

LYNCHBURG 06: The Echo

01: The Echo (1816-1818)

The sixth newspaper started in Lynchburg appears to be a successor to the two Republican papers published there previously. It is also a journal whose trace in the historic record is so thin that many bibliographic authorities report that the paper survived less than one year, when it actually continued for two under two different sets of proprietors.

The Echo was the second journal conducted in Lynchburg by William Waller Gray (193), the son of two of the town's earliest residents, Revolutionary War veteran Francis Gray and Nellie Hening, sister of William Waller Hening (213), the well-known legal scholar who was Gray's namesake. His prior experience there was as printer-publisher of the *Lynchburg Press* from May 1810 to May 1811. That newspaper was begun in May 1809 as a sectarian, non-partisan alternative to the *Lynchburg Star*, the secularized, Republican paper published by James Graham (183). In 1810, Gray agreed to a one-year contract to publish the *Press* when its founder, Fleming Grantland (185), left Virginia to join the printing office of his brother, Seaton Grantland (186), in Georgia. But in the year that Gray was associated with the *Press*, it seems that he took the paper in editorial directions not approved of by his sponsors. So when his contract expired in 1811, they replaced the printer with more amenable agents, so sending Gray back to the press offices in Richmond in which he had been trained.

Gray returned to Lynchburg in the spring of 1816 to start a partisan successor to the *Star*. Graham's journal had ceased publication early in 1814, with his office being sold to a group of proprietors, who then published a new *Lynchburg Centinel* in September 1814 from that press. In November 1815, those owners offered that same printing office for sale once again, having closed the *Centinel* after about a year-long run. By January 1816, Gray was in possession of Graham's old press when he placed a prospectus notice in the *Virginia Argus* and the *Daily Commercial Compiler* in Richmond announcing his intention to issue a new Republican paper in Lynchburg that March in cooperation with Russel Dawson (139), a young printer from Bedford County.

The partners were concerned about prejudicial appraisals of their youth and inexperience, and so tried to assure potential subscribers that they need not be apprehensive:

"We are young—bent on enterprise—possessed of industry—capable of perseverance. We have both been brought up to the printing business, and we are not utter strangers to the due management and proper conduct of a newspaper. Our efforts will be unrebutted—and, we trust, successful. They will be constantly and earnestly directed to the collection of the most recent intelligence of every sort—to a judicious selection of borrowed materials—in short, to the regularity, symmetry, and elegance of a whole, combining, at the same time, variety of subjects and unity of plan."

Still, their avowed Republican perspective seems to have posed a problem for them, just as it had for their predecessors, the *Lynchburg Star* and the *Lynchburg Centinel*. Their starting date slipped from the proposed one of March 15th to June 2, 1816. In July, the two printers

addressed that twelve-week lag and their assessment of its causes in a lengthy statement to their readers and editors elsewhere.

"Controlled by no limited, interested, hungry policy; not even knowing the public sentiment, either upon the *compensation law*, or on the defects of the State Constitution, upon the basis of which the Staunton Convention has its origins; without awaiting events, or anticipating what has occurred, we independently told our fellow citizens, what our sentiments were upon each of those great subjects.

The discussions which have been published, afford the strongest testimonials of the sincerity of the motives by which we have heretofore been governed, and by which our paper shall hereafter be conducted."

That address suggests that Dawson & Gray had suffered from the general public resentment to Congress's decision that spring to raise their salaries, and from Federalists' opposition to changes in suffrage and apportionment advocated by the Virginia's western counties which were about to be delineated in a meeting of delegates from those counties in August.

With those issues delaying the start of the *Echo*, the printers were also manifestly annoyed with their former colleagues in Richmond for treating their *Echo* as if it had never actually issued after the January prospectus, as had so many other failed ventures in this era. That disregard and its apparent effect on their subscriptions led Dawson and Gray to invigorate their editorial content by employing Gerard Banks (019), the well-known Republican writer (and a brother-in-law to Gray's maternal uncle, William Waller Hening), who announced his new situation in an addendum to the printers' admonition. Yet his association with the *Echo* continued for just six weeks; Banks was compelling his return home to Fredericksburg when his wife died that September.

Thereafter, the course of the *Echo* can only be discerned from reprinted items or editorial criticisms elsewhere, as only four numbers from its first two months now survive. Many twentieth-century scholars presumed that the *Echo* ceased publishing shortly before Gray returned to Richmond to join with Thomas Burling (066), a long-time friend and associate, in publishing a new weekly there called *The Spirit of Union* in October 1817. But the reality is that Dawson and Gray withdrew from the venture at about the time that they completed its first volume in June 1817 and transferred the *Echo* to Tubal Early Strange (406), a native of Campbell County who apparently learned the print trade from his predecessors. Over the next year, Strange evidently followed the original plan laid out by Dawson & Gray, as the articles reprinted from the *Echo* during his tenure are a combination of ones on scientific agriculture and ones detailing the recent growth in commerce in Lynchburg – topics that the founders specified as their paper's principal objects.

The date the *Echo* closed can be estimated by Strange's placing of a notice in the *National Intelligencer* offering the paper for sale in May 1818, just as the proprietors of the *Centinel* had done with that same office in late 1815. His advertisement carried a stop date of June 12th, a date consistent with one for the completion of a second volume of the *Echo*. But unlike that previous case, Strange offered the establishment for sale as a going concern, and not an idle press.

"The *Echo* is published twice a week, at \$3.50 in advance, or \$4 at the end of the

year, on a demy sheet. The circulation of the *Echo* is very respectable; and might be increased so as to be the equal of any semi-weekly paper. The advertising and job custom is very large, at all times over two pages of advertisements.

This office is worthy of attention, in being in one of the most flourishing towns in Virginia. Lynchburg has advantages not to be surpassed by an inland town."

Still, it appears that Strange could not find anyone willing to continue publishing the *Echo*. Indeed, it seems that the chief beneficiary of his offer was the competing *Lynchburg Press*, at least in the short term. On September 21, 1818, that weekly advanced its publication frequency to a twice-weekly pace, an acceleration requiring a commensurate increase in supplies and labor, at just the time that the *Echo* office became available. That considerable expense evidently induced that paper's proprietors to sell the *Press* the following spring.

By then, Strange was resident in the Missouri town of Jackson in Cape Girardeau County, starting another paper there in June 1819. About that same time, Dawson borrowed money in Lynchburg, ostensibly to start another Republican paper there; but within a year, he had absconded with those funds to Union County, Indiana, and never returned to Virginia. That meant that Gray was the only principal in the *Echo* project to continue in the print trade in Virginia after that paper's demise; after Thomas Burling had died by his own hand in January 1818, ending the short life of their *Spirit of Union*, Gray conducted a job-press in Richmond until 1820 or 1821, when he retired from the trade forever.

Sources: LCCN no. 85-025579; Brigham II: 1120; Hubbard on Richmond; U.S. Newspaper Directory, Library of Congress; Early, *Campbell Chronicles*; notices in [Richmond] *Virginia Argus* (1816), [Norfolk] *American Beacon* (1816), and [Washington] *National Intelligencer* (1818).