

NORFOLK 05: Norfolk & Portsmouth Gazette

01: The Norfolk and Portsmouth Gazette (1789)

The Norfolk and Portsmouth Gazette was the shortest-lived newspaper issued in Norfolk in the early Republic era. Only five numbers were issued in the fall of 1789 by William Davison (128), a Philadelphia-trained printer.

Davis brought a press to Norfolk that summer after the death in May of John McLean (297), founder of the first journal established in the port town after the Revolutionary War: *The Norfolk and Portsmouth Journal*. However, Davison found himself quickly at a disadvantage when he arrived. Two Virginia-born-and-bred journeyman printers – William Prentis (340) and Daniel Baxter (027) – had acquired the McLean press and the *Journal's* subscriber list from the publisher's estate and were then close to issuing their replacement for the *Journal: The Norfolk and Portsmouth Chronicle*. With his a press in hand, Davison was committed to attempting, at the very least, to publish his rival *Norfolk and Portsmouth Gazette*, and did so. His first number issued on September 9th, eleven days after Prentis & Baxter began publishing their weekly. He told his readers that:

"This paper ... shall be conducted with fidelity, accuracy, and dispatch. — Energy devoid of acrimony shall be one of his characteristics. It shall up hold the cause of patriotism without degenerating into faction; and, whilst it affords the ready column for wit, sentiment, and humor, shall be particularly guarded against the admission of personal abuse, slander, and immorality."

Yet Davison's printing office was in the basement of Adam Lindsay's Hotel, suggesting that he used undesirable rented space in his rush to publish. But being preempted was not the principal difficulty Davison faced; his competitors had well-established connections all over the state, dating back to pre-Revolutionary Williamsburg, which gave them a standing that he could not match. Recognizing that his journal was doomed, Davison ceased publication after just five issues, returning to Philadelphia with his press.

Sources: LCCN No. 83-026152; Brigham II: 1124.