was trained as a printer at a Federalist press in Alexandria, so accounting for his political perspective; and he embraced the ministry as an adolescent, so telling his motives for settling in Lexington. And while residing there, Mason published the *Lexington Intelligencer* from 1823 to 1831.

Despite that wealth of information about Mason, all of his biographers failed to mention his association with a short-lived weekly in Leesburg. That early chapter in his life is evinced only by notices found in the newspapers of Frederick, Baltimore, Hagerstown (in Maryland), Alexandria, and Fredericksburg (in Virginia) between February 1803 and December 1804. Still, those few notices indicate a two-year life-span for the *Impartial Journal*: it was born in February 1803, but its circulation as a "little country paper" was apparently very small, and so Mason's revenues were slight, which led to his relocation to his wife's hometown at the end of the paper's second volume in February 1805, where he began a full-time ministry.

The closing of the *Impartial Journal* seems, in part, a result of Leesburg's inability to then sustain a newspaper, despite a political orientation consistent with the views of the town's merchants, in the face of larger competitors close by. That issue was not resolved until the appearance of Leesburg's next paper – *The Washingtonian* – in 1808.

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Sources: Not recorded by US Newspaper Project (Lib. of Congress) or by Brigham; account here from notices in Frederick, Baltimore, Hagerstown (Maryland), Alexandria, and Fredericksburg (Virginia) newspapers between February 1803 and December 1804