

## MORGANTOWN 03: Monongalia Herald

### 01: The Monongalia Herald (1820-1821)

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The third paper issued in Morgantown was effectively a successor to the second, albeit after an eighteen-month hiatus. Yet the weekly did not connect with its predecessor's subscribers and so expired within six months of its birth.

The *Monongalia Herald* was "edited and printed by James M. Barbour for Wm. Barbour" beginning on December 16, 1820. Neither proprietor was resident in Morgantown when the town's preceding weekly – the *Monongalia Spectator* – ceased publication in May 1819. But that closing apparently led to the printing Barbour relocating to Virginia as part of an effort to resurrect that moribund journal. The *Spectator* had been printed by William McGranahan (288) for Ralph Berkshire (032) and Nicholas B. Madera (276), two prominent merchants in the town; their association created a stable mercantile advertiser that issued for five years until the printer had a falling out with his financiers in the spring of 1819. McGranahan then moved south to Clarksburg, where he started a new weekly – the *Independent Virginian* – in August 1819. Berkshire and Madera were left in Morgantown with an idle press office and no printer to conduct it, compelling the suspension of the *Spectator*.

Almost immediately, they began a search for a new trade partner that summer, finding one James M. Barbour (020) in nearby Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. The native of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania had published the *Huntingdon Republican* (formerly *Intelligencer*) in that town since 1813. But the prospect of producing a paper that had a license to publish the laws of Congress each year, as was granted the *Spectator* in 1818, persuaded him to close that paper in August 1819 – at the same time that McGranahan's new paper issued – and move his young family to Morgantown. However, the projected new proprietors of the *Spectator* soon discovered that the prized federal license had been issued to McGranahan, and not to the paper. So without that key fiscal resource, Berkshire and Madera abandoned the effort to restart their paper. But Barbour now controlled the printing office they had set up for McGranahan next door to Berkshire's dry-goods store, and so conducted it as a job-press for the next year.

During that year, Barbour continued to plan for a new weekly in the place of the *Spectator*. He faced a significant challenge in doing so. McGranahan's *Virginian* was now the journal-of-record for Monongalia and Harrison counties alike, as well as the region's sole advertising outlet; when combined with his federal license, his weekly had a financial foundation not seen in the Monongahela Valley before. Moreover, his journal was the political voice of James Pindall (1783-1825), the region's Federalist representative in Congress. But it appears that Barbour found encouragement for his project in Pindall's unexpected resignation from Congress in July 1820, which – in combination with the appointment of John G. Jackson (1777-1825), the area's Republican leader, as a judge on the U.S. District Court in 1819 – left the political situation and the two parties' newspaper alliances in the valley in confusion.

Ominously, the inauguration of Barbour's new weekly paper in December 1820 was not an auspicious one. After he had printed one side of the sheet for the first issue, he found his

ink supply exhausted, so forcing a week's deferral in its publication until a delayed shipment arrived. Still, Barbour was undaunted. In his introductory address, he told his readers that he understood that the record of such ventures in Morgantown was "almost sufficient to operate as a bug-a-boo." Indeed, McGranahan had warned Barbour that he could not trust anyone in Morgantown to live up to their commitments to either him or his project. In view of those concerns, he decided that the *Herald* would present a non-partisan stance in order to reach the greatest circulation possible. Accordingly, his masthead proclaimed that "Ours are the plans of fair, delightful peace, unwarped by party rage, to live like brothers." He also recognized the problems bred by the continual scarcity of specie in the area, and so offered to take agricultural produce as in-kind payments for his newspaper.

The combination of those features with his seven years of experience in journalism made Barbour optimistic about the future of his *Herald*:

"The citizens of Monongalia County are, beyond a doubt, sufficiently able to support a Newspaper in such a manner as to afford ample remuneration to the proprietor; and we trust they will view the institution as advantageous to the improvement of the most uncultivated mind, and, impressed with a firm conviction of its salutary and meritorious effects bestow on it their undivided patronage."

Notwithstanding this hopeful introduction, Barbour's venture suffered the same fate as his Morgantown predecessors. Sometime after March 10, 1821, the *Herald* ceased publication. It appears that Barbour's experience told him that his paper's declining revenues could not be reversed in the face of McGranahan's dominance in the Monongahela Valley; so he cut his losses before they became excessive by closing the weekly and then returning to job-printing alone. Eventually, Barbour would try journalism again. Beginning in February 1822, he printed the weekly *North-Western Journal* for Nicholas Madera, who was Morgantown's postmaster now. That paper did not last out the year either, and Barbour decided to return to more fertile ground Pennsylvania in about 1825.

Throughout its brief life, the *Herald* appeared under the corporate name of "James M. Barbour for William Barbour." Who this William Barbour (021) was is undetermined; one would presume that at age 25, the publisher's partner would likely have been his brother or his father, but neither of those kin were named William; the only William clearly associated with Barbour was an infant son, making him an unlikely partner; so it is likely that he was a family member from Chambersburg, who was never again part of the Virginia print trade.

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Sources: LCCN No. 86-092162; Brigham II: 1173; Norona & Shetler 1303; Wiley, *Monongalia County*; Callahan, *Morgantown*.