

STAUNTON 04: Candid Review

01: Candid Review and Staunton Weekly Register (1805-1807)

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The fourth newspaper issued in Staunton was an offspring of the first successful mercantile advertiser published in Augusta County. However, being an avowedly Federalist journal, its finances were weakened by the appearance of a competing Republican paper there, and so ceased publication when it was at last defeated by its debts.

The *Candid Review and Staunton Weekly Register* was produced by William G. Lyford (272), a New England native who was apparently trained as printer in the Exeter, New Hampshire, office of the prolific Federalist publisher Henry Ranlet (1762-1807); he relocated to Virginia in late 1802 or early 1803 to help Samuel Walkup (426) in publishing the *Virginia Telegraphe & Rockbridge Courier* in Lexington; when Walkup turned to printing the *Virginia Religious Magazine* for the Lexington Synod of the Presbyterian Church, he ceased publishing his two-year-old weekly in October 1804, dissolving his partnership with Lyford.

At just that same time, *The Phenix* in Staunton was closed by its proprietor, Ira Woodruff (458), because of ongoing financial difficulties, leaving the largest town in the Shenandoah Valley south of Winchester without a mercantile advertiser. Lyford clearly saw that void as an opportunity, especially given his coincident idleness. So sometime before December 21, 1804, he used the proceeds gained in the dissolution of his partnership with Walkup to buy Woodruff's press office and the *Phenix's* subscriber list. Then on that date, Lyford wrote to U.S. Secretary of State James Madison to inform him of the demise of Woodruff's paper, his acquisition of its residue, and his wish to continue as "publisher of the laws" of Congress for Virginia's western counties, as Woodruff had been, for the session that had commenced on November 5th. Madison evidently acquiesced to his entreaty, as most of the five surviving numbers of Lyford's new paper issued during that session carry published acts.

The earliest of those surviving numbers indicate that Lyford began issuing his *Candid Review* on January 4, 1805. Like its predecessor, it was avowedly Federalist in its perspective, fitting its setting in "Old Federal Augusta" County and Lyford's New England roots. However, little more can be said about its content, as there are only eleven surviving numbers from its first six months of publication, most carrying the acts of Congress, and there are no surviving numbers after July 12, 1805 until that issued on March 14, 1807, some eighty-seven weeks later. Then the next survivor from September 18, 1807 evinces a pseudonymous proprietor, a shortened title, and a smaller page-size, revealing that Lyford had financial problems that had compelled him to bring make changes sometime between those dates; but that issue is also the latest number known, leaving the date Lyford finally ceased publication unknown.

It is possible to sketch the probable course of the *Candid Review* during those lost twenty months. In August 1806, Walkup resumed publishing his *Virginia Telegraphe* in Lexington and likely drew away some of Lyford's readers to the south, especially as that one-time Federalist paper now eschewed politics. That choice was in all likelihood linked to fact that

the Valley was divided by congressional redistricting in 1803 into constituencies controlled by rural Republicans rather than urban Federalists, as was formerly the case, leading to the defeat of incumbent Federalist representatives in the 1804 and 1806 elections. This political shift was facilitated by the introduction of partisan newspapers in Winchester (*Triumph of Liberty*), Lexington (*Rockbridge Repository*), and Staunton (*Political Mirror*), that supported Thomas Jefferson, both before and after his election as president in 1800. The Staunton journal had closed after the 1801-02 congressional session, allowing Lyford's *Candid Review* to emerge as an unchallenged successor to the recently-deceased *Phenix*. But in July 1807, in the midst of the popular uproar over the Chesapeake/Leopard affair that spring, and the ensuing militia mobilizations, a new Republican sheet – the *Staunton Eagle* – was started by Jacob D. Dietrich (135), a bilingual printer with ties to Matthias Bartgis (024), the publishing impresario of Frederick, Maryland. With this well-financed competitor appearing less than a year after Walkup had cut into his subscriber base, a paper that presented an anti-Federalist perspective at the height of anti-British feeling, Lyford certainly endured a further decline in readership that undermined the viability of his weekly. Add to these circumstances the deteriorating economic conditions in the Valley associated with contractions in markets and currency that resulted from the ongoing maritime war in the Atlantic, the survival of the *Candid Review* was very much in doubt in September 1807, when the last known number was issued. Indeed, one local history reports Lyford's inability to pay for paper bankrupted the paper mill on nearby Mossy Creek that supplied his and Dietrich's needs.

This known context helps explain the changes made to the *Candid Review* between March and September in 1807. From the numbering of that September issue, it appears that there was twenty-week publication suspension after the March issue; the later issue indicates that the paper's third volume/year commenced in May rather than in January, as should be the case in an unbroken run between the two dates. When the *Candid Review* reemerged, it was significantly smaller in size, reduced from its original 53 cm. size (Super Royal) to a 33 cm. one (Foolscap). And it no longer reported Lyford as proprietor, even as he continued to conduct the printing office from which it was issued. Rather, the troubled weekly claimed that one Erranto Invisus (233), Esq. was now the paper's proprietor; the use of that obvious pseudonym – roughly translated as "wandering inspector" – suggests Lyford (the wanderer) was continuing the paper with the help of others while masking his connection to it.

Just how long that these tactics kept the *Candid Review* alive is uncertain, and is perhaps unknowable. What is evident is that Lyford began publishing a new Federalist weekly – the *Staunton Political Censor* – in May 1808 in advance of the election cycle for that year. That date roughly corresponds with what would have been the start of a fourth volume of the *Candid Review*; but his new paper was printed on the larger sheet that had marked the early days of his preceding offering, suggesting that Lyford had closed this paper to effect a reorganization of his business affairs before starting the new weekly the next spring. Hence, the end of the *Candid Review* likely came in late 1807 or early 1808, so allowing Lyford the time needed to start over. But lacking more evidence, an exact date cannot be established.