

RICHMOND 06: Richmond Advertiser

- 01: The Virginia Gazette and Richmond Daily Advertiser (1792)
 - 02: The Virginia Gazette and Richmond Advertiser (1792-1793)
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The first daily newspaper issued in Richmond was the sixth journal published in the capital. It proved to be but a short-lived experiment as a result of its editor's mismanagement and insufficient support from readers and advertisers, so expiring after just seventy issues.

By the fall of 1792, Richmond was host to three weekly papers: the semi-official *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser* of Augustine Davis (119); the long-lived *Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser* of Thomas Nicolson (315); and the *Virginia Gazette and Public Advertiser* of John Dixon Jr. (141), recently inherited from his legendary father. Of the three, the Davis *Gazette* was the most widely circulated and so the most profitable, reflecting his position as Virginia's public printer. Davis was named to that position in May 1791 following the death of John Dixon Sr. (140), who had once been his mentor and master in Revolutionary-era Williamsburg. But that appointment came with an obligation for Davis to employ much of the limited advertising space in his single-sheet *Gazette* for government notices, effectively boosting his competitors by diverting commercial notices to their pages. So in mid-1792, he decided to invest in a second paper to accommodate the growing demand for advertising in the city while still fulfilling his role as the voice of the state and federal governments via his original paper. That second journal proved to be the city's first daily paper.

That September, Davis convinced James Carey (080), brother of the Philadelphia publishing entrepreneur Mathew Carey, to come to Virginia's capital to conduct *The Virginia Gazette and Richmond Daily Advertiser* for their mutual benefit. Like his well-known brother, Carey was a political exile from Ireland; throughout the 1780s, their family was actively involved in anti-government publishing in Dublin, which led to Mathew's departure for America in the fall of 1784; James followed in early 1792 when he was faced with prosecution for sedition for his editorials printed in the *Rights of Irishmen or National Evening Star* in collaboration with younger brother William. After reaching America, James lived in Baltimore, apparently working as a journeyman there while he and Mathew arranged for him to conduct another newspaper here. The Careys soon connected with Davis and agreed to his plan to publish a daily paper in Richmond, the capital of the state that they perceived as most devoted to the revolutionary ideals of France and Ireland – a remarkable assessment given Davis's later role as an arch-Federalist publisher there.

The first number of the new *Virginia Gazette and Richmond Daily Advertiser* was issued on October 1, 1792, the first day of the 1792 session of the General Assembly. In choosing that date, it is clear that Carey and Davis understood that the success of their venture depended on the broadest circulation possible, and the months when the Assembly was in session saw the resident population at its greatest numbers. However, Carey did not manage the newspaper's business well. Publishing in the United States was far different from his prior experience. He found that the collegial atmosphere of Dublin printing shops did not exist on this side of the Atlantic; rather, this country's printing centers were widely-dispersed across

the landscape, requiring printers to maintain reliable long-distance relationships to support each press; indeed, the urban-centered model of Europe was just beginning to develop in Philadelphia, the place where it first appeared here. As a newcomer, Carey lacked such vital connections, and paid the price in terms of labor and supply costs that were not offset by his advertising revenues. Moreover, his daily's content appears to have had little in the way of original material; while the other Richmond papers were frequently quoted in journals throughout the country, only a few pieces of poetry that had appeared in the pages of the *Daily Advertiser* were reprinted elsewhere, and nothing of political or commercial import.

By December, Carey could readily see that the venture was failing and that drastic measures were required to save his paper; so on December 7th, he reduced the pace of its publication from daily to thrice-weekly. The change did not stem the bleeding, and with the Assembly about to adjourn, it became clear to Carey and Davis alike that the daily could not survive long after that adjournment. So the *Virginia Gazette and Richmond Daily Advertiser* issued its last number on January 2, 1793, five days after the Assembly rose, having issued just 70 numbers in the preceding twelve weeks.

Carey's analysis of his Virginia failure focused on a lack of advertising support; yet it seems that Davis had misread the market for a daily paper in Richmond as well in proposing the journal in the first place; it would be another twenty years before a second such attempt was made – the *Richmond Compiler* – and that paper served as the capital's only daily until the 1830s. Still, Carey's incompetence seems to have been the larger problem than Davis's over-reach; he proved to be a peripatetic figure, the result (his brother would say) of an inability to manage the details of his enterprises. Over the next eight years, Carey opened and quickly closed seven more newspapers: one in Charleston (March-September 1793), in Savannah (December 1793-February 1794), in Charleston again (January-March 1795), in Wilmington, N.C. (July-December 1795), and three in Philadelphia (February-September 1797; January-September 1798; December 1799-February 1800). His was a remarkable record of futility, one that only ended with his unexpected death in February 1801.

Davis was far more successful. Despite losing the public-printing commission in November 1798 – and so the substantial financial subsidy it provided to his *Gazette* – his original paper survived beyond his retirement in April 1821, sustained by Virginia's Federalist leaders and northern Federalist editors. Davis died at his country estate near Richmond in 1825.

Sources: LCCN No. 85-026727; Brigham II: 1149; Printer File, American Antiquarian Society; Mordecai, *By-Gone Days*; Pollard, *Dublin Book Trade*; Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital*; notices in Davis's *Virginia Gazette* and the *Philadelphia Daily Advertiser* (1792-93).