

LYNCHBURG 02: Lynchburg Gazette

- 01: Lynchburg Weekly Museum (1797-1798)
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Lynchburg's second newspaper was much like its first one: a mercantile advertiser with a Federalist political orientation. But unlike that initial effort, the weekly's links to some of the leading families in the area provided a foundation that first paper lacked, and so guaranteed its success until the unexpected death of its last proprietor forced the sale of its tools.

Robert Mosby Bransford (049) had published the town's first weekly for a full three years, from February 1793 to February 1796, before he shuttered the heavily-indebted paper as a consequence of the town's inability to provide the fluid currency needed to sustain it then. But after its closing, merchants in the area realized just how much the economic viability of their locale depended on an accessible mercantile advertiser like Bransford's.

So, in the spring of 1797, John Davis (124) – son of a Lynchburg merchant descended from the town's first English settlers – bought Bransford's dormant press and began publishing his *Lynchburg Weekly Museum* that June. Still, he too was faced with problems wrought by the scarcity of currency. One way to deal with the issue was to accept payments in kind, particularly for rags which he could trade for paper at a distant paper mill. So in August 1797, Davis printed a long exhortation for "the Ladies" to "save your Rags."

"The prime materials of Paper have risen in value upwards of 20 percent. The price of paper, consequently must rise to [sic], which is already to [sic] high as to almost mount to a prohibition of the publication of our favorite histories, novels or romances, in the United States; for an example, see the London edition of Camilla and compare it with the American, only observe the difference of paper. In England, they work it right, *they save their rags.*"

Such business practices allowed Davis and his successors to continue the weekly for eight years. So too did its popular political perspective among its merchant subscribers.

From the start, it was clear that the *Museum* was a newspaper sympathetic to the new administration of John Adams and antagonistic to the ideas and criticisms of its Jeffersonian opponents. Pseudonymous commentaries by local Federalists regularly filled the paper's back page, alongside the plethora of legal notices which seem to have been a more reliable revenue source initially than was merchant advertising. Moreover, there were frequently notices from land speculators in the neighborhood offering to buy military land warrants at a discount, a key point of contention over Hamiltonian fiscal policies between Federalists and Republicans. Davis further courted political controversy early on in the paper's run by publishing a long essay criticizing Jefferson for including "Logan's Lament" – a justification for Logan's retribution against white settlers in the Ohio Country in response to the Yellow Creek Massacre of April 1774 – in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*; therein, Logan blamed Capt. Michael Cresap for that event, in which members of his family died; Cresap's family,

including Maryland attorney Luther Martin, rejected the charge and objected to its frequent repetition; in November 1797, Martin published a letter maligning Jefferson in a Federalist paper in Baltimore for doing just that in his 1782 book; shortly thereafter, Davis published a defense of Martin's letter that denigrated Jefferson even further, impelling the Virginian to circulate a privately-printed letter of rebuttal throughout the country.

Yet despite his prompt success in this venture, Davis was associated with the weekly for just one year – or one full volume. Born and raised as a Quaker, Davis was thus caught in the debate over slavery that then dominated Virginia's Quaker communities; the Friends were considering whether they could or should continue to live in a state where chattel slavery was condoned and promoted. The debate followed an earlier one on the morality of owning slaves, resulting in a general divestiture among the faithful, usually through manumissions, and expelling those unwilling to renounce the peculiar institution. Now, many Friends in Virginia decided that leaving the state was the only way they could escape the tarnishing influence of slavery. By the time Davis began publishing his *Weekly Museum*, large numbers of Quakers had already emigrated to Ohio and Kentucky, and now Davis's family was about to follow suit. As part of his family's divestiture of its properties in the area, Davis sold his newspaper to John Carter (083) in May 1798, and then joined his father near Cincinnati.

Carter was a native of Amelia County who was probably a part of Davis's office from the start, helping to edit the paper. With the change in ownership came a change in both title and identity. Carter recast his weekly journal in a more mercantile dress, as the *Lynchburg Gazette*. Its identification with the town's commercial interests proved profitable, even as the *Gazette* continued to be an active supporter of the Federalist party. That combination helped him to successfully navigate the problems associated with untrained proprietors engaging trained craftsmen to produce a paper for them. Indeed, he and Davis had moved in 1798 to build a home-grown trade base of their own – advertising for "two active Lads of genteel connexions...as Apprentices to the Printing business." John Weaver (433) was the primary beneficiary of their offer, becoming Carter's principal assistant over the ensuing five years. With such a solid foundation, Carter was able to buy out his unnamed partners at the end of 1799 with the capital he had accumulated in just eighteen months. Sometime in the summer of 1802, Carter made Weaver his new partner, apparently anticipating his eventual retirement from journalism. The pair continued the *Gazette* together until the end of 1803, when Carter sold his interest in the *Gazette* to Weaver, retiring to the life of a gentleman farmer at his Amelia County plantation, Mulberry Grove.

The Weaver period is the most mysterious in the life of the *Lynchburg Gazette*, resulting from the absence of issues surviving from that time. Hence, the course of Weaver's career can only be followed in references to him in other places. An essay addressed to Carter and Weaver jointly in October 1802, reprinted in a Baltimore paper, indicates that he had risen to ownership by then, at about age seventeen. A similar reference dated February 22, 1804 reported that Weaver was now proprietor of the *Gazette*, with Carter retirement. Then, in March 1805, this short death notice appeared in several northern newspapers:

On Thursday, the 7th instant, in Lynchburg, Mr. John Weaver, Editor and Printer of the "*Lynchburg Gazette*."

These references reflect the perception of reliability the *Gazette* had gained in northern Federalist papers by then. Yet the brevity of Weaver's proprietorship meant that he could not forge an independent identity for himself or his version of the *Gazette* before he died unexpectedly at just age twenty. The last known issue of the *Lynchburg Gazette* is that for September 11, 1805; it indicates that his brother, Matthew Weaver (543), had continued its publication – as the firm of M. W. Weaver & Brothers – until the printer's intestate estate could be settled that fall. His mortgaged press office was sold at auction in August to John Graham (183), a respected physician in the town; the *Gazette* would cease publication just before Graham issued his new *Lynchburg Star* that October.

However, while Graham understood the need for a weekly mercantile advertiser there (and so wanted to continue the paper), his vision for a Lynchburg journal was a Republican one, not a Federalist one. Thus, his weekly was a successor, not a continuation of the *Lynchburg Gazette*, despite Graham's use of Weaver's tools. That divergent political reality would lead to another Federalist paper being issued there in May 1809: the long-lived *Lynchburg Press*.

Sources: LCCN No. 85-025544, 85-025578, & 95-079035; Brigham II: 1121-1122; Christian, *Lynchburg and its People*; notices in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Richmond newspapers (1797-1806).