

## PETERSBURG 03: Virginia Star

01: The Virginia Star, and Petersburg Weekly Advertiser (1795)

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The third newspaper published in Petersburg was also its first avowedly political one. But the Jeffersonian perspective it presented did not reflect the Federalist temperament of the town's merchant class, and so it expired in short order from a lack of advertising support.

*The Virginia Star and Petersburg Weekly Advertiser* was a project closely tied to one Philip Rootes (362). He was a descendent of Major Philip Rootes of Rosewall in King & Queen County, the family's Virginia progenitor, who was practicing real-estate and probate law in Petersburg in early 1795. In March of that year, he opened a job-printing office on "Old Street" there, employing unnamed hired tradesmen, and began soliciting subscriptions for a new weekly that would be

"...conducted with that prudence, circumspection, and independent impartiality consistent with the true principles of civil liberty, and freedom of inquiry, as they flatter themselves will secure it a permanent establishment."

The project came to fruition on April 16, 1795 with publication of the first number of his *Virginia Star*. But Rootes presently found the journal to be a problematic venture. He was in competition with the long-established and well-funded mercantile advertiser of William Prentis (340), the *Petersburg Intelligencer*; that journal had been the voice of the town's merchant class since its introduction in July 1786, and so was now the principal Federalist sheet in the Virginia Southside. Rootes, in marked contrast, exhibited a perspective befitting the Democratic-Republican views of Jefferson and Madison, in his pursuit of "freedom of inquiry." Hence, his weekly did not offer area merchants with an advertising alternative that they wanted to use. Lacking such vital advertising patronage, the *Virginia Star* met a quick demise; the last known issue is that for July 16th, exactly three months from the paper's commencement, suggesting that this July number was the last that Rootes issued.

A Republican paper would not take root successfully in this bastion of Federalism until 1799, in the midst of the Alien & Sedition Acts controversy, in anticipation of the 1800 elections. Thus, the *Virginia Star* can be considered a premature effort at such a journal.

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Sources: LCCN No. 85-025890; Brigham II: 1135; advertising notices in *Richmond Chronicle* (1795) and [Halifax] *North-Carolina Journal* (1795).