

PETERSBURG 01: Petersburg Intelligencer

- 01: The Virginia Gazette, and Petersburg Intelligencer (1786-1793)
 - 02: Virginia Gazette & Petersburg Intelligencer (1793-1797)
 - 03: Virginia Gazette and Petersburg Intelligencer (1797-1800)
 - 04: The Petersburg Intelligencer (1800-1803)
 - 05: Petersburg Intelligencer (1803-1808)
 - 06: Petersburg Virginia Intelligencer (1808-1810)
 - 07: Petersburg Intelligencer (1810-1817)
 - 08: The Intelligencer & Petersburg Commercial Advertiser (1817-1840)
 - 09: The Intelligencer, and Tri-Weekly Commercial Advertiser (1840-1850)
 - 10: Daily Intelligencer (1850-1860)
 - 11: [Petersburg Intelligencer] (1860-1861)
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The first newspaper published in Petersburg was also the longest-lived journal issued in that Appomattox River port town prior to the Civil War. That longevity reflects its foundation as a mercantile advertiser, and so its function as the voice of the region's commercial interests. Hence, its long-held Whig perspective became a Unionist one in 1860 which led, in turn, to its closing as secessionism took root in the spring of 1861.

In the four years between the Treaty of Paris in 1783 and the Constitutional Convention of 1787, all of Virginia's principal ports saw the introduction of a weekly mercantile advertising sheet in their town. This expansion of journalism beyond the state capital – be it Richmond or Williamsburg – was part of a pre-war trend resulting from the incapability of the capital's two or three weekly papers to satisfy the growing demand for commercial advertising while still carrying non-advertising matter. In this immediate post-war period, the chief merchants in Alexandria, Fredericksburg, Norfolk, and Petersburg induced young printers to establish presses in their towns, initially to provide the forms and account books that sustained their businesses, then to produce a weekly advertising sheet.

Founding Era

In Petersburg, those young printers were William Prentis (340) and Miles Hunter (229). Of the two, Hunter was the elder, although Prentis was the more experienced, having already conducted a newspaper before moving to Petersburg in the winter of 1785-1786. Both were sons of Williamsburg merchants who learned the printing trade there before and during the Revolutionary War. As a result, both men moved to Richmond when the state government relocated there in 1780. There, Hunter – apparently a nephew of William Hunter (230), the late colonial-era public-printer – was part of the office of the newly-installed public printer James Hayes (207); but that association evidently limited his trade options, as Hayes was soon embroiled in a dispute with the government over his performance in office as a result of supply and credit problems dating to the first days of his appointment. Meanwhile,

Prentis was employed in the office of John Dixon (140) and Thomas Nicolson (315), Hayes's immediate predecessors in that office; that concern dissolved when Hayes finally opened his Richmond office in late 1781, with Nicolson forming a new partnership with Prentis (as his shop foreman) to publish Richmond's first true advertising sheet, the *Virginia Gazette or Weekly Advertiser*. The firm of Nicolson & Prentis continued successfully until their office was destroyed by a fire in January 1785, consuming a nearly complete collection of Virginia laws that the state government had contracted from them, rather than use the press of the habitually-late Hayes; the cost of replacing that project brought an end to their alliance.

Shortly after the firm of Nicolson & Prentis closed, Prentis moved to Petersburg to conduct a job-press in a thriving commercial center that did not then have a printing office. At about that same time, Hunter was contemplating an offer to relocate to Kentucky as printer for the faction proposing statehood for that western district of Virginia. But Hunter decided to stay in Richmond, anticipating the imminent dismissal of Hayes as public printer, and so the reorganization of the capital's printing offices that such an event would prompt. That choice was fortuitous, as Prentis began preparations for issuing an advertising sheet in Petersburg at just the moment that Hayes was dismissed in May 1786. He had written to the town's Common Council that February seeking support for such a project and was encouraged to pursue that initiative; the closing of Hayes's office in Richmond made his colleague and friend Hunter available to him as a reliable partner, and Hunter quickly accepted the half-interest offered to him by Prentis.

The first number of the *Virginia Gazette and Petersburg Intelligencer* issued from the press of new firm on Hunter & Prentis on July 6, 1786. While the partners set out to produce an archetypal mercantile advertiser, the weekly also represented a joint venture between two merchant families with established business concerns in this Appomattox River entrepôt, one that brought together younger members of those families to support its older ones. That facet of the paper was likely not lost on the readers of the *Intelligencer*, so enhancing the credibility of a journal published by tradesmen only recently resident in the town. That claim to trustworthiness was reinforced by their choice of a title; by asserting that their new paper was a "Virginia Gazette," they inferred that the weekly carried an official imprimatur, a tactic that was standard among many of the state's newspapers before their politicization during the 1790s.

This formula was successful from the outset, allowing the *Intelligencer* to survive those later political wars. But Hunter's time with the journal was limited. Following the deaths of two wives in eighteen months, Hunter passed on too in December 1788, most likely succumbing to the same disease that claimed his second wife – just as the controversies attending the ratification of the Federal Constitution reached their zenith and so demand for their paper. Hence, the *Intelligencer* did not skip a beat, and Prentis did not find the need for engaging another partner until 1796. Indeed, within months of Hunter's death, Prentis was afforded a second journalistic opportunity by another old Williamsburg colleague, Daniel Baxter (027); together, they acquired the Norfolk office of the late John McLean (297) and published the *Norfolk and Portsmouth Chronicle*, another mercantile advertiser, for the next three years.

In the 1790s, both Prentis and his *Intelligencer* became ardent Federalist advocates, a sign

of the mercantile purpose that each had evinced since 1786. While that choice remained a profitable one, he was faced by a Federalist challenger in March 1793; the Norfolk publisher William Davis (127) began publishing *The Independent Ledger and Petersburg and Blandford Public Advertiser* there in an attempt to siphon off some of Prentis's Petersburg revenues, after having driven the old Prentis & Baxter *Chronicle* in Norfolk to the brink of extinction; in response, Prentis increased the frequency of his paper's publication from weekly to twice-weekly, a move that Davis could not match, so forcing him to abandon his Petersburg effort after just nine weeks in print. But subsequent competitors would not be so easily rebuffed, as those newspapers would be political ones opposing the *Intelligencer's* outlook, and not bald attempts to divert its advertising.

The first of those competitors appeared in April 1795; *The Virginia Star* was published by Philip Rootes (362), a Republican-leaning lawyer in Petersburg who lacked prior experience as a journalist; that inexperience, as well as a lack of supportive advertisers in this Federalist bastion, led Rootes to close his new weekly after just a three-month publication. Apparently sensing that other Republican papers would follow the *Star*, Prentis moved in early 1796 to revamp his office; he added William Yates Murray (310), a former apprentice still working in the *Intelligencer* office, as his partner; the resulting capital infusion allowed for a refit of the journal's type and an increase in its page size, enhancing the *Intelligencer's* suitability for advertisers. The new alliance was short-lived, however, as Murray died on October 1, 1796, at just twenty-four, so bringing the relationship to an end. Similarly anticipating the grueling political campaigns in 1799 (state) and 1800 (national), Prentis added another partner in the spring of 1799; Tarleton W. Pleasants (333) was a printer trained by his cousin, Samuel Pleasants (331), the respected Richmond printer-publisher, as well as a scion of a prominent Appomattox Valley merchant family; but his participation did not blunt Republican attempts to counter the influence of the *Intelligencer* in the region, leading to the parting of Prentis and Pleasants in the spring of 1800.

By that time, a third competitor had appeared, one that would be the *Intelligencer's* most formidable foe. Virginia's Republican leadership realized that the hinterlands surrounding Petersburg favored native son Jefferson, even as the port and its merchants favored Adams. So they backed a new journal designed to oppose Prentis's Federalist paper; they induced printer Thomas Field (162), a Petersburg native, to return from Kentucky in 1799 to produce the *Petersburg Republican* for journalist James Lyon (274), the Vermont-trained printer-publisher who was then heading up similar efforts in Richmond, Staunton, and Georgetown as well. Field's contacts in the area allowed him to find support for his alternative paper in neighboring Dinwiddie and Prince George Counties, while Prentis continued to dominate the market for in-town patrons. That sustenance also meant that Field's circle of supporters were willing to provide refuge to several Republican writers who were being persecuted then under the Alien & Sedition Acts, most conspicuously James Thomson Callender (075) and John Daly Burk (063). Sustained by such partisan activity, the *Republican* survived the 1800 election cycle, and competed with the *Intelligencer* into the 1830s.

From Federalist to Whig

As the 1804 elections neared, however, Prentis chose to take a different course than the

one he had followed in 1796 and 1800; rather than reorganize the *Intelligencer* again, he left to battle to others and retired. From his arrival in Petersburg, he had been an active figure in local civic affairs, eventually serving on the Common Council from 1786 to 1811, among other posts; and as those commitments grew in number and complexity, Prentis became increasingly an absentee proprietor of the *Intelligencer*. Moreover, the forty-two year-old Prentis wanted to employ his accumulated wealth in the same mercantile pursuits that then occupied his brothers and cousins, rather than to continue in the partisan newspaper wars. So he turned to the most-senior printers in his employ – John Dickson (134) and Edward Pescud (324) – and made them his successors. For twenty-two year-old Dickson and twenty-five year-old Pescud, the purchase of the *Intelligencer* was their first independent trade venture, and it appears Prentis facilitated the sale by providing them with the financing they needed. Over the next twenty years, Prentis conducted a range of private business activities while continuing in governmental roles; he died in February 1824.

In taking possession of the *Intelligencer* in January 1804, Dickson & Pescud promised that the paper would be "conducted upon the same principles as when under the management of Mr. Prentis" – a consistently-voiced Federalist organ. While seemingly an acceptable course for Pescud at the outset, it was a partisan perspective he did not share; a year later, when the competing *Republican* was offered for sale by its founder, Thomas Field, Pescud withdrew from his arrangement with Dickson to buy it. Hence, the former partners found themselves in constant competition from October 1805 until Dickson died in July 1814.

The loss of his partner did not noticeably affect Dickson's business. Indeed, Dickson would claim that its patronage had never "flowed more warmly than at the present period." This prosperity came despite a serious challenge to the *Intelligencer's* survival in late 1807 and early 1808; the unnamed paper mill on which he was dependent was destroyed, making a continuing supply of needed paper uncertain. For about six months, Dickson reduced the size of his sheet by nearly half, with a concomitant reduction in advertising content. When his supplier was about to restart production in June 1806, Dickson pointedly asked his contemporaries, who had formed a "Manufacturing Society of Petersburg" to promote such ventures, whether building a paper mill nearby was not an obviously profitable project. In publishing such a comment, the influence of his former master, an advocate for developing local manufacturing, can be clearly seen. Prentis was obviously Dickson's mentor politically as well. He appears often in reports of meetings of the port's Federalists, as its recording secretary, with Prentis in the chair.

Dickson soon, however, encountered an obstacle that he could not overcome. After mid-1811, he was longer seen in reports of any Petersburg meetings, suggesting a withdrawal from public life. Then on June 1, 1813, he placed an advertisement in Washington's *National Intelligencer* offering his office for sale that ran for several weeks. The reason, he declared, was his "long and continued ill-health" which now forced him "to relinquish my present pursuits." It was an inopportune time for someone to be selling a Federalist paper, as the country was immersed in a war with Britain that most (if not all) such journals opposed. It seems Dickson received no serious offers, as the *Intelligencer* was still being issued under his name when he died on July 11, 1814.

The *Intelligencer* continued publication uninterrupted, despite the death of its proprietor. His wife (and administrator) promptly advertised an auction sale of the *Intelligencer* office and effects for August 26, 1814; but just two weeks after Dickson's death, the paper itself passed into the hands of Thomas Whitworth (443), a merchant-manufacturer in Petersburg, and Francis G. Yancey (463), previously Dickson's shop foreman; the partners then bought the Dickson press at the auction she had advertised. The initial months of their association were difficult ones for Yancey; just before Dickson's death, Yancey committed to leaving the *Intelligencer* to join with John Wood (456), a controversial Federalist editor then teaching at the Petersburg Academy, in publishing Petersburg's first daily newspaper, the *Daily Courier*. But once Dickson passed and Whitworth entered the picture, Yancey evidently thought that the prospects for the proven *Intelligencer* were better than those for the unproven *Courier*, especially given reports of Wood's erratic editorial behavior in the past. As a result, Yancey was forced to act as the tradesman-partner in both papers until Wood could find a new one, which finally came in November 1814. The twenty-year-old printer appears to have handled the situation with considerable skill, though the appearance of a new daily there manifestly strained the available supplies of paper; Whitworth & Yancey apologized for the irregular size of their *Intelligencer* on September 30th, assuring their readers that it would "in future appear in its regular and proper form."

Despite these problems, Whitworth & Yancey profitably conducted the *Intelligencer* for the next five years. That result was not foreordained, especially given the destruction of their business and Yancey's home in the Great Petersburg Fire of July 1815. But their substantial subscriber base and advertising patronage allowed the two partners to quickly rebuild the business. Nonetheless, Whitworth had other goals in life beyond the print trade, primarily in building mills on the Appomattox and profiting from their products. So in about September 1819, Whitworth sold his interest in the *Intelligencer* to Yancey and retired from journalism. By the 1830s, he was directing the various mills of the Providence Manufacturing Company, later the Matoaca Manufacturing Company, along the northern bank of the river.

Following Whitworth's departure from the *Intelligencer*, Yancey was the central figure in its publication until his death in July 1833. This was also the period when the paper evolved from a Federalist journal into a Whig vehicle. Yancey was assisted in that process by a circle of Petersburg-area merchants, physicians, and lawyers including Richard Field (d. 1829) of Brunswick County, Miles Jordan (1779-1833) of Lunenburg County, William Moore and Stith E. Burton of Dinwiddie County, and James B. Kendall and Samuel Hinton (1775-1827) of Petersburg. Yet while the identity of his backers and his partners can be readily discerned, the timing of ownership changes during Yancey's years are not very clear; the problem lies in the scarcity of surviving issues of the *Intelligencer* for the entire course of its life; over its seventy-five-year existence, only an average of 21 issues per year are still extant; in that run, eleven years of publication are now lost, while three-quarters of a year's production survives for only seven of those years. That meager testimony indicates that Yancey took on two short-term partners between 1819 and 1828; in 1821, he joined with one William Rose in a one or two year arrangement; then in August 1824, he took on Burton in a three-year agreement. It was during the Yancey & Burton period that the *Intelligencer* office acquired a Philadelphia-trained editor named Thomas Low Wilson (1800-61).

In 1828, though, Yancey appears to have tired of the partisan grind long associated with the *Intelligencer* and set out to publish a literary weekly instead. With issue of June 6, 1828, Yancey sold the *Intelligencer* to his friend and business associate, Dr. Richard Field, and his editor Wilson; he then formed a partnership with theatrical entrepreneur Henry Whyte to publish *The Times* starting on October 6, 1828. This new alignment worked well for both journals from the start, but that success came to an abrupt end when Field died in May 1829. In order to save the *Intelligencer*, Yancey bought Field's interest in the paper from his estate in October that year; with issue of October 9, 1829; Yancey folded his weekly *Times* into the *Intelligencer* as its weekly edition, while the original continued as a twice-weekly one; both papers were now issued by the firm of Yancey & Wilson, with Wilson conducting the combined office on a daily basis.

Instability becomes Stability

On July 7, 1833, Francis G. Yancey died at the relatively young age of thirty-nine. His death unleashed a five-year period of instability in the *Intelligencer's* ownership. It also resulted in a five-year-long chancery suit in which Field's son and executor tried to recover monies that he thought were still due his father's estate from Yancey's sole surviving security, James B. Kendall. As the end of that suit came concurrently with the last sale of the *Intelligencer* in this period, the shuffling of owners likely had as much to do with the encumbrances on the journal's assets associated with the settlement of several personal estates, including Field's and Yancey's, as it did with those owners' conduct of the paper itself.

In August 1833, Yancey's estate sold his half-interest in the *Intelligencer* to Robert Birchett Jr. (1807-52), a lawyer who later served as the city's postmaster. His introductory address made it clear that, in the vernacular of the day, that he would be conducting a Whig paper, as had Yancey, opposed to the Jackson administration and its aggrandizement of Federal power:

"Honestly and deeply impressed with the conviction, that the preservation of our liberties mainly depends upon the devotion with which we cling to the reserved rights of the States, and the vigilance with which we guard and protect them, we shall never fail to sound the alarm whenever and by whomsoever they may be attacked. ... Untrammelled by party dictation, superior to the slavish fear of giving offense to those in authority, we shall obey the honest dictates of our judgment; and, looking to principles that men, freely and unreservedly animadvert upon the conduct and measures of our public functionaries."

While Wilson continued to conduct the office as Birchett's full partner, as before, it appears that he found it increasingly difficult to work with Birchett as a result of diverging political opinions. Early in 1835, Wilson sold his half-interest of the *Intelligencer* to Birchett in order to buy the *Lynchburg Democrat*; he assumed control of that ardently-Jacksonian newspaper on May 4, 1835.

Birchett continued as sole proprietor of the *Intelligencer* for another two years with the assistance of unnamed and unknown hands. But by April 1837, the constant press of work, and the slim remuneration it afforded, compelled him to offer the paper to sale, once again,

to "any gentleman who has the talents and the means to conduct a newspaper with energy and spirit." Birchett found a apt candidate in Maine-born poet Edward Vernon Sparhawk, then a writer for the *Southern Literary Messenger* in Richmond and formerly editor of the *Martinsburg Gazette*; he held a sizeable reputation among Whigs generally as a result of his having been beaten in 1828 by Duff Green, publisher of Jackson's semi-official *United States Telegraph*, for unflattering comments he had published in the *National Intelligencer*. Still, Sparhawk had little effect on either the course or tone of his new journalistic outlet; he died suddenly and unexpectedly on January 6, 1838, just age forty, while he was reporting on the Virginia General Assembly in Richmond, a task he had undertaken since 1831; his death led to a quick sale of the *Intelligencer* by his estate and creditors.

That sale had been completed by February 2, 1838, when the fifty-two year-old newspaper passed into the hands of John W. Syme (1811-65), yet another young Petersburg lawyer. This time, though, the paper's new owner would conduct the *Intelligencer* for nearly twenty years, longer than Prentis or Yancey. Syme was the twenty-seven year-old eldest son of Andrew Syme (1755-1845), the town's revered Scottish-born Episcopal minister. He swiftly reenergized the Whig journal, which had lost its focus in the succession of changes of the preceding years: one eulogist later remarked that "the pungency and easiness of his pen greatly increased its reputation, and made it one of the most popular and influential journals in Virginia."

Syme took the first step in building that reputation in January 1840 by increasing its pace of publication from the twice-weekly frequency maintained since 1793 to a thrice-weekly one. That change was linked to the forthcoming elections in which the Whig party would attain national prominence by placing William Henry Harrison in the presidency; but it was also tied to an attempt in late 1839 by Postmaster General Amos Kendall, a stalwart Jacksonian journalist in the cabinet of incumbent Martin Van Buren, to intimidate Whig publishers. In August 1839, Kendall ordered all local postmasters to determine the persons receiving all newspapers passing through their offices, ostensibly as part of a calculation of the expense (i.e. burden) those papers put on the national postal system; that November, Petersburg's postmaster, Thomas Shore (382), appeared in the *Intelligencer* office demanding such an accounting from Syme; he refused Shore's request as "an unwarrantable and high handed measure" that infringed on his business practices. Consequently, Shore simply detained the copies of the *Intelligencer* sent out via his office until he could inventory them himself; the resulting delay in deliveries of the *Intelligencer* raised the specter of suppression among Virginia's Whigs. By increasing his pace of production, Syme made Shore's compliance with Kendall's order ever more difficult, and perceptions of Democratic suppression ever more pervasive. The Whig victory in the fall of 1840 brought an end to this controversy through the prospect of a purge of Jacksonian postmasters in the new Harrison administration.

That victory provided Syme with the opportunity to ridicule the state's principal Democratic editor, Thomas Ritchie (360), with some regularity in the ensuing years. The first such piece appeared within days of the election, one in which Syme reported that he had been "cruelly frightened" by an encounter with another Petersburg resident:

"While sitting in the Reading-room of the Exchange the other day, a gentleman with

a most melancholy countenance accosted us in these words: 'Syme, can you tell whether or not Mr. Ritchie's body has been found?' 'Good heavens!' we replied, in great alarm, 'what has happened to Mr. Ritchie?' 'I fear he has been drowned,' said the gentleman; 'for you know he pledged himself to sink or swim with Mr. Van Buren, and as that gentleman has *sunk* to rise no more, I greatly fear Mr. Ritchie has gone to the bottom with him.'"

Such anecdotes and similar caricatures in verse were Syme's hallmark, and so imitated by supporters and detractors alike in comments about the *Intelligencer* during his tenure.

Still, even as Syme became one of Virginia's most quoted Whig journalists, he did not always fit his opinions to match those of other Whig editors and party leaders. Most telling was his support of John Tyler, the "accidental" president, against efforts by Democrats and Whigs alike to impeach him for having vetoed popular legislation in 1842. He also opposed the reelection of Whig John Minor Botts to Congress in 1848, a darling of state leaders, because of Botts's disapproval of the Virginia-born Zachary Taylor as the Whig presidential candidate that year. Eventually, his independence would undermine the *Intelligencer's* influence, especially once Syme himself became a political figure, and not just an editorial writer.

In early 1841, the Whigs of Petersburg nominated Syme for the town's seat in the General Assembly that fall. While he lost that election, with the Democratic Party retaining control of the legislature, Syme amplified his criticisms in his paper of legislation that unsettled the course of Petersburg's commercial development. That commentary led to his election to the House of Delegates in 1845; it also led to his interrogation by a Democratic-dominated committee of the House during the ensuing session about articles published in his journal that were critical of recent laws concerning new steamboat and railroad lines in the state, ones which allowed their operators, without oversight, to bypass Petersburg if they deemed such service unprofitable; Syme refused to identify the authors of those pieces. His stalwart defense of Petersburg's business interests resulted in his reelection to the Assembly for the succeeding four sessions, without opposition.

Nevertheless, Syme began to diverge from the state leadership generally, and the *Richmond Whig* particularly, after the 1848 elections. The initial point of his departure was the Wilmot Proviso, the attempt by Northern congressmen to bar slavery from the territories acquired in the Mexican War. In order to maintain the unity of the party on the national level, Whig leaders everywhere deferred comment on the provision, a tactic that Syme saw as simple cowardice; he demanded that those individuals make plain their position on the subject, and so their view of slavery generally. That stridency instigated two efforts to publish new journals in Petersburg in 1849: the "independent" *Daily News* of James M.H. Brunet, former editor of the *Petersburg Republican* [1843], and the *Southside Democrat* of Roger A. Pryor, both associates of Thomas Ritchie. His response to the challenge was to convert his thrice-weekly *Intelligencer* to a daily paper on January 1, 1850. Yet, his stridency also divided local Whigs, allowing Democrats there to defeat his bid for reelection that April, when torrential rains limited voter turnout. At almost the same time, the Whig administration of Zachary Taylor replaced Petersburg's postmaster, Democrat William N. Friend, with Syme's editorial predecessor Richard Birchett; the change was immediately attributed to Syme's influence

with Taylor, so resulting in charges of hypocrisy on his part, being opposed to the partisan favors bestowed by Jackson and his successors, while supporting similar actions by the Whig president.

In the wake of these events, the *Richmond Whig* discerned a childish petulance in Syme's comments and began poking fun at the editor in "little Petersburg." Syme took the "joking" as evidence that state leaders were unresponsive to concerns that the national party did not support "Southern Rights, Southern Honor, and Southern Interests," and so began to regularly detail the faults of those leaders in "big Richmond." With the 1852 election, the editorial divide became avowedly political; Syme backed the election of Millard Fillmore, Taylor's successor – because of the president's willingness to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law that he thought key to preserving national unity, rather than follow the Northern practice of ignoring that law – while the state party leadership backed Petersburg-native Winfield Scott who, like Zachary Taylor before him, declined to comment on the vexing slavery issue. Such intraparty rifts throughout the South doomed Scott's campaign and effectively ended the Whig Party as a national organization that fall.

A Downward Spiral

Syme continued to assert that his political perspective was true to Whig principals, but now his *Intelligencer* became a vehicle for the particular Whig variant that found common cause with the Southern branch of the new American Party, the "Know-Nothings." While generally known for its anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic stance, that party was one that pressed for more influence in government and commerce for native-born citizens. That motive was Syme's as well; he believed that non-native Northerners were undermining the Southern way of life. Yet in opposing a party that asserted its defense of the principles of Jefferson and Jackson, while being dependent on non-native support, Syme was seen as something of a weakling. Needing a more robust image, he added a poetic motto to the *Intelligencer's* masthead in early 1855 evincing a decidedly aggressive tone, so reflecting his ever increasing frustration with the decline of Southern power in this era:

"Under this flag we fight!
Under this flag we will conquer!
'Groan, sinners, groan!'
The day of retribution is at hand!"

The modification of his editorial stance was tied to the revived candidacy of Millard Fillmore in 1856. While he was now the American Party candidate because of his opposition to the combining of religion and politics in the Democratic ranks, he was also the candidate chosen by the remnants of the Whig Party because of his unwillingness to allow the Union to be rent by the slavery question, despite his own antipathy for the "peculiar institution" of the South; these were sentiments reflected in Syme's commentaries that year, demonstrating the melding of partisan allegiances in Virginia. But the growing strength of the Democratic Party, behind yet another non-committal presidential candidate, James Buchanan, meant that Fillmore finished a distant third in the race, outpaced by John C. Frémont, a Catholic representing the anti-slavery Republican Party.

The growing influence of "the Democracy," as Syme often called his political foes, was felt in neighboring North Carolina as well. Shortly after Buchanan's victory, patrons of the *Raleigh Register*, that state's Whig/American journal-of-record, approached Syme about moving to the North Carolina capital to reinvigorate that time-worn daily. Recognizing that Petersburg was more Democratic than ever and now hosted two competing daily papers – conditions which made his journal an ever more problematic venture – Syme accepted the challenge; he bought the *Register* in December 1856 for just \$5100 and promptly put his *Intelligencer* up for sale. But disposing of his aging daily was not easily accomplished; after not receiving a suitable offer, Syme decided to auction the office and journal on February 19, 1857; but on the designated day, no one capable of meeting his reserve price was present, compelling him to offer the newspaper and its building separately, asking \$11,000 for the journal alone, based on its annual profit of \$4000 to \$6000. Still, it was not until April 2nd that Syme finally secured a buyer willing to pay an acceptable price on terms that he could agree to.

The new firm of McDonald & Page took possession of the *Intelligencer* with issue of April 16, 1857. James McDonald (1824-93) was then the editor of *The Virginian*, the long-lived Whig newspaper in Lynchburg; evidently, he was convinced by Frederick W. Page (1826-1913), a lawyer in Charlotte County, that moving to Petersburg and taking on the *Intelligencer* would enhance each man's prominence in Virginia. In introducing themselves to the paper's readers, the partners promised that the *Intelligencer* would

"...uphold with whatever ability they possess, conservative principles and measures of government, 'the rights of the States and the Union of the States,' the development of the industrial and social interests of Virginia, and the prosperity of the thriving city in which it has been here to four so generously sustained."

However, the waning influence of the Whig Party in the state brought editorial and financial challenges to all of Virginia's Whig journals. It appears that the *Intelligencer* was not now as profitable a venture as it had been before 1852; meanwhile, the editorial perspective of the *Richmond Whig* was in flux; those two circumstances combined to bring an end to the firm of McDonald & Page after just twenty months. In the fall of 1858, McDonald was offered a chance to take his well-known pen to the state capital as a part of the *Whig*; doing so meant finding another editor for the *Intelligencer*, a daunting task when the more visible *Whig* was itself finding it difficult to employ suitable editors; so the partners chose to offer the entire paper for sale once again in December 1858.

Effective with the issue of January 1, 1859, the *Intelligencer* passed into the hands of Albion K. Moore (d. 1864), formerly editor of the *Savannah Republican* and then a proprietor of the *Virginia & Tennessee News* in Bristol. McDonald & Page seem to have taken a considerable loss in the deal, selling the daily to Moore for \$8500, or about 75% of what Syme had asked for the journal just two years before. While Moore's introductory address that winter day was clearly intended to assuage readers' fears, it demonstrates that the *Intelligencer* suffered a significant decline in the period after Syme's departure:

"Intending to devote a considerable portion of my time to the management of the business of the office, it is my intention to secure such editorial assistance and all the departments of the paper, as will enable it to compare favorably to the best in

the State. As soon as arrangements can be made, correspondents will be engaged to help make up a pleasing variety of news and information from all parts of the country. The old type will be changed in a few days and other alterations made which are much needed in the mechanical department."

The last sentence of that address suggests that McDonald & Page had not been able to replace the office's supply of type in the intervening months, despite promises to do just that made in their introductory address. Moore was also limited in what he could do on that score, deciding to buy type previously used by the short-lived *The South* in Richmond, published by Roger A. Pryor, the former proprietor of the *Southside Democrat*, rather than buy new type in Baltimore. Once refit this way, he apparently thought the paper's content and reputation would carry his business forward successfully.

Moore's designs were thwarted, however. In July 1859, he sold a partial interest in the *Intelligencer* to James B. Bingham, then editor of the *Wheeling Times*, in an apparent effort to recapitalize his sagging finances. By June 1860, however Moore had defaulted on the notes that he had issued to buy the daily despite that effort, suggesting a sharp decrease in subscription and advertising revenues, fiscal mismanagement, or both. Thus, Moore was forced into a court-ordered auction sale of the paper and its assets on Saturday June 9th, losing legal title to the *Intelligencer* for the reduced price of \$3500, some \$5000 less than he had paid for the daily. As the high bidder was Frederick W. Page, his largest creditor and predecessor, it is not surprising that Moore refused to surrender those assets on the day of the sale. Rather, Moore used them to issue what he called a "new paper" on the following Monday, June 11th. Yet it was clear to all, particularly Page, that Moore's new "Daily Times" was just the old "Daily Intelligencer" with a slightly altered masthead, as it carried the same advertising notices seen in the *Intelligencer* of June 9th. Moore tried to placate Page by surrendering the type that he had inherited in January 1859, while keeping the type he acquired from Pryor in order to continue publishing his new journal. Incensed, Page secured a court order to force Moore to immediately surrender the *Intelligencer's* subscriber list, effectively impeding distribution of the *Daily Times* to "his" subscribers, and to then enjoin Moore from publishing another issue of that paper with the *Intelligencer's* tools; he then published notices in Richmond and Petersburg newspapers warning those who received the *Times*, and those who advertised in it, that Moore had no claim to any charges resulting from the use of his property. Moore plainly capitulated in short order; the only copies of the *Times* now known extant are those for June 11 & 12, 1860, the two days when the property dispute emerged and was then resolved by an order of the city's Hustings Court.

An Ignominious Passing

Most sources report that Moore's *Times* was a continuation of the *Intelligencer*, when in reality it was an entirely new journal that employed the *Intelligencer's* tools without legal authority. Rather, the *Intelligencer* was Page's property as of June 9th; once in possession of the subscriber list, he officially suspended publication while he reorganized the *Intelligencer* office and engaged a new editorial partner to conduct it. The venerable journal reappeared about Monday, July 2, 1860, edited by Robert Bolling, a descendant of one of the town's founding families. The new associates set out to support the Constitutional Union ticket in

that year's election, as did most of the old Whig journals that still existed in Virginia then. But the defeat of the Unionist Whigs and the Secessionist Democrats by the insurgent Republicans that November brought an end to the viability of such papers.

The *Intelligencer* became a casualty of Lincoln's victory and the ensuing secessionist clamor. Once the election's result was confirmed, Bolling withdrew from his agreement with Page; cast adrift by an editorial partner once again, Page began advertising for another in early December 1860; but instead, he found a buyer for the whole business. In mid-January 1861, Page sold the troubled *Intelligencer* to Richard Cabell Shell (1825-84), a thirty-five year-old lawyer and "politician" – according to the 1860 census – from Dinwiddie County; this time the sale price was just \$1500, some \$2000 less than Page had paid seven months before, and just 13% of the price first asked by Syme three years before. The rapid deterioration of the perceived value of the long-lived daily indicates a concomitant decline in Virginia of the Unionist sentiment that the paper had sustained during the 1860 election.

Shell took control of the *Intelligencer* effective Monday, February 11, 1861, and so proved to be the last proprietor of that venerable paper. He enlisted in the Virginia Militia in May 1861, following passage of the secession ordinance. As a result, the *Intelligencer* breathed its last at about that same time, having become an irrelevant artifact of a bygone era.

Sources: LCCN No. 84-024506, 85-025963, & 84-024505; Brigham II: 1134-1135 & 1131-1132; Cappon 1075; Hubbard on Richmond; Wyatt, *Checklist for Petersburg*; Seagrave, *Artisans & Mechanics*; Scott and Wyatt, *Petersburg's Story*; Wyatt, *Petersburg*; Barnes, *Artisan Workers in the Upper South*; Williamsburg People and York County Records Project files, Colonial Williamsburg Research Dept.; U.S. Newspaper Directory, Library of Congress; record for Case #23 in 1833, Circuit Superior Court of Law in Chancery at Petersburg (Library of Virginia); *Journal of the House of Delegates* (1845-46); notices in various newspapers in Alexandria (1786-1861), Norfolk (1786-1852), Baltimore (1813-1837), and New York (1824-1838), as well as the *Petersburg Intelligencer* (1786-1840), the [Petersburg] *Republican*, (1800-1814), the *Richmond Enquirer* (1804-1852), the [Washington] *National Intelligencer* (1814 -1860), the [Petersburg] *Daily Courier* (1814), the *Richmond Whig* (1824-1860), the [Richmond] *Daily Dispatch* (1852-1861), the [Wilmington, NC] *Daily Herald* (1859), and the *Raleigh [NC] Register* (1860).