

## **LYNCHBURG 01: Lynchburg and Farmer's Gazette**

01: The Union Gazette (1793-1794)

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The first newspaper issued in Lynchburg was an early Federalist journal published by a young Richmond journeyman with familial ties to the area. The scattering of surviving issues from its short life indicate small print runs, which suggest that the weekly was a premature venture, coming as it did just eight years after the formation of this James River port town.

Lynchburg was chartered by the Virginia legislature in October 1786 on land owned by the descendants of the notorious Charles Lynch adjacent to the ferry conducted by his nephew John since 1757. Within three years, area residents were asking the Assembly to establish a tobacco inspection there as well, which led to such a warehouse being built in early 1792. At the same time, efforts were underway to extend the lately-authorized James River Canal from Lynch's Ferry to the Kanawha River Valley in the west. Evidently, the combination of these improvements to the neighborhood's commercial infrastructure with the concurrent growth of traffic on the James between Lynchburg and Richmond generated support for publishing a mercantile advertiser there.

Robert Mosby Bransford (049) responded to that new challenge in the winter of 1792-93. Just twenty-two years of age, he was a native of nearby Powhatan County, both a son of a prominent planter there and a descendent of the county's initial English settlers. Bransford attended school in Richmond, which led to his training as a printer there, apparently in the office of John Dixon (140), the famed Revolutionary-era publisher. When Dixon died in April 1791, all of Richmond's press offices experienced a reshuffling of their staffs; Bransford was one of several journeymen who caused that reordering by deciding at that time to pursue independent paths. It appears that he acquired a press in Richmond sometime during 1792, moving it to Lynchburg to start a simple job-printing office there before the year ended.

About February 2, 1793, Bransford issued the first number of *The Union Gazette* there; with only two issues now known extant from its first year of publication (both from the last two weeks of its first volume), that initial date presumes there was not a suspension of his paper during that year. With the start of the weekly's second volume, Bransford retitled his paper as the *Lynchburg and Farmer's Gazette*, the name under which it was apparently issued for at least two succeeding volumes. In all, only seventeen issues of Bransford's weekly survive, twelve from 1795, making the period from February 1793 to February 1795 something of a mystery. A correlation of dates to numbers shows Bransford suspended publication for four weeks after the last issue of the *Union Gazette* and probably before the first of the ensuing *Lynchburg and Farmer's Gazette* in early 1794, based on the surviving issue for April 5, 1794 (vol. 2, no.7). Similarly, most authorities give an end date for this weekly in February 1796, assuming that Bransford complete a third volume, citing the last known issue for November 28, 1795 (vol. 3, no. 40). That date also fits with the fact that Bransford was advertising the sale of his press in Richmond's newspapers by late March 1796.

Through this three year period, items from his Lynchburg weekly were frequently reprinted

in Philadelphia papers. That experience evinces both Bransford's trade associations and his political views. In the early days of the *Union Gazette*, the *Federal Gazette & Philadelphia Daily Advertiser* of Andrew Brown was the paper that most often reproduced political items from this Lynchburg weekly; but after Brown disavowed the Federalist Party in 1794, that priority fell to the *Gazette of the United States & Daily Evening Advertiser*, the journalistic voice of Alexander Hamilton, published by John Fenno; those items were largely consistent with the views of the national party's leaders. Meanwhile, items of general interest – largely tales of infamous crimes and native predations on the western frontier – were most often reprinted in the *American Daily Advertiser* published by John Dunlap and David Chambers Claypoole; Dunlap had a long-standing trade relationship with John Dixon during the years of Bransford's training in Richmond, and the aging publisher evidently extended those links to Dixon's protégé after his master's death. Indeed, the single most-widely reprinted article from Bransford's paper was a May 1795 account of a home invasion and robbery in Russell County, under the cover of hospitality, that ended with the murder of the hospitable settler and a domestic servant at the hands of about a dozen drunken frontiersmen; the edited story from the *American Daily Advertiser* was reprinted subsequently in dozens of papers north and east of Philadelphia.

Despite the wide redistribution of items from Bransford's paper, the few surviving issues indicate that it was issued only in small runs each week, suggesting both a short subscriber list and limited advertising revenue – meaning that there was not yet a critical mass in the Lynchburg area to sustain such an ambitious mercantile advertiser. Many American journals started in the 1790s had such financial difficulties, especially newspapers published in small market towns that were then still satellites to larger urban venues, as then was Lynchburg to Richmond. Hence, the closing of the *Lynchburg and Farmer's Gazette* was likely the result of unpaid subscriptions and overdue debts, with the immediate sale of Bransford's press being clear evidence that his creditors were pressing him for restitution, perhaps for debts dating back to his paper's birth.

Lynchburg would not see a successor to Bransford's weekly until June 1797, a void of about sixteen months. By then, the journeyman was back in Richmond, apparently employed in his master's old printing office, now conducted by John Dixon Jr. (141), his son and heir. Bransford was still living there when he died unexpectedly in July 1798, just twenty-eight.

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Sources: LCCN No. 85-025598 & 85-025523; Brigham II: 1121 & 1119; Hubbard on Richmond; Woodson, *Woodsons and Connections*.