

LYNCHBURG 05: Lynchburg Centinel

01: Lynchburg Centinel (1814-1815)

The *Lynchburg Centinel* has long been recorded as the fifth newspaper issued in that town, based on a solitary advertising notice placed in the *National Intelligencer* in late 1815, one offering its tools for sale by auction:

"TO MEN OF ENTERPRIZE & INTELLIGENCE THROUGHOUT THE U. STATES

"The proprietors of the Lynchburg Centinel will offer that establishment for sale, at public auction, in the town of Lynchburg, on Wednesday the 20th, December next. The pre-eminent advantage is connected with the situation of Lynchburg for the publication of a Newspaper, render the present advertisement an important object of attention to all persons who may be desirous of engaging in this very profitable species of employment. The rapidly encreasing population of Lynchburg will soon make even the local patronage of the town fully adequate to the support of a newspaper; besides which, the numerous subscription may be expected in the neighboring country, and the more remote western parts of the state which have been accustomed to look to Lynchburg as their principal medium of intelligence from the Atlantic. There is but one paper published in Lynchburg, besides the Centinel, so that nothing is to be apprehended from competition. The whole establishment, as it will be exposed to sale, consists of the following articles:

- 2 Printing presses
- 1 Font small pica
- 1 do. Long primmer
- 1 do. burgeois
- 1 do. English
- 1 do. 2 line burgeois
- 1 do. great primmer
- 1 do. French cannon
- 1 do. 5 line pica
- 1 do. German text
- 2 marble imposing stones
- 22 chases of various sizes
- 30 pair of cases
- 9 stands for cases, and

2 packs, with a variety of ornaments and other articles, necessary for carrying on the printing business. The terms of sale will be made accommodating to the purchaser.

Lynchburg, Va. Nov. 25."

For scholars of printing in the early Republic era, this notice provides unusually clear-cut evidence of the size and scale of a small press office in a growing market town in the South at that time. But even that clarity can only support a statement that this paper was issued by unknown proprietors for some time during 1815, and nothing more.

However, buried deep in Ray Hummel's bibliography of southeastern broadsides is a record of one-sheet prospectus for this journal in the special collections of the Sweet Briar College, now lost. Dated August 13, 1814, the bill shows that the firm of Rives & Davies was soliciting subscribers at that time. More recently, a half-sheet "extra" of the *Centinel* for September 10, 1814 – also issued as a broadside, printed on verso only, and not listed in Hummel – was discovered in the special collections of the Duke University Library and digitized for online viewing. That extra was saved, undoubtedly, because it describes the withdrawal of British forces from Washington and Alexandria after they had burned the capital's public buildings on August 25th, just three weeks before those same forces abandoned their ensuing siege of Baltimore. So the two sheets show that the *Centinel* began publishing about September 1st that year, and that Addison Davies (539), a native of Bedford County, was one of its two proprietors.

The date the *Lynchburg Centinel* ended is less certain, as the only other evidence of its existence is an 1815 almanac issued from that office in late 1814, and then the auction sale notice published in November of 1815. While the sale notice provides a clear *not-after-this-date* marker, it is most likely that the journal was closed at the end of its first volume in September 1815; that supposition is supported by the absence of once-regular references to the paper in county-court records in the nearby counties after that date.

Interestingly, that dating also suggests that the *Centinel* was printed on the same press that was used previously to publish the *Lynchburg Star* of James Graham (183). His paper ceased publication early in 1814 after a nine-year run; Graham's *Star* was a Republican weekly that often drew on the same Republican papers cited in this unique edition. Moreover, the type seen in the two papers is strikingly similar, though that similarity may be simply the result of each using the same type founder. Even so, the *Star's* end date precedes the apparent start date of the *Centinel* closely enough to lead one to believe that the *Centinel* was, at the least, a successor to the *Lynchburg Star*, if not an actual continuation of that paper. And if so, the sale represented a chance to continue a decade-long legacy. Furthermore, the other paper mentioned in the sale notice was the *Lynchburg Press*, which had experienced an extensive reorganization in October 1815, one that made its long-term survival in competition with any journalist who bought the offered press uncertain, so the odd comment "that nothing is to be apprehended from competition."

Still, as tantalizing as these suggestions are, more evidence is needed to determine whether they represent the actual context surrounding the publication of the *Lynchburg Centinel*.

Sources: No LCCN number because this title was not recorded by U.S. Newspaper Project; Brigham II: 1119-20; Duke University Library Special Collections.