

RICHMOND 12: The Recorder

01: The Recorder, or Lady's and Gentleman's Miscellany (1801-1802)

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The first literary weekly issued in Richmond was the twelfth newspaper published there before the War of 1812. Yet the paper is best remembered for the anti-Republican tone it adopted in early 1802, when its founder gave control of its content to a controversial editor with an axe to grind. That approach ultimately divided the partners, leading to the journal's demise just two years after its first appearance.

During the 1790s, a partisan spectrum developed among the newspapers published in the state capital. The city's two largest journals ruled the center of that range with the center-left being held by the *Virginia Argus* of Republican Samuel Pleasants (331) and the center-right by the *Virginia Gazette* of Federalist Augustine Davis (119). The ends of that spectrum were held by a series of short-lived papers with more radical perspectives. By 1800, the far-left was occupied by the semi-official *Examiner* of Meriwether Jones (242), then the public printer; he was challenged on the far-right by the new *Virginia Federalist* of William A. Rind (359) and John Stewart (401), the recently unseated Clerk of the House of Delegates. Yet, when it became clear that Jefferson would be elected president that fall, Rind and Stewart removed their journal to the District of Columbia so that it could serve as a censor of the incoming administration, leaving the far-right position in Richmond vacant. That void would be filled in 1802 by an unlikely successor: a literary weekly turned partisan journal.

Beginnings

The Recorder, or Lady's and Gentleman's Miscellany was the creation of Henry Pace (319); Pace was an English émigré, a journeyman printer who arrived in America sometime after December 1797 (according to an 1802 report), purportedly fleeing a sedition charge during the prosecutions of those writers and editors who supported the English radical movement of the 1790s. He apparently made his way to Richmond in the winter of 1800-01 and forged an association with the Republican presses of Jones and Pleasants. In early 1801, his small press aided them in publishing the second volume of the controversial *The Prospect Before Us* by James Thomson Callender (075). Its author had also fled the prosecutions of radicals in Great Britain, only to be convicted of seditious libel in Virginia for publishing the first volume of that work, which issued in Richmond in January 1800; he had just been released from the city's jail after serving a six-month sentence when the second volume issued, and was then awaiting a remission of his fine in that case, as well as a grant of a public position in Jefferson's new administration – neither of which ever came. Pace took pity on the now destitute Callender and gave the writer shelter and support when no one else in Richmond was so willing. Their meeting proved a defining event in each man's life.

While conducting his job-press, Pace also became familiar with several of Virginia's leading literary figures, including St. George Tucker, the professor of law at the College of William &

Mary, for whom he published a *Letter to a Member of the General Assembly of Virginia on the subject of the Late Conspiracy of the Slaves; with a Proposal for their Colonization* following the suppression of Gabriel's Rebellion. Those contacts led the printer to believe that a non-partisan journal capable of presenting similarly cogent articles was a viable idea.

So in July 1801, Pace began publishing just such a "literary" weekly. Nevertheless, his new journal was in deep trouble financially by year's end, a result – as one contemporary later reported – of Pace being someone "who could compose types much better than he could paragraphs." Samuel Pleasants attempted to assist Pace by recruiting him for a joint venture in publishing a new volume of Virginia laws commissioned by Governor James Monroe; but delays in its publication resulting from the protracted illness of its indexer, left both men waiting for compensation for their efforts.

Recognizing Pace's dilemma, Callender offered to edit the weekly for his benefactor and host, provided that the printer made him a partner in the venture and allowed the serial's focus to become more political in nature. Pace agreed and the Scotsman took control of *The Recorder* on February 19, 1802 – some 20 weeks after the paper first issued. He had been a key provider of editorial content for Jones's *Examiner* in its early days in 1799, and had been a contributor to the Republican journals started and edited by James Lyon (274) in 1800 while he was imprisoned in Richmond's jail; after his release, he continued writing partisan pieces for Samuel Pleasants, but the Quaker publisher dispensed with his services about the time that the second volume of his *Prospect Before Us* issued, so leading to Pace's charity. It is worth noting that his new business association with Pace came less than two weeks after he had been denied appointment as Richmond's postmaster on Augustine Davis's removal from that office in favor of a Republican member of Virginia's Council of State. With this final humiliation, Callender was now determined to skewer Jefferson and his administration as thoroughly as he had Adams and the Federalists previously, and Pace's *Recorder* gave him a vehicle to effect that vengeance.

Predictably, his opening target was Gideon Granger (1767-1822), the Postmaster General in Jefferson's cabinet who had dismissed Davis. But over the next fifteen months, Callender's principal marks were the Republican leaders in Richmond, particularly public printer Jones, who now became the epitome of corruption in office for him. Indeed, so plentiful were his "letters" concerning Jones in the summer and fall of 1802, that he was able to offer them in pamphlet form for broader circulation in late 1802 when Federalist editors elsewhere failed to reprint his articles. That neglect was representative of an uncertainty among Federalists as to how to deal with this "turncoat," someone who was known to have a problem with truth and accuracy based on his earlier efforts against their leaders and patrons; it has been said that Alexander Hamilton warned William Coleman, his protégé and editor of *The New York Evening Post*, to desist from reprinting anything Callender published in *The Recorder*, or even commenting on such, out of fears of losing credibility.

Hence, the most frequent retellings of Callender's reportage are seen in Republican papers, retellings that prefaced their commentaries on Callender. After finishing with Granger, he turned to Virginia's U.S. Senator William Branch Giles (1762-1830) and Jefferson's Secretary of Treasury, Albert Gallatin (1761-1849), for investigating spending by Adams's Secretary of

the Navy, Benjamin Stoddert (1744-1813), and Secretary of State, Timothy Pickering (1745-1829), in their approvals of ship yards to build vessels for the new-born U.S. Navy. The tart-tongued William Duane of the *Aurora & General Advertiser* in Philadelphia noted that:

"Callender has undertaken the defence of Stoddert, as well as of Pickering. It is a favorite maxim of Callender, that he who pays him best holds the best principles. He complains that the Republicans would not pay him; which of course accounts for the innocence of Messrs. Pickering and Stoddert."

And when he then reported that Giles's supporters in Virginia had threatened his life over that reporting, William Pechin of the *Democratic Republican* in Baltimore observed that:

"Callender told his readers some time since that the Gilesites (meaning the friends of Mr. Giles of Virginia) had threatened to murder one of the editors of the Richmond "Recorder;"—We presume that it could not be Callender that was to be the victim; as he is proof against mortal attacks—having to boast of a spiritual preservative, by means of rye whiskey!"

Pechin's observation is manifest evidence of a widespread knowledge of Callender's binge drinking. Pace himself was one who eventually laid the blame for his editor's troubles on his predilection for alcoholic beverages. Similarly, Duane's assessment was a commonly held understanding of Callender's evident pecuniary motivations. These perceived defects in his character gave credence to rumors about Callender's other shortcomings, including a likely apocryphal threat that he was reported to have made directly to Jefferson, that "I have MADE you president and I'll UNMAKE you."

Belief in that purported threat was sustained by Callender's assault on Jefferson's character in the fall of 1802. His first thrust was the most memorable; beginning on September 1st, he published six consecutive weekly reports of an illicit sexual liaison, including a bastard child, between Jefferson and Sally Hemings, one of his enslaved servants. This now well-known narrative is an example of the increasing rancor that began to pervade Callender's writings; where previously his animosity had been discharged against persons he did not personally know, now it was aimed at those he did, especially those who he thought had not lived up to his expectations of them, as Jefferson now had. The second thrust followed in October when he reported that Jefferson had wantonly pursued the wife of a married friend for decades. With this story, Callender apparently hoped to bring the Virginian down as low as he had Hamilton five years earlier when he revealed Hamilton's affair with Maria Reynolds; that item undermined the Federalist's national standing when he had to admit to the affair in order to refute charges he had paid hush money to the husband, when he had actually been blackmailed by James Reynolds. Here, however, Callender dredged up a tale from the president's early life that had been resolved amicably as a misunderstanding among friends long before the Revolutionary War; so in pursuing this tale, he besmirched the reputation of a well-respected matron of the Virginia elite without any effect on his intended target.

It appears that Callender was increasingly infuriated by the absence of any response to his effusions in *The Recorder* from Jefferson or his closest associates. In December 1802, he openly bragged that his reports had rent Jefferson's immediate family, when no such split had occurred, so leading many Republican editors to redouble their defense of the sitting

president. But Jefferson took little notice, if any, of Callender's attacks; he explained his approach later in his life, with the comment that:

"I should have fancied myself half guilty had I condescended to put pen to paper in refutation of their falsehoods, or draw to them respect by any notice from myself."

Throughout all this, Pace remained in the background. Yet the printer soon discovered that his editor's attacks on people who were close at hand had serious consequences, and not just for the reputation of his newspaper.

Endings

Discontent with Callender in Richmond seethed just under the surface for the duration of his association with Pace. But in late December 1802, that enmity broke out into the open. As he walked down a city street, Callender was assaulted by George Hay, the man who had served as his defense attorney in the 1800 sedition trial, over the writer's frequent and repeated *ad hominin* attacks on Hay's friends and associates. The affair brought charges from both sides into the city's Hustings Court; after a brief hearing, the magistrates found that Hay was justified in assaulting Callender for his ongoing scandalous behavior, and they ordered Callender and Pace to post a bond guaranteeing their future good behavior; Pace posted the bond on the spot, but Callender did not, and spent the ensuing three days back in a cell in the Richmond jail. Then in early March 1803, after Callender published a story in the *Recorder* about the drunken and belligerent behavior of a few college students in town (all sons of Republican leaders), an even larger group of students ransacked the Pace & Callender office; thereafter both men kept pistols close by.

Still, all was not well between the partners. It appears Callender's drunkenness kept him away from the *Recorder's* office for weeks on end, and that during April and May 1803, he contributed nothing to the newspaper as a result of one lengthy bender – leading at least one biographer to suggest that he was mellowing that spring, as the articles that Pace wrote during this period, which were assumed to be Callender's, were milder than the *Recorder's* usual content. Near the end of May 1803, as Callender emerged from his retreat, he asked Pace to settle their accounts, evidently thinking that he was not receiving his due, as *The Recorder* had become a profitable venture. Pace agreed to the request, apparently content that his tumultuous relationship with his editor seemed to be nearing a quiet end. However, before Pace could reconcile those accounts – and just two weeks into the month both had agreed was needed to produce an accounting – Callender took to the pages of Augustine Davis's *Virginia Gazette* to accuse Pace of withholding monies owed him, and announce that he was terminating the partnership as a result.

Incensed, Pace published a long defense of his business practices. The piece documented the course of their partnership; how Pace took in Callender despite warnings against making such a charitable offer; how Pace made an indigent Callender a partner in his paper without his having to buy into the business, in which Pace had invested \$2500 of borrowed funds before Callender joined him; how he had kept subscription monies for himself, rather than putting them into the firm's coffers; how Callender continued to live under his roof without paying either rent or board; how his material well-being was the result of donations from

persons he did not know, as favors to Pace; and how Callender absented himself from the office for weeks while drinking, only to return highly repentant and begging for forgiveness. But most important for Pace in this now public dispute was that Callender's recent truancy and dereliction had voided their partnership agreement, as was clearly stated in that pact. All this Callender had done, and then circulated fabricated stories about Pace's conduct in order to ruin him and take control of his property – meaning his press office. Pace invited any interested party to visit the *Recorder's* office to view the firm's books and the contract between the two men as testimony to the veracity of his claims; that evidence would now become part of a law suit against Callender, in which Pace sought £2000 in damages. And throughout that account, Pace offered Callender a dose of his own rhetorical medicine:

"Does Callender think to impose his falsehoods upon me? Does he think I shall crouch or stand aghast at his pen? Does he think that the man, who had the hardihood to stem the torrent of every opposition, in establishing the Recorder, is to be so frightened by a beast, liar, and drunkard? No. No. His infamy shall ride on the fluid of eternal space. It shall petrify with horror every human heart. The very beasts shall feel its force, and h–o–w–l at the name of Callender!"

Unsurprisingly, Pace resumed sole ownership of the *Recorder* with the issue of Saturday June 18, 1803, three days after the unexpected assault from Callender, so leaving the late editor to fend for himself. Pace reported later that he immediately began another drinking binge; but this time it ended badly for Callender. On July 17th, almost exactly a month later, the Scotsman drowned in the James River, apparently while drunk. A coroner's jury found his death accidental, but Jones suggested in his *Examiner* that his death was a suicide, given the significant legal problems Callender now faced from the only person willing to support and to employ him after his release from prison.

Though Pace continued publishing his *Recorder* alone, he found that Callender's departure did not secure his future. Just days after Callender's death, he was assaulted by Jones and several friends at Richmond's summer resort on Bacon's Branch of Shockoe Creek; bloodied but unbowed, he promptly began an editorial campaign against the overly aggressive mein of the city's "democratical society." Still, his editor's absence largely eliminated the demand for his paper; Pace had never printed more than 700 copies of any issue, and he had fewer than 400 regular subscribers for it, conditions that made the journal a marginal production without the partisan subsidies that Callender attracted to the venture. Indeed, *The Recorder* is remarkable for the lack of advertising in its pages, rarely consuming more than two of its sixteen columns, if that. Thus the weeks after Callender's departure were ones where Pace attempted to follow the bellicose approach his editor had always employed, while dunning delinquent subscribers, wearily reporting that,

"If I have made anything in this country by printing, it was made by the profits of the Revised Code, printed by Mr. Pleasants and myself, which is taken to support this paper."

Hence, Pace was able to continue publishing his *Recorder* for just another two months. He was forced to close the two-year-old paper permanently in late August 1803.

Pace left Richmond that fall in search of employment elsewhere. He seems to have found

work as a journeyman in Baltimore in 1804, but did not stay there long. By June 1805, Pace had moved on to Cayuga County in upstate New York, establishing that county's journal of record at Aurora, then the county seat, with his brother James. That newspaper proved to be successful initially, but their Federalist sympathies killed the paper at the end of the War of 1812. It was the last journal Pace printed or published. Eventually he landed in Cincinnati, where he became a well-to-do land-speculator; he died there in October 1861 at the ripe old age of ninety-six.

Sources: LCCN nos. 84-024678 & 84-024679; Brigham II: 1145; Hubbard on Richmond; Rawson, "Guardians," chaps. 5 & 7; Durey, *Hammer of Truth*; Malone, *Jefferson the President*; Mordecai, *By-Gone Days*; notices in various Richmond papers (*Recorder*, *Examiner*, *Virginia Gazette*, and *Virginia Argus*) from 1799 to 1803.