

## MARTINSBURG 02: Martinsburg Gazette

- 01: The Berkeley Intelligencer (1799-1801)
  - 02: The Berkeley and Jefferson Intelligencer, and Northern-Neck Advertiser (1801-1802)
  - 03: The Berkeley and Jefferson Intelligencer(1802-1809)
  - 04: Martinsburg Gazette (1809-1826)
  - 05: Martinsburg Gazette and Public Advertiser (1826-1833)
  - 06: Martinsburg Gazette (1833-1855)
  - 07: The Berkeley American (1855-1857)
  - 08: The American and Gazette (1857-1861)
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The premier newspaper published in antebellum Martinsburg was the second weekly issued there in 1799. It was also a Federalist paper founded explicitly to challenge and overwhelm the Republican-aligned *Potomak Guardian*, the town's initial newspaper. After succeeding in that effort, it evolved into a popular Whig journal that died at the start of the Civil War.

The *Martinsburg Gazette* was originally known by a title that identified the county it served, rather than the town where it was published. That choice – *The Berkeley Intelligencer* – was apparently a counterpoint to the regional persona similarly adopted by its cross-town rival, the *Potomak Guardian* of Nathaniel Willis (449). Willis was a Boston-born printer who fled Massachusetts in 1786 rather than pay taxes levied on newspaper essays that were critical of the merchant elite that controlled the state legislature; so when he came to Martinsburg in 1792, he with him brought a newspaper that evinced open distrust of the influence of the area's merchant-planters while depending on the advertising revenues they provided. Thus over the course of the 1790s, Willis became ever more estranged from his urban advertisers while trying to connect with rural readers, a path reflected in his choice of a title tied to the valley of the Potomac River, rather than the town of Martinsburg.

### Federalist Origin

In early 1799, the tensions between Willis and Federalist leaders in Berkeley County broke out into a violent confrontation. Between episodes of vandalism against his property, he was severely beaten by Magnus Tate, then a delegate in the General Assembly, and William Riddle, a county-court justice and Martinsburg's postmaster, over a letter he printed in his paper accusing local Federalists of impeding the circulation of Republican newspapers and pamphlets through the county's post offices. When the assault failed to deter him from publishing articles critical of Federalist authorities, other Berkeley County Federalists moved quickly to assure the demise of the *Potomak Guardian* and so remove Willis from their midst without further violence. *The Berkeley Intelligencer* was the result of their efforts.

The key to their plan was John Alburtis (004), the man best recognized as the publisher of the *Martinsburg Gazette*. Born in Baltimore, Alburtis came to Berkeley County to apprentice in the office of Nathaniel Willis, who represented a connection to the extensive printer-network of the Green family, and so a viable future as a print tradesman; he was completing

his training in the *Guardian* office when Willis was assaulted in March 1799, and so became a convenient alternative to Willis within days of the attack. Alburtis was induced to leave his master and start publishing a competing paper backed by sizable financial subsidies from local merchants. His new *Berkeley Intelligencer* issued its first number on April 3, 1799, so allowing those merchants to completely cease advertising in the *Guardian* within a month of the assault on Willis. The abrupt loss of revenue ruined Willis, compelling him to sell his weekly at the end of October and leave Martinsburg the following winter. Still, the *Guardian* struggled on for two more years under Armstrong Charlton (088) and William Brown (058), before finally giving way to the immediately dominant *Berkeley Intelligencer*.

Alburtis continued to be the printer-publisher behind this Martinsburg weekly until the end of 1822. Yet for the first decade of that tenure, he embraced a wider geographical identity for his journal than was afforded by the town itself. In early 1801, Alburtis expanded its title when the Assembly split Jefferson County off from Berkeley: *The Berkeley and Jefferson Intelligencer, and Northern-Neck Advertiser*. Though he discarded the appellation "Northern Neck" at the start of 1803, the main title was one he retained until 1810, when adopted the name by which his paper was best known: the *Martinsburg Gazette*. By that time, Alburtis could no longer say that his weekly represented the interests of the northern Shenandoah Valley; Jefferson County had sustained a viable journal-of-record (*The Farmer's Repository*) since April 1808, and that Charlestown journal was competing with two papers in Leesburg to the east and three in Winchester, as well as with Alburtis, for such representativeness. So by 1810, specific urban locales were more critical to the identity of a newspaper in northern Virginia, and Alburtis transformed his journal into one tied closely to the town and not to the county as before.

With the closing of the *Guardian* office, Alburtis became Martinsburg's principal printer as well as its sole newspaper publisher. Consequently, both reflected the commercial mien of his community, and served its mercantile needs faithfully throughout his tenure. From all accounts, excepting those of Willis, Alburtis was beneficent and humble, always recognizing the gifts bestowed on him in his youth and repaying those favors generously as an adult, perhaps out of remorse for the events of 1799. John S. Gallaher (177) – the most eminent of his apprentices, who went on to a long career in publishing and politics himself – said that his former master was "the most even-tempered gentlemen I ever knew" and that he never forgot Alburtis's contributions to his later success.

At the end of 1822, Alburtis decided to retire from journalism, perhaps a result of declining health, as he died from a "prolonged illness" in May 1827, eight days shy of his forty-eighth birthday. His retirement may also have been prompted by an understanding that a renewal of partisan warfare, like that in 1799-1800, was dawning between newspapers in the region. He faced friendly competition then from two nearby mercantile advertisers with political views similar to his *Gazette*, one issued in Shepherdstown – the *Virginia Monitor* of Edward Bell (029) – and another in Harper's Ferry – the *Virginia Free Press* of John S. Gallaher; he was also in competition with established papers in Charlestown – *The Farmers' Repository* of Richard Williams (447) and in Winchester – the *Republican Constellation* of Samuel H. Davis (126) and the *Winchester Gazette* of Federalist publisher John Heiskell (210); and in the next few years, new Jacksonian newspapers would emerge in the area as well to

compete with the established Federalist papers that became first Adamsite ones, and then Whig ones, as the *Martinsburg Gazette* now did.

### **Whig Maturity**

With the issue of January 9, 1823, Alburtis turned control of his weekly over to Washington Evans (1790-1853) and removed to Shepherdstown. Evans continued the *Gazette* without any change in title, numbering, or advertising content, evincing an easy transition between the owners and a continuity of opinion. But it was during Evans's tenure that the partisan was reemerged, particularly after the divisive election of John Adams over Andrew Jackson. Gallaher consolidated the Charlestown and Harper's Ferry papers into the most articulate Whig voice in northern Virginia, while stridently Jacksonian papers issued in Winchester, Leesburg, and nearby Hagerstown, Maryland. Evans apparently charted a more moderate course by adopting a mildly Whig perspective so as to draw the widest range of advertisers possible; that approach is also suggested by the alteration he made to the journal's title with the first issue of 1826, when it became the *Martinsburg Gazette and Public Advertiser*. This expanded title was the one carried by the paper through the next seven years. Yet its moderately Whig orientation found dissenters in Martinsburg by 1832, the year of Jackson's reelection campaign; remarkably, the challenger that first appeared in May that year – the *Virginia Republican* – was issued by William Alburtis, eldest son of his paper's late founder. In opposing the *Gazette* and its Whig contemporaries in the region, the *Republican* survived until 1862. But Evans seems to have recognized the challenge the new weekly represented and decided that leaving the ongoing contest to others was the best course for his future well-being. So with the issue of February 28, 1833, he transferred ownership of his paper to Edmund Pendleton Hunter (1809-54).

Hunter was then a young lawyer with political ambitions; a clear sign of those proclivities is in his return to the paper's shorter title of 1810-25 period in October 1833; thereafter, he used the *Martinsburg Gazette* as a platform for his election to the Assembly in 1834, 1835, 1839, and 1841 as a Whig delegate. It also helped him gain the appointment of the county court as the Commonwealth Attorney for Berkeley County in 1838, a position he held until his death. Consequently, it can be argued, that the *Gazette* was as closely tied to the most conservative elements in the county during Hunter's tenure, as it had been during its years under John Alburtis, if not more so. From May to September 1834, Hunter employed the Maine-born poet Edward V. Sparhawk (1798-1838) as his editor, drawing on, or so it seems, the notoriety that Sparhawk had gained from a beating he had taken at the hands of Duff Green, editor & publisher of Jackson's semi-official *United States Telegraph* in Washington; that employment ended when Sparhawk was called to Richmond to edit the new *Southern Literary Messenger* as immediate predecessor to Edgar Allan Poe.

The defeat of the Whigs in 1844 on both the state and national level apparently persuaded Hunter to retire from journalism in order to focus on his legal practice. Following the issue of February 27, 1845, he transferred the weekly to James E. Stewart (1814-90), another Berkeley County lawyer then serving as a Whig delegate in the General Assembly. This sale marks the beginning of a series of short-term ownership arrangements suggesting that the collection of Whig adherents in Berkeley County were the principal financiers of the *Gazette*

in the ensuing decade, a group that hired a succession of editor-publishers to be the public face of the journal while they remained in the background, a group in which all of those editor-publishers were also a part.

Stewart retained ownership of the *Gazette* until February 25, 1847, a two-year tenure, with Henry K. Gregg (d. 1884) joining him as a partner in March 1846; that association gave the journal a new dress and appearance, indicating a significant monetary investment in the *Gazette* at that time, likely in an effort to enhance the chances of Whig candidates in that year's state and federal elections. But when that cycle was easily carried by the Democrats (née Jacksonians), flush from the victory over Mexico, Stewart chose the path followed by Hunter before him; he retired from journalism to concentrate on his legal practice.

He sold the *Gazette* to Charles Hance Lewis (1816-80) effective March 4, 1847; Lewis was "a chaste and forceful writer, and a zealous Whig" (according to the *Richmond Whig*) who had recently been contributing poetry to the *Southern Literary Messenger*; he was part of the respected Lomax family of Augusta County and a veteran of the Mexican War, serving as a major in a Virginia Militia unit raised in his home town of Staunton in early 1846. Lewis was joined in April 1848 by another Mexican War veteran, printer Daniel A. Stofer (1821-92) of Lewisburg. Apparently the addition was made to allow Lewis to retire that summer while leaving an experienced tradesman behind for his successor. Accordingly Lewis sold his interest in the weekly to Norman Miller (1814-63) after the issue of July 26, 1848, not four months after Stofer joined the *Gazette*.

However, Miller was not a native Virginian, and so seems to have found himself out of step with his Whig contemporaries in Berkeley County. By May of 1849, the Vermont-born Miller had withdrawn from the *Gazette* office and had started publishing a competing *Berkeley Chronicle*, which also offered a Whiggish outlook. The dual journals evince the split within the Whig Party in Virginia that developed in 1848 over the candidacy of Gen. Zachary Taylor, a native Virginian, for president and his manifest silence on the slavery issue, specifically the so-called Wilmot Proviso which sought to exclude slavery from the territories gained in the 1846 Mexican War. With northern Whigs adopting anti-slavery views in the debate over the Proviso, in a blatant appeal to the immigrant voters who supported Democratic candidates, an anti-immigrant movement emerged in the wake of the war, commonly called the Known-Nothing Party for its secretive practices. In Virginia, this nativist movement found a home in the Whig Party, where successive losses in the 1846, 1847, and 1848 Assembly elections led to an overwhelming Democratic majority created, in part, by immigrant votes in the state's urban centers. In this context, Miller became a leading voice among Berkeley Whigs for new controls on immigration and immigrant suffrage in the Old Dominion. That perspective seems to have led to differences with his backers, and so his withdrawal in early 1849.

### **Advocate Adrift**

Yet Miller's departure from the *Gazette* deprived the long-lived weekly of its accustomed support, much as Alburtis had undermined Willis in 1799; so in July 1849, the *Gazette* was sold in a sheriff's auction in order to pay its outstanding debts. The sale resulted in Norman Miller reacquiring the office as its sole proprietor; he promptly folded his new *Chronicle* into

the *Gazette* and continued publishing under the older name. The transaction was financed, in part, with funds from George A. Porterfield (1822-1919), who Miller made a partner with the issue of September 18, 1849; then a teacher in Martinsburg, Porterfield was an 1844 graduate of the Virginia Military Institute and a veteran of the Mexican War; he would later be known for his exploits with state's militia forces in the Army of Northern Virginia. The new firm of Miller & Porterfield endured until September 1851, when Porterfield withdrew to take on a post with the U. S. Coast Survey in Washington, suggesting their arrangement had been a two-year contract that allowed Miller to buy the *Gazette*. And throughout his tenure, it seems Miller continued some form of editorial relationship with Henry K. Gregg, who represented him at an 1854 convention in Richmond of Virginia's newspaper editors.

In 1855, the *Martinsburg Gazette* ceased to be known as such. Miller's continued affinity for the nativist American Party, and his weekly's support of its political views, led to a change in title with the issue of March 14, 1855; the restyled *Berkeley American* made that connection manifest. That change may have been prompted by Miller's embarrassing loss to John E. Norris, the favorite of mainline Whigs, in a special election to fill the vacant seat of the late E. P. Hunter as the Commonwealth Attorney in late 1854. So by retitling his paper, Miller announced his disassociation with the increasingly marginalized Whig Party of Virginia, and with the local circle that once controlled his journal.

That same year, other Virginia journalists who were sympathetic to Miller's views launched a newspaper in Richmond that they hoped would have a national influence: the *National American*. Offered in two editions, a daily version appeared in July 1855, and a weekly one in December. The weekly version was edited by Charles H. Lewis, formerly proprietor of the *Martinsburg Gazette*, and A. Tyre Maupin (d. 1905), who previously edited Whig papers in Harrisonburg and Staunton. The choice of title and its connection to Martinsburg evinces the small circle of "Know Nothing" editors that emerged in Virginia in 1855 in advance of the next presidential election, as the legitimacy of the Whig Party began to wane. It seems that Miller has an unseen hand in this larger project, as he sold the *Berkeley American* to William Evans just before the *Daily National American* appeared.

Evans was evidently a Methodist minister in Martinsburg, but his sparse trace on the historic landscape makes any other depiction speculative; however, it is likely that he was related in some way to Washington Evans, the proprietor of the *Gazette* who converted a Federalist weekly into the Whig one that most Virginians knew it to be after 1820. He conducted the *American* from May 1855 to April 1857, making the enigmatic A.G. McDaniel his partner in April 1856. Yet their affiliation seems to have been a temporary measure that anticipated the subsequent transfer of the *American* to Maupin, once his prior arrangement with the *National American* expired in 1857.

Maupin took control of the weekly with the issue of April 29, 1857; he immediately changed the paper's title to a hybrid of new and old – *The American and Gazette* – in a clear effort to breach the decade-long divide within local Whig circles. Still, the Whigs in Virginia were a dying breed after the 1856 elections. The Northern component of the national party soon became a key element of the Republican Party, while many Southern Whigs turned to the Democratic Party. Die-hard Whigs like Maupin, however, were determined to forge a new

alliance as the Constitutional Union Party, which embraced parts of the platforms of both the Whig and American parties. Hence, his *American and Gazette* backed the Constitutional Union candidates in the divisive 1860 election – John Bell of Tennessee for President and Edward Everett of Massachusetts for Vice President – and suffered the consequences.

With the state's secession ordinance in April 1861, northern Virginia became a war front, forcing the closure of most newspapers throughout the region. Maupin's journal was no exception; its last known number is the issue for February 20, 1861; by June, Maupin was a part of a Martinsburg militia unit called up to resist the invasion of Federal forces there; he deserted that unit just before the First Battle of Manassas and then joined the Union Army, so leaving Martinsburg behind. These circumstances indicate the successor to the venerable *Martinsburg Gazette* finally ceased publication in May 1861 and was not restarted after the war had ended.

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Sources: LCCN nos. 84-038396, 85-059524, 84-038455, 85-059526, 84-038468, 85-059529, & 85-059527; Brigham II: 1171; Norona & Shetler 1276; Rice, "West Virginia Printers;" U.S. Newspaper Directory, Library of Congress; Cartmell, *Shenandoah Pioneers*; Aler's *Martinsburg*; Hudson, *Journalism*; Vaughn, *American Journalism*; notices in *Alexandria Gazette* (1801-1861) and *Richmond Whig* (1824-1861).