

RICHMOND 16: Spirit of 'Seventy-Six

01: The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six (1808-1809)

xx: The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six (1809-1811) in Washington, D.C.

yy: The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six (1811-1814) in Georgetown, D.C.

The sixteenth newspaper issued in Richmond before 1820 was highly-partisan broadsheet that began its life as a campaign journal. With Republicans split between the candidacies of Madison and Monroe in the 1808 presidential election, this paper was issued by Monroe's supporters in an attempt to prevent Madison's election. When that effort failed, it became an anti-Madison journal that eventually followed the new President to Washington.

Background

The system of legislative caucuses that emerged in the country's major political parties was a central issue in the 1808 election to succeed Thomas Jefferson as President. Federalists and Republicans alike adopted the process at both the state and federal levels after the 1800 election as a way to resolve intraparty differences, and so deliver a cohesive effort for electing the party's designated nominee. Yet there is no constitutional provision for such a nominating process, as that compact did not anticipate the partisan divides that emerged in the 1790s. And so there were complaints in both parties about elected legislators assuming powers and influence that lacked a legitimate foundation.

Of the three potential Republican nominees in 1808, two were Virginians: James Madison, Jefferson's Secretary of State, and James Monroe, the retiring ambassador to Great Britain. As the year opened, it became clear that the Congressional caucus would choose Madison as the "official" Democratic-Republican candidate; as a result, his supporters in the General Assembly organized a "caucus" in Richmond that excluded Monroe's supporters in order to coordinate a campaign in the state. By that time, Virginia's "Old Republicans," then known as the *Tertium Quids* (a third way), had launched an anti-caucus paper in Richmond, which now became the primary voice for Monroe's partisans; *The Virginian* was edited by Gerard Banks (019) and was supported by a number of influential *Quids*, including John Randolph of Roanoke and John Taylor of Caroline. But once Monroe made it known that April that he did not wish to compete with Madison for the presidency, Banks turned his paper into a vehicle supporting Jefferson, particularly his embargo on trade with France and Great Britain. The change evidently infuriated Randolph and Taylor alike, and they initiated a second effort to publish a vehicle that embraced their anti-caucus views, one that would also reinvigorate the campaign for Monroe's election.

Beginnings

In its original form, the new *Spirit of Seventy-Six* was explicitly associated with the "Monroe Corresponding Committee," which was comprised of George Hay (1765-1830), U.S. District Attorney for Richmond and Monroe's new son-in-law; John Clarke (1766-1844), then the superintendent of the state's arms manufactory; William Robertson (1750-1829), long a

member of the Council of State; John Brockenbrough, Jr. (1775-1852), the new president of the Bank of Virginia; and Edward Carter Stanard (399), an attorney from Albemarle County who would serve as the new paper's editor. This committee evinces the divisions within the party in the state, as Hay and Brockenbrough had previously been members of the so-called "Richmond Junto," the Republican Central Committee in Richmond, a group that included the capital's other Republican journalists as well: Thomas Ritchie (360) of the *Enquirer* and Samuel Pleasants (331) of the *Virginia Argus*. (Brockenbrough was also a marriage relation to Ritchie, which opened a familial divide as well.) Thus, the Monroe group set up their new journal in opposition to the principal voices of the Republican party in Virginia, as well as to the state's Federalist newspapers.

Still, Stanard was uniquely qualified to undertake the project for the committee as a whole, as he had a trained printer close at hand in the person of John M. Carter (084), his brother-in-law (and probably his brother, James B. Carter, as well). With their technical assistance, and with contributions from his committee colleagues, Stanard issued the first number of the *Spirit of Seventy-Six* on September 13th, just a month after the paper's prospectus was first circulated. Once Stanard began circulating that prospectus, Banks understood that the days of his paper were numbered; in late August, he published a bitter commentary in *The Virginian* that expressed his anger at the turn of events; he noted that rather than allowing him to follow their agreed course, his backers – apparently meaning Randolph and Taylor, among others – "let me understand that they wanted a machine." So it seemed to everyone that such was just what the *Quids* had acquired with Stanard's paper.

In his inaugural issue, Stanard made it clear that he thought that most, if not all American newspaper editors, had abrogated their duty as conveyors of public information in order to advance their own opinions in the political realm; such an approach did not address the underlying problem of legislative bodies usurping the sovereignty of the people, but rather turned political discourse into a mere popularity contest.

"The great error into which the Editors of papers in the United States have fallen is this: They seem to consider themselves as advocates, whose business it is, to bring forward facts and arguments on one side only of the question. They act before the grand inquest of the nation, like counsel before a jury, who press that evidence and those arguments which tend to support the cause in which they are engaged, and like them, they leave to their antagonist the task of opposition and reply.... No matter how obscure the individual, no matter how trivial the controversy, this course is invariably pursued. How much more, how infinitely more important is it, that the people should have correct information; that they should hear both sides, on questions involving their best rights and their most valuable interests?"

Stanard adopted the motto on his masthead that: "A frequent recurrence to fundamental principles is essential to the liberties of a Republic," suggesting that such principles as had been articulated during the Revolution – "the spirit of 'seventy-six" – were no longer at the center of American public life, and therein lay the root of the country's problems.

Two weeks later, the entire Monroe Corresponding Committee published a lengthy defense of their purposes in the new paper. First, they reiterated the standing criticism of the caucus

system – its lack of legitimacy:

"We thought last winter that the recommendation of the Caucus at Washington, did not afford an unequivocal proof of the real sentiments of the nation. Time has evinced the accuracy of this opinion.... We also thought that as the members of Congress were constitutionally excluded from the right of electoral suffrage, they were the last persons, who ought to prescribe or recommend to the people the way in which their tydings should be bestowed.... This subject is entitled to the most serious consideration of the people. Their acquiescence in the present nomination, would contribute to the establishment of a precedent subversive of the only right except that of voting for their immediate representatives, which the Constitution authorizes them to exercise in person. Their own legitimate power will be transferred to others, and what is more to be deplored, transferred to the identical persons, who a wise policy has excluded from an electoral appointment."

Then after extolling Monroe's virtues, they set him in contrast to Madison and the policies that he had carried out as Jefferson's secretary of state:

"A principal objection to the election of Mr. Madison, and one which we deem unanswerable, is derived for the present state of our national affairs. Our foreign commerce is totally suspended, our ships are rotting, our seamen dispersed and gone, and our produce shut up in our ware-houses, our public revenue is cut off, and the deficiency resulting from that cause, must be supplied by recourse to the expenses system of internal taxation.... The evils exist; we feel that they are great and our best interests require that they should be speedily removed. We ask you, whether it is probable that they will be removed under the administration of Mr. Madison... We may be mistaken, and we shall rejoice if time shall convince our error; but if Mr. Madison is elected, we see at present, no alternative for the United States but WAR, or an EMBARGO of an indefinite duration. If on the other hand, Mr. Monroe should be elected, we think ... that he will at least stand a better chance to extricate us from the critical dilemma in which we are involved."

Their rationale for favoring Monroe was his service as an ambassador which "opened him to sources of information, with respect to the real views, motives and sentiments of the French and British cabinets," knowledge which Madison lacked, and so led him into error.

Yet many Republicans found the committee's reasoning flawed, especially when personal animosities taken into consideration. Legend has it that much of Randolph's animus against Jefferson and Madison resulted from their choosing Monroe over him as ambassador to Great Britain in 1803; thus his support of Monroe in 1808 was retribution for Madison's failings, making the *Spirit of 'Seventy-Six* an instrument of his vengeance. Such was certainly the understanding of John B. Colvin (d. 1826), the editor of the *Washington Monitor*, who stated, as part of a report on Stanard's paper and the committee's statement, that:

"The appearance of such a production at this particular time would be totally inexplicable to me, were I not in possession of a few facts, communicated by a friend in Virginia, and which have not appeared in the newspapers. I will do Messrs. Hay and Stanard and their coadjutors the justice to declare, notwithstanding that I have

all due reverence for their violent declarations of *purity*, that they have not acted of their own mere motion in this business. They are the instruments of a personage who has made some noise in the political world, generally recognized under the name and title of the Honorable John Randolph. If Col. Monroe himself is not the dupe of that man, I am much mistaken."

Stanard was clearly annoyed by such reports, which painted his journal in an unflattering light. In response the Colvin and others, he noted on October 11th that:

"This gazette has had the honor to be noticed, in conversation and in print.—It has been called by some a federal paper, a minority paper, a quid paper; by others it has been called by its real tendency, and independent republican gazette. The Editor requests that its merits may not be taken upon trust.—Let every man do the Editor the justice to believe, that he acts upon the principles of out in his Prospectus; until an instance of a departure from them can be shown—let him be read before he is condemned."

Still, as the campaign progressed, the Monroe faction came under suspicion of forging an alliance with Federalists to deny Madison the presidency by voting for Monroe, rather than for their candidate, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney of South Carolina. The wide circulation of that rumor compelled the Monroe committee to address the public once again, just two weeks before the election:

"We have been charged also with forming a coalition with the Federalists. We solemnly and upon our honor declare the accusation to be false those who make it cannot seriously believe it.... The Federalists perhaps mean to vote for him. They have a right to do so as they please. ... Are we to abandon Mr. Monroe because of Federalists, knowing that they cannot have a president of their own party, prefer him? Would not such an abandonment be equally cruel and absurd; and if we really and conscientiously believe that Mr. Monroe ought to be president, is our regard for the welfare of our country, to give way to the illiberal jealousy which tells us not to vote for the man of our choice, because he has the suffrages of our political opponents?"

However, all the committee's protestations and all of Stanard's commentaries could not save the candidacy of a man who did not assent to these activities on his behalf. Madison outpolled Monroe 5-to-1 with Virginians casting 3505 of the 4848 votes he drew nationally; elsewhere, Madison easily defeated Pinckney, garnering 122 votes (in 12 states) when the electoral college met early in February 1809, as opposed to the 47 (in 7 states) allotted to Pinckney. Still, Monroe did receive electoral votes for Vice President from New York, where six electors had voted for the state's former governor, George Clinton, for president; those voters then split their vice-presidential ballots between Madison and Monroe.

Opposition Journal

The electoral defeat did not bring an end to the *Spirit of 'Seventy-Six*; indeed, it retained sufficient support to continue for another year, aided as it was by the termination of *The Virginian* on election day itself. In January 1809, Stanard turned his attention to Thomas

Ritchie and his "authoritative" *Richmond Enquirer*. It seems that Ritchie had published an inaccurate report, if not an outright fabrication, that *Quid* John Taylor had decided in late September 1808 – about two weeks after the *Spirit of 'Seventy-Six* appeared – to switch his vote from Monroe to Madison. After reading that report, Taylor wrote a scathing letter to Ritchie wherein he denied the charge, evidently expecting that Ritchie would publish his letter, before cancelling his subscription to the *Enquirer*. That letter did not appear in print until Stanard published it the following January, well after the election. Ritchie immediately countered the attack by publishing a refutation, one that Stanard answered by way of a second more-heated letter from Taylor.

"By declaring that you would have printed my first letter, if I had desired it, you seem to have an idea of justice, and therefore I require of you to publish this answer to your attack of the 14th, or to withdraw read and let me alone; the latter, I would greatly prefer, for so far from being induced like yourself by a foolish fondness for scribbling to attack others, it is even irksome to defend myself. I submit to it, to pay a public duty, for I do not see why calumniators, any more than any other tyrant, should require innocence to stand mute as a pretext for condemnation, nor any public spirit in encouraging public lying, by submission."

Stanard also began publishing articles that cast doubt on the character of the recently retired Jefferson. Again, John B. Colvin ascribed the criticisms to a disgruntled Randolph:

"The Mongrels who assail Mr. Jefferson's character are but few; they consist for the most part, of Mr. Cheetham [James of the *Republican Watch-Tower* in New York], Mr. Elliott [William of *The Observer* in New York], and a Mr. Stanard, the reputed editor of a typographical bantling reared at *Richmond*, under the auspices of the honorable *John Randolph*, *Mr. George Hay*, and two or three other gentlemen...."

But Stanard continued to argue that Jefferson's administration had taken an active hand in promoting Madison's candidacy by pressuring and intimidating journalists, so infringing the freedom of the press. In May 1809, he reprinted an article from Cheetham's *Watch-Tower* wherein the New Yorker suggested that William Duane, editor of the *Philadelphia Aurora*, had been bought off with a "colonelcy." In an addenda, he said that:

"This we believe to be a fact, but not one of general notoriety. Duane was pledged to support the minority [Monroe], but necessity perhaps compelled him to keep with the administration.—Had Duane taken the side of the minority, or rather had he not abandoned them (for certainly he thought with them) there would probably have been attempts (which he feared the success of) to put down the *Aurora*."

His unrelenting advocacy of the principles of popular sovereignty and limited government was consistent with the doctrines fostered by Randolph. Thus, Stanard reported frequently on the campaign to defeat Randolph for reelection to Congress in the summer of 1809; in September, he took particular satisfaction with the fact that those efforts failed:

"The people of the district represented by John Randolph have been repeatedly addressed by his political opponents. Their object was to deprecate his character and to prevent his reelection. This object however was not attained. He was approv-

ed by a large majority of freeholders in the four counties of the district, notwithstanding the extraordinary opposition that was raised against him both internally and externally, aided as it was alike by executive influence and the ties of consanguinity....

It is not our intention to make a formal address to the people of that district; yet we conceive there can be no impropriety in reminding them, that to John Randolph we are indebted hitherto for an exemption from the mischief and disgrace of a Yazoo compromise, and that he was the person by whom an inquiry into the expenditures of the commander-in-chief, and the accounts of the navy department has been instituted."

This commentary displays the *Quids* concern over the growing expense of government, both federal and state, in the face of growing tensions related to the ongoing war between Great Britain and France, which effected American commerce. Yet as Stanard and Randolph believed that these concerns were not being addressed adequately in either Richmond or Washington, it became evident that a change in their approach to the *Spirit of 'Seventy-Six* was needed. With the Madisonian faction now controlling the state government, the editor and his patron concluded that the paper had lost any influence in the state that it may have had; but the journal could still serve as a fitting vehicle for the *Quid* faction in Congress, especially as an outlet for Randolph's speeches and essays. Consequently, Stanard decided to relocate his newspaper to Washington before the next session of Congress met at the end of November 1809 – so issuing his last Richmond number on November 4th.

The move did not go smoothly, however. The cartage firm that he hired failed to deliver his press and tools to his new Washington office before Congress convened on November 27th; the delay meant that he was not able to publish his first number there until December 5th. In the meantime, Stanard also lost the services of his enslaved pressman, Solomon (522), who used the disruption as an opportunity to flee his master's control, never to return. Yet he did retain the services of the Carter brothers, who were his marriage relations, so making the *Spirit of 'Seventy-Six* a familial venture as much as it was a political one.

Once settled in his new locale, Stanard returned to the standing *Quid* concern with rampant government spending, and the revenue systems established to sustain such. Editor James Elliott of Philadelphia's *Freeman's Journal* found one of Stanard's commentaries in January 1810 particularly amusing:

"Mr. Stanard, editor of *The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six*, now published in Washington, attacks all the administrations, from Washington down to Madison. He makes a statement, in the form of an account current, of the losses which the people have suffered by the Funding System, Banking System, Embargo, Non-Intercourse, &c. which appear, when touted up, at the enormous sum of 264 millions of Dollars. He then gives credit, in several successive columns, for all that had been gained, national character, respect to broad, union at home, &c. but carries out every column with ten or a dozen *cyphers*, of course footed in the same manner, without a solitary *sum*, and, at last, which is "the unkind is cut of all," sarcastically remarks, that the credit side is stated *much too high!*"

Meanwhile, Randolph employed the now close-at-hand pages of the *Spirit of 'Seventy-Six* to publicize his critiques of Madison's foreign policy, especially his implementation of the Non-Intercourse Act that had supplanted Jefferson's Embargo Act early in 1809. Believing that war with Great Britain was inevitable if the president did not alter course, he drafted three letters for Stanard under the *nom de plume* of "Mucius" – a homage to the Roman hero whose courage in facing certain death was a quality aspired to by Randolph's classically-educated generation. Those letters challenged the idea that the policies pursued by either Adams or Jefferson had any legitimacy in an independent American, as one returned from Europe "a rank Englishman," and the other "a finished Frenchman." But more problematic, he felt, was such a susceptibility to foreign influence had subverted the freedom of the American press, as "we find that Porcupine [William Cobbett] flourished under the reign of the one, and [William] Duane under that of the other." That assessment conformed with the view of American journalism that Stanard had expressed in his paper's prospectus some two years before, and which led to his promise of presenting material from all perspectives "however different the opinions or principles of the writer may be from his own."

However, both Stanard and Randolph soon found that, though the *Spirit of 'Seventy-Six* now reached a national audience, the paper did not exercise as much influence over events in the Capitol as they had hoped. Consequently, the journal struggled, despite protestations to the contrary, and despite the growth of the public's interest in foreign affairs resulting from British and French attempts that year to circumvent the Non-Intercourse Act.

Transitions

Randolph was poised to again lead a journalistic effort to mute the growing chorus of the "war hawks," as he derisively called them, in the ensuing session of Congress when disaster struck the *Spirit of 'Seventy-Six*. On December 8, 1810, five days into that session, Stanard died unexpectedly, leaving "a young and disconsolate widow and two infant children." John M. Carter now found himself the proprietor of this opposition journal, though the masthead retained his brother-in-law's name until the following February.

Discontinuing the newspaper while the Congress was still meeting was evidently out of the question; but whether Carter was up to the task of editing the journal was an unknown. So when he reported Stanard's death, Carter tried to calm any fears about the paper losing its particular editorial focus:

"If public sentiment, (to say nothing of its immediate patrons,) were not too much interested in the support of the principles of an independent paper at the seat of the general government, the materials of the establishment are now too complete, and the daily accession of numbers to the subscription list too considerable to suffer it to expire with its late editor and proprietor. We therefore announce to its friends and subscribers that a capable successor will be sought, and that the Spirit of '76, lives, and will continue to live, while their countenance and support shall be continued towards it, in spite of its enemies — Court Sycophants, Court Flatterers and Office Hunters, all."

While the new proprietor searched for a new editor, the paper's *Quid* supporters did their

part by providing content for the *Spirit of 'Seventy-Six*. Most notable among them was John Taylor of Caroline, who had been relatively silent since the paper's move to Washington. On December 25th, he used Carter's pages to present the first of his renowned "Arator" essays. It was the beginning of a publishing relationship between the two men that continued until Taylor's death in 1824; over the ensuing fifteen months, Carter published fifty of Taylor's then-anonymous articles in the *Spirit*, before issuing a collected edition of those items early in 1813; then in 1814 and 1817, he issued a "revised and enlarged" collection of sixty-one essays, before finally publishing three editions of the now-standard sixty-four essay version in 1818; Carter retained the copyright to these collections, manifestly with Taylor's blessing, and so brought supplementary revenue into what now became a Carter family business.

On February 16, 1811, Carter revealed a "change of situation" for the *Spirit of 'Seventy-Six*:

"At the request of a number of the inhabitants of Georgetown, the present editors of the *Spirit of '76* have determined to establish their office in the town and conduct the paper as usual, for the benefit and support of the widow and orphan children of the late editor and proprietor. They solicit advertising custom in any other business in the printing line, which they will undertake to execute with facility and accuracy."

The reality of this new arrangement was that the journal became a joint venture among the three Carter siblings – John, James, and Rebecca, Stanard's widow – even as the masthead carried the name of John M. Carter alone. Still, the change in locale and proprietors did not alter the editorial course of the paper; as before, the *Spirit* encouraged negotiation over affronts to American commercial and political rights, while contesting the rising clamor for a war with Great Britain. Thus, the journal's continued existence came into doubt once war was declared in June 1812, as Republican editors rallied around the president and portrayed any published anti-war sentiment as sedition and treason.

By the spring of 1813, the Carter siblings were faced with the decision to either close the *Spirit* for good as a result of its declining fortunes or change course. As the widow Stanard and her children were still in need of sustenance, they chose to yield editorial control of the paper to someone who had not been a part of the pre-war journalistic debate, so infusing the family venture with new capital. Their choice was Ebenezer Harlow Cummins (1786-1834), a lawyer from the Carolinas who had recently mustered out of the U.S. Marine Corps; an accomplished writer with honorary degrees in literature from the University of Georgia and Princeton, some sources suggest that he was clerk in the State Department at the time he joined the *Spirit of 'Seventy-Six*, which may have been the case as he had been lobbying Madison for a position in the federal government since 1808. With the issue of May 18, 1813, Cummins acquired a one-third interest in the newspaper, which gave him authority "alone in editing the paper, and to be uncontroled in his discretion as to the style and matter," while the family provided a press and its operators.

That editorial independence, however, created discord between the Carters and their editor in fairly short order. As only scattered issues survive from the ensuing six months, the exact nature of their dispute is unclear, but it apparently concerned Cummins's departure from the "strict constructionist" perspective of the *Quids*, which had been the foundation of the paper since its inception. So the family reasserted their control over the *Spirit* with the issue

of November 16th, announcing that publication would be suspended until a reconciliation of all of its accounts was completed, including those with Cummins and Stanard's estate, because of its precarious financial condition.

Cummins promptly filed suit against the Carters for breaching their contractual agreement; he made known that decision the following day in the *Federal Republican*, the notorious Baltimore Federalist journal driven out of that city in July 1812 by Jeffersonian mobs, and which was now also issuing from the Carter family press in Georgetown:

"I will not ask any sympathy of the community. Nor will I trouble it with a description of the conduct of the proprietors—it has been such as to ensure to me all the redress I wish or desire, in applying to the court of justice. As to the insinuations contained in their address of yesterday, touching the character and profits of the paper for the last six months, the proprietors attempt a deception on the public mind. ... I need state nothing more to prove my fidelity and industry in the discharge of my duty, than to remind the public, that the paper was literally dead; yet notwithstanding this inauspicious fact, (as their friend who attempted on last Monday morning to negotiated dissolution of the partnership will testify,) the paper has afforded a profit, that agreeable *to their own admission*, will entitle me to a sum of two hundred dollars. I would then ask what better result at the end of six months could we have expected from our [further] prospects?"

The dispute was evidently resolved in early 1814, as the *Spirit of 'Seventy-Six* reappeared on February 22nd, after Cummins started a new paper in Washington, *The Senator*, on January 1st. Yet now James B. Carter was the *Spirit's* sole proprietor, his siblings having withdrawn from the business as a result of the settlement. He seems to have determined to divorce the *Spirit* from its immediate past by adopting a new numbering scheme, so conveying the appearance, at least, of a reborn journal.

However, the printer also appears to have created an occupational conflict in restarting the *Spirit*. The Carter press had been printing the refugee *Federal Republican* since July 1812 on alternate days from the *Spirit*; in January 1814, that paper's proprietors – Alexander Contee Hanson and Jacob Wagner – increased the frequency of its publication to daily, putting new demands on the Carter press, just as the siblings planned for the return of their paper. The conflicting priorities evidently became insurmountable within days of the revival; Carter issued just four numbers of the resurrected *Spirit*, ceasing production with the number for March 4, 1814, so bringing an end to the principal *Quid* voice in the country.

At the end of 1815, shortly before the *Federal Republican* returned to Baltimore, John M. Carter, Stanard's original tradesman, advertised his family's press for sale in Washington's *National Intelligencer*. The sale marked the end of the brothers' career as practical printers, as well as their lives as partisan journalists.

Sources: LCCN no. 82-014068; Brigham II: 1142, I: 106 & 94; *Tyler's Quarterly*; Stohrer, "Arator: A Publishing History" (VMHB, 1980); notices in the *Spirit of Seventy-Six* (1808-15), *The Virginian* (1808), the *Petersburg Intelligencer* (1808-10), the *Federal Republican* (1813), and the *National Intelligencer* (1812-15).