

STAUNTON 06: Republican Farmer

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The sixth newspaper issued in Staunton before 1820 was one that survived for more than a century, though under a name that differed from the one employed at its start. Hence the early days of the *Staunton Spectator* are relatively unknown, despite their being the period when the foundations were set for a conservative weekly that lived for so long a period of time under challenging and changing conditions.

Federalist Origins

In its original form, this weekly was called the *Staunton Political Censor*. Issued initially in advance of the 1808 federal elections, and reacting to the disorder to American commerce wrought by the Embargo Act of 1807, the paper was intended to censure both Jefferson and Madison for the prevailing "stagnation of all business [which] ought to incite the farmer, the merchant, the mechanic, and indeed every other person, to inquire into the cause." But the publisher of the *Political Censor* was himself already mired in financial woes that antedated this paper's introduction, ones limiting his ability to reach audiences beyond Staunton.

William Gilman Lyford (272) was a New England native who came to Staunton in late 1804 from Lexington after assisting Samuel Walkup (426) in publishing the *Virginia Telegraphe & Rockbridge Courier* there. In January 1805, Lyford began publication of a Federalist weekly designed to take replace the paper lately issued by Ira Woodruff (458), which had expired about three months earlier. His *Candid Review and Staunton Weekly Register* was sustained initially by his continuation as "publisher of the laws" of Congress for the western counties of Virginia, as Woodruff had been, for the session then assembled. But as his *Review* was an avowedly Federalist organ, the Republican administration in Washington reassigned that plum contract for the ensuing session of Congress, leaving Lyford without that vital subsidy. So it appears that the *Candid Review* struggled for the next eighteen months or so, carried by its function as the sole advertising outlet in this important Valley market-town; but once faced with competitors both in town – the *Staunton Eagle* of Jacob D. Dietrich (135) – and nearby – the revived *Virginia Telegraphe* of Samuel Walkup – the life of Lyford's weekly was soon in jeopardy. Even reducing the size of its page by one-third and cutting the number of issues he produced each week could not save his paper, leading to its closing sometime in

the fall of 1807.

Still, there was sufficient reason to think that an anti-administration journal could succeed in "Old Federal Augusta" County, given that the *Candid Review's* predecessor had survived for more than a decade. Indeed, its demise, as well as that of Lyford's paper, was seemingly a result of the arrangements made to finance its production, rather than any dissatisfaction with its content; those arrangements were apparently undermined by the ever-problematic lack of currency in the area, which limited subscribers ability to settle their accounts, as was the case with most Valley newspapers before 1820. Thus, the 1808 election cycle presented a new opportunity for a "federal print" in the region, one that would attempt to exploit the divisions within the Republican party then between supporters of Madison and Monroe.

By May 1808, Lyford had reorganized his business sufficiently to start up his new *Political Censor* to fill that role again. The state of commerce in the central Valley had been degraded by then by the "damn-bargo" enacted the preceding December and showed little prospect for improvement under either a Madison or Monroe administration. Employing the mocking style of the New England Federalists who had trained him, Lyford offered the well-known maxim from Jefferson's inaugural that "We are all republicans ... we are all federalists" as his masthead motto, and then aggressively disparaged the Republicans for deviations from that dictum he perceived in their words or actions, especially as the trade policies effected the region's merchants. All the same, most Virginia Republicans coalesced behind Madison's presidential candidacy that year, which helped to elect him as Jefferson's successor.

That result clearly infuriated Lyford, and apparently his principal supporters as well. At the start of his journal's second volume/year in May 1809, following Madison's inauguration, he recast the title of his weekly in an obvious fit of pique:

"Should any one ask why it assumes a new name, after having acquired some notoriety under that, which it has borne already, the enquirer is reminded, that my press was established in the period, when almost every measure of administration was censurable. Expecting, from this circumstance, that my paper would unavoidably bear the character of a 'Political Censor,' I thought it not improper to give it that appellation. But now, a new reign has commenced; and from the boasted virtue and wisdom of the chief [Madison], it is but candor to presume, that the censorious name and office of my paper made it once expire! As we are to abandon all intercourse with the trading world, and devote ourselves to pursuits of agriculture; and as my press will be appropriated to the information and amusement of our virtuous yeomanry, the name of 'Republican Farmer' will be a like characteristic of the times, and the object of my paper."

While the change in title clearly expressed Lyford's frustration with Madison's election, it also embraced his taste for the ironic. Moreover, it reflected a then-common Federalist critique of Republicans: they were not republicans, in the proper sense of the word, but rather democrats, and so subject to the inconsistent whims of an electorate regularly deluded by demagogues. Rather, Federalists, especially those of the Washingtonian variety, and not of the Adamsite one, were the real republicans, and that their actions and policies reflected a balanced and disinterested understanding of the country's true interests.

Despite a receptive readership, Lyford's *Republican Farmer* seems to have fared no better fiscally than had his *Candid Review*. The ill-effects of the embargo were not immediately relieved by its easing in 1809, leading to many bankruptcies in the Valley of Virginia, both personal and business. One such insolvency had a major impact on all of Staunton's papers in early 1810; the paper mill on nearby Mossy Creek went under in about February of that year, leading to an acknowledged seventeen-week suspension of publication for Dietrich's competing *Staunton Eagle*; local histories report that its collapse was caused, in part, by Lyford's inability to pay anything on his account since coming to Staunton in late 1804. That situation appears to have forced Lyford to sell the paper to better financed hands sometime between May and September in 1810, and then leave town to find work as a journeyman in Richmond. (He later became publisher of an influential commercial register in Baltimore.)

The new proprietor of the *Republican Farmer* was Isaac Collett (100); like Lyford, he was a young printer with a Federalist orientation, who learned his trade in the Winchester office of Richard Bowen (045) and his successor William Heiskell (211); but when their Federalist-aligned *Winchester Gazette* was sold in 1809 within the Heiskell family, and not to its shop foreman, Collett quickly recognized that any chance that he had for owning his own press and paper now lay beyond that town. With relatives of the Winchester Heiskells settled in Staunton, there was a suitable group of potential backers there who could assist Collett in his quest for trade independence; so it seems that some of Staunton's Federalists, including merchant-brothers Peter and John Heiskell, facilitated the sale of the troubled mercantile advertiser to Collett from Lyford in order to set it on a more sound financial footing.

Collett immediately announced that his *Republican Farmer* would have "decidedly a Federal character." And as he proceeded, it was evident that Collett understood his Virginia readers better than his New-Hampshire-born predecessor and prospered by that knowledge; so this Federalist journal with its consciously ironic "Republican" title was something he happily continued for the next thirteen years. Yet what distinguished Collett from Lyford was his willingness to engage in publishing projects other than his weekly advertiser, so integrating his business into the setting that he shared with his readers in the central Valley; foremost among these were the religious tracts he published regularly with the encouragement of the Lexington Presbytery, including several pamphlets printed for the Rockingham County evangelicals Rev. Andrew B. Davidson (116) and Rev. George Bourne (043) supporting their missionary publishing establishment, the Virginia Religious Tract Society. That ancillary work corresponded to Federalists' assertions that Republicans were generally irreligious, a claim that was clearly buttressed by Jefferson's open disapproval of Bourne's activities in the area just west of his Albemarle County home during his retirement years. But more importantly, that outlook was also part and parcel of Collett's discussion of religious affairs in his weekly.

Whig Evolution

Still, few numbers of the *Republican Farmer* survive from its years under Collett's control, leaving most of the details of its content unknowable, even as he made his weekly into the leading journalistic voice in the central Valley. That standing made the *Republican Farmer* an attractive commodity when Collett finally decided to sell the paper in 1823 and retire to the comfortable life of a gentleman farmer at just age thirty-eight. That decision may have

hinged on the prospect of a rancorous election campaign in 1824 over the presidential succession and the strident partisan journalism that would attend it. So in December 1823, Collett sold his *Republican Farmer* to Kenton Harper (203), the man who would transform the respected regional paper into the nationally-known *Staunton Spectator*.

Harper had deep Federalist roots. The eldest son of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, publisher George Kenton Harper (1778-1858) and a nephew of Gettysburg publisher Robert Harper (1771-1816), he was raised in the trade in the office of his father's *Franklin Repository*, then considered the foremost Federalist journal in central Pennsylvania. In 1816, a journeyman in his father's office, John Nelson Snider (392), removed to Shepherdstown to establish the Federalist *American Eagle* there; then when Snider departed for Lexington a year later, it seems that the elder Harper sent his seventeen-year-old son Kenton to Jefferson County to conduct the technical side of that partisan paper, and its succeeding *Potomack Register*, for a series of local editorial partners. The son returned to his father's employ in Chambersburg in 1819, but by late 1823, he was ready to take on the challenge of conducting Staunton's *Republican Farmer* on his own.

Harper immediately put his own mark on the paper by amending its title to the *Staunton Spectator and Republican Farmer*. He then turned to the work of supporting the candidacy of John Quincy Adams over native Virginians Henry Clay and William H. Crawford and the popular war-hero Andrew Jackson. This turn placed Harper out of step with most Virginia editors, who supported one of the other three Southern candidates; but the choice did put him in the leading ranks of those editors who would help shape the emerging Whig party, with its focus on developing American commerce and manufacturing. Even so, Harper was wise enough to couch his views in the long-accepted Virginia attitude of preferring locally-based initiatives over federally-dictated ones, and he would do so for the duration of his proprietorship of this paper.

After the ensuing indecisive election, Harper added to his masthead the oft-quoted motto of "The man who will not read one newspaper during the week, must truly be the slave of ignorance, or poverty." It was a statement addressing contemporary assessments that the majority of those voting for Jackson were illiterate and so uninformed, and that the coming vote in the House of Representatives required an informed decision about the choices, and not a thoughtless surrender to popular dictates. Tellingly, the motto disappeared from the weekly once Adams prevailed in that vote. And at about that same time, Harper shortened his weekly's title to *Staunton Spectator*, the form that is still best known for this periodical, so completing the severing of his journal from its problematic Federalist past.

With Adams in office, the *Spectator* became one of his primary advocates in Virginia. Harper bucked the general journalistic trend of debating the legitimacy of his presidency – ignoring the continuing assertions of a "corrupt bargain" between Adams and Clay that kept Jackson from that office – to focus instead on the actions of the new administration and their effect on the state. By December 1826, those papers who were opposed to Adams had generated a narrative that the nation was turning against him, and that Congress would eventually right the wrong that deprived Jackson of his due in early 1825. In advance of the 1826-27 session of Congress, Harper challenged that narrative directly, at least in terms of Virginia:

"That the people of the State, as might be inferred from the intemperance of some leading presses are almost disposed, Sampson-like, to draw down the pillars of government itself, at the risk of their own ruin, to dislodge Mr. Adams, is fallacious in the extreme. No such excitement prevails, except in the breasts of a few mad-caps, who are rapidly thinning the ranks of the respectable party opposed to Mr. Adams before his election, by the disgust which they create. We venture to assert, & we have good grounds for the assertion, that Virginia is daily becoming more and more disposed to judge the administration by its acts, and should the same wisdom which has thus far marked its course continue to be exercised, there is little doubt, that, in the event of Jackson's being the only opposing candidate, Mr. Adams will obtain here support."

Harper's assessment was shaped by his residence in Augusta County, which was clearly a place that favored Adams over Jackson; the incumbent president carried Augusta in 1828, the only county that he won in the Valley in the year of Jackson's election. So while Harper's comment was mistaken for the state as a whole, it demonstrates that from the start, he and his *Spectator* were in tune with the majority of the county's voters, and for that reason his weekly flourished.

Harper's success in Staunton evidently encouraged him to carry on the familial tradition of assisting younger relatives to establish themselves in the print trade. Shortly after acquiring the *Republican Farmer*, Harper brought his youngest brother William (1810-87) to Virginia to hone his trade skills in Staunton, making him the foreman of his press in due course. Then in September 1828, during the hotly-contested Adams/Jackson presidential election, Harper transferred ownership of his journal to William, apparently in an effort to funnel some of his weekly's profits into his brother's hands, and thereby let him accrue the capital he would need subsequently to start a business of his own elsewhere. William was backed in this venture by Thomas J. Michie (1795-1873), an Augusta County lawyer then emerging as a key Whig political leader in the Valley. The resulting firm of Michie & Harper – often mistakenly seen as a short-lived arrangement of the elder brother – was titular proprietor of the *Staunton Spectator* until February 1829, just five months; Kenton then resumed sole ownership of the weekly, with William departing Staunton later that year for the Hampshire County seat of Romney, where he started the *South Branch Intelligencer* in early 1830, that town's first paper. Michie was later involved in partisan journals in both Harrisonburg and Staunton, one of which would be folded into the *Spectator* in the 1890s.

In the Jackson years, Harper was highly critical of the new president's administration; but at the same time, he was critical of many of those opposing Jackson as well, particularly the nullification doctrine articulated by John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. In his *Spectator*, Harper offered a view of the Constitution being both an expansive and restrictive covenant, one that allowed more power to the federal government than most Democrats in Virginia were willing to accept, but one that limited that power by the checks and balances laid out with it. An apt example of his views can be seen in his commentaries over the controversies attending the ill-fated re-chartering of the Second Bank of the United States. While he was a supporter of the bill extending that bank's life, he also recognized that Jackson was within the bounds of his constitutional authority in vetoing such legislation. So when the Bank's

advocates suggested – through the offices of the *National Intelligencer*, by then no friend to Jackson – that Congress should cease appropriating funds for operating the government until the president signed a bill renewing that bank's charter, Harper argued that such a course was unconstitutional, just as much as was nullification:

"The President has no more interest in our Government than any other individual, apart from his salary and the short term he has to enjoy it. Ours is in fact a Government of the *People*, instituted for *their* benefit; and if it be destroyed and anarchy ensue, *they* only are the sufferers. The effect of a refusal of supplies [i.e. funds] being therefore a destruction of *all* Government, it cannot be our proper remedy against Executive abuses. We do not wish to *revolutionize*—we have no tyrant for life to throw off. In a less period than it would take to recover from the effects of such an act as is recommended by the Intelligencer, the man who abuses his trust will have sunk to the condition of a private citizen."

Elections were essential, he argued, to rectifying the ills begot by the Jacksonians. Thus the 1836 cycle became a focal point for the *Spectator*.

Whig Maturity

A key participant in Harper's endeavors that year was his shop foreman, Jacob Sosey (1808-88); another native of Franklin County, Pennsylvania, Sosey had trained in the Gettysburg office established by Harper's uncle, but then conducted by cousin Robert G. Harper (1799-1870); Sosey arrived in Staunton as a trained journeyman after William Harper's departure and soon became the manager of the *Spectator's* press. Early in 1836, Harper decided to publish a campaign paper supporting the candidacy of William Henry Harrison and engaged Sosey as his partner in the project; so starting that April, they issued the *Harrison Advocate or Staunton Spectator Extra*, intending it to "be published in 25 numbers from now until the Presidential election in November." Whether they achieved that goal is unclear, as the only surviving number of their journal is that issued on July 23, 1836; but it is clear that Harper thought enough of Sosey's contributions to the project that he took him into partnership in the parent paper with its issue of September 1, 1836.

The concern of Harper & Sosey conducted the *Spectator* for the ensuing twenty months. For Harper, forming such a partnership was an apparent necessity, as he had just been elected as one of the Augusta County delegates to the coming General Assembly; his service there would require his attendance in Richmond for more than four months the following winter; while he continued to contribute pieces to the *Spectator* during that session, he needed to leave his weekly in trusted hands in his absence as well; Sosey was evidently his first choice. In that session, Harper and fellow delegate Alexander H. Stuart (1807-91), pressed for construction of new roads in the central and upper Valley of Virginia that would facilitate the commercial growth of Staunton – an issue that had been an ongoing concern addressed in the *Spectator* since Harper acquired the paper in 1823. When their efforts proved futile, faced with resistance to the cost of such projects among eastern delegates, Harper decided that he would not stand for reelection in 1837; yet he remained a close political associate of Stuart's for the rest of his life, with the *Spectator* leading the campaign for the attorney's

election to Congress in the 1840 elections. By that time, however, Sosey had moved on to Missouri to conduct a Whig journal of his own.

The 1840 elections brought the *Spectator* a national prominence with the emergence of the Whigs as a fully-formed national party; the multiplicity of candidates offered by the party in 1836 (four in all) reflected the regional divisions within the country's anti-Jackson forces; but Harper's support of Harrison then made the *Staunton Spectator* his leading advocate in the state when "Old Tippecanoe" vied with Virginian John Tyler for the party's nomination in December 1839. When the party nominated a ticket that combined the two, Harper's *Spectator* quickly became one of that ticket's most enthusiastic supporters, going so far as adopting a new motto – the first used since 1825 – synopsising the Whig platform: "One presidential term, reduction of executive power, retrenchment, and reform." Consequently, the *Spectator* praised Harrison's election and offered whole-hearted support for what was expected to be his administration's agenda.

However, Harrison's unexpected death just a month into his term made Tyler an "accidental president" who did not hew to the party platform; thus his administration was one marked by Whig obstruction of his "Democratic" policies in anticipation of a subsequent Henry Clay administration, a turn that Harper did not oppose. But when the Republic of Texas sought annexation in 1844, and the Whigs openly opposed the idea, they handed the presidency to the Democrats in the person of a Tennessee expansionist named James K. Polk. It was a result that Harper bemoaned, even as he helped bring Augusta County into Clay's camp.

Still, Polk's election would prove a turning point in Harper's life, and so that of the *Staunton Spectator*. Polk's expansive interpretation of Texas's southern border resulted in a war with Mexico in May 1846; by the spring of 1847, military operations in northern Mexico had ended following Santa Ana's defeat at Buena Vista; Polk then began repositioning federal troops there to the south to support operations near Vera Cruz, and turned to the states to supply troops for garrison duty in the conquered territory. When the war started, Augusta County raised a volunteer militia unit, and that company was now called up to provide the needed manpower; that company's captain was Kenton Harper. Once again, the publisher would be called away from Staunton, though now for an indeterminate period. But unlike his experience in 1836, he did not add a trusted partner to his business; rather he left his affairs in the hands of unnamed collaborators. Harper was gone from May 1847 to August 1848, during which time those hands conducted the *Spectator* for him, carrying occasional dispatches from the war-front penned by the absent proprietor. There he also served as the military governor of Parras in the Mexican state of Coahuila, just south of the border with Texas, until the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed.

On his return to Virginia, however, Harper evidently began negotiations to sell his beloved *Spectator*; his health was reported to be in decline as a result of his service in Mexico, and the election of the Whig war-hero Zachary Taylor as president seems to have convinced him that his principles would be those guiding post-war politics. So in November 1848, Harper sold his weekly to a pair of Staunton lawyers, Lyttleton Waddell, Sr. (1790-1869) and his nephew, Joseph Addison Waddell (1823-1914), later the well-known author of the *Annals of Augusta County*. The confidence he exhibited in his successors suggests that the Waddells

were the hands conducting the *Spectator* in his absence, as does the rapid transition after Taylor's election, though nothing has been found to confirm these suggestions.

In leaving the *Spectator* behind, Harper assured his readers that the unexpected change was not one of desperation, but one intended to leave the weekly to new proprietors without the prospect of difficulties, as he had received the journal twenty-five years before:

"In quitting the post which I have so long occupied—pleasantly to myself, and, as I have reason to believe, acceptably to the numerous patrons of the establishment—it is gratifying to me to reflect that I do so under circumstances so entirely auspicious. It is under no lowering fortune—it is from no field of disaster that I retire; but at the moment of victory, and upon those principles which I have zealously labored for years to promote."

The Waddell family would control the *Spectator* for the ensuing twelve years. However, where Harper had conducted the paper during the Whig ascendancy and so benefited from that association, they were faced with the collapse of the party in the wake of the Mexican War. Accordingly, the weekly lost much of the influence that it had acquired under Harper's management. Yet the Waddells' editorial course did not wander far from the one followed by their predecessors, advocating policies that would enhance Staunton's commercial role, and opposing those that would limit its development, with the introduction of new banks that could finance industrial and transportation projects being their central concern.

Vital Adaptations

That traditional focus meant that the Waddells' *Spectator* did not follow the course of many of the state's Whig papers in converting to the nativist cause of the American Party – known popularly as the Know-Nothings – after the national party disintegrated in the 1852 election over the issue of the westward expansion of slavery. Indeed, the rise of Know-Nothing-ism put the *Staunton Spectator* in a defensive position, trying to prove, as A.H.H. Stuart would later report, "that the American movement was not a Whig trick." As a result, the Waddells struggled to help revive the fortunes of a party that had advanced the ideals of commercial and industrial development in Virginia that were so central to their newspaper's identity, even as Democrats embraced some of those ideas to blunt the Know-Nothing threat. In the end, those efforts came to naught.

While navigating the alteration of the state's partisan allegiances, the *Spectator* underwent a generational transformation as well. In March 1854, Lyttleton Waddell decided to retire from journalism and sold his interest in the weekly to his son, Lyttleton Jr. (1829-86). By bringing the son into the editorial mix, the aging father likely saw his retirement as a way make the paper into a voice for a rising generation of political leaders in the persons of his son and nephew, while the journal retained the perspective that it had promoted since its founding. It appears that the Waddell cousins had a like view of the *Spectator's* future, as they promptly proposed publishing a twice-weekly edition of the paper that could respond more quickly to challenges tendered by those opposing their agenda, while continuing the original weekly. But the declining fortunes of Virginia's Whigs meant that there was not a sufficient support for such an undertaking, and that proposed variant never issued.

Even so, the threat posed to the *Spectator* by the few Know-Nothings in the Valley proved a transient one. In 1855, Henry A. Wise, the Whig-turned-Democrat who represented the Know-Nothings, defeated Thomas S. Flournoy, the Democratic nominee, in a gubernatorial election in which the Whigs did not field a challenger. Then the national party imploded in the 1856 presidential election over the issue of slavery, though now over efforts to abolish the "peculiar institution." Thereafter, the Virginia papers that had supported the withering American Party either adopted a relatively-uncontroversial localist perspective or ceased publication, and the *Spectator* benefitted from that shrinking number of competitors.

At the beginning of the 1855 gubernatorial campaign, a Know-Nothing weekly entitled the *Staunton True American* was started by physicians Wills DeHass (1818-1910) and George K. Gilmer (1822-99); after Flournoy's defeat, DeHass sold his interest in the journal to Richard Mauzy (1824-1912), who had previously conducted the *Lewisburg Chronicle* with Samuel A.B. Gilmer (1824-62), his new partner's brother. Mauzy later said that he regretted "his unfortunate investment" in the *True American*, as he lost money in the venture right from its start. As the American Party rapidly lost steam after 1855, so too did their paper lose its readers. Hence the partners closed the failing weekly in April 1857, with Mauzy keeping the firm's press and business records. Within two weeks, he had converted those fundamental assets into an investment in the *Staunton Spectator*, which the Waddells used to upgrade their office and expand their subscription list.

For the next three years, Mauzy remained a silent partner to the Waddells while they railed against the distractions brought annually to the General Assembly by the growing sectional crisis. In the 1858 session, for example, the Assembly failed to enact legislation to collect taxes for government operations in 1859, or to elect the minor officials required under law to conduct the day-to-day business of the state government.

"Yet ... the Legislature are much more excusable for their omissions than for some of their commission—the act in reference to the Banks, for instance. By the way, the recklessness, with which our law-makers pass acts affecting the currency, among the most complicated and delicate subjects of legislation, is truly remarkable."

After noting the Assembly's cavalier attitude toward their constitutional duties, the editors made a suggestion as to how Virginians could bring them to account:

"The ancient Locrians required that whoever proposed a new law should appear in public assembly with a rope around his neck, which was immediately tightened if he failed to convince his fellow-citizens of the necessity of his propositions. If our modern legislators could be subjected to some such penalty for all unwise and injurious laws passed by them, we should have fewer enactments of the kind."

Still, such comments evince the fact that the Waddells and their *Spectator* were increasingly out of step with the pro-slavery and pro-Southern voices who dominated the newspaper discourse in Virginia at this time. Indeed, their weekly was evidently perceived by the most radical "fire-eaters" among those journalistic voices as a paper with abolitionist tendencies as it had reported on anti-slavery petitioning in the Valley prior to the state constitutional conventions in 1829-30 and 1850. Moreover, the *Spectator* had served as an advocate for reapportioning representation within the state and broadening suffrage to include all adult

white men from the Staunton Convention of 1816 forward, making it a dubious influence in the minds of the Tidewater slaveholders who still controlled the state government.

As the political situation deteriorated, the Waddells decided that they needed to quit the *Spectator* before secession fever killed the heretofore profitable weekly. So on June 1, 1860, they sold their shares to Richard Mauzy and retired from journalism to pursue careers in the law. Mauzy retained a controlling interest in the journal until December 1895, and so was the proprietor that guided the *Spectator* through the trials of the Civil War.

Wartime Crises

At the outset of Mauzy's tenure, he continued to affirm the Unionist perspective that had marked the Waddells' closing years. A succinct summary of that affirmation can be seen in the *apologia* that he published immediately after the war:

"We denied the right, and opposed the policy of secession. We maintained that it was not a remedy for any of the evils of which were complained, but, on the contrary, that it would aggravate a thousandfold all the evils which its advocates claimed it would remedy—that it was not a constitutional, but a revolutionary right—that it was not a peaceful, but a war remedy—that it would not secure us our rights in the territories, but would result in the loss of the territories themselves—that it would not protect the institution of slavery but would endanger its very existence—that it would ensure the protection of no Southern interests, but betray them all to destruction—that it would not secure additional freedom, but would probably quench in fratricidal blood the vestal flame of liberty, and leave us to grope our miserable way through the Cimmerian darkness of military despotism."

However prescient Mauzy's assessment may have been, the passage of Virginia's ordinance of secession in April 1861 was enough to turn him into a Southern nationalist and his paper into an advocate for the independence of the Confederacy – just as it did for most formerly-Whig journals in the state.

Yet Mauzy was immediately confronted by the harsh realities of conducting a newspaper in this time of war: within days, he had lost the services of the three journeymen in his office who enlisted in the volunteer militia companies sent north to the Potomac to defend the state's border; and by June, he was obliged to publish the *Spectator* on a half-sheet because of an inability to secure paper, probably from mills in Pennsylvania, and continued to do so for the ensuing year. Despite such hardships, Mauzy was able to continue publication of the weekly until the summer of 1864 by re-staffing his printing office with young assistants in the persons of David E. Strasburg (1837-95) and Newton Argenbright (1845-1920), both of whom would later become his partners.

As Mauzy was able to keep his weekly going during the war years, his *Spectator* became an influential commentator on government and military affairs, just as it had in the Harper era. Yet that influence also made its proprietor a target. In May 1863, the *Staunton Vindicator and General Advertiser* – a Democratic journal converted to a Unionist sheet in 1858 by Thomas J. Michie – printed a brief report that the commander of the 12th Virginia Cavalry, Col. Asher W. Harman (1830-65), had sent home to his wife in Staunton a silver tea service

that had been "captured" during the Battle of Chancellorsville; the story made its way into that paper's pages as the *Vindicator's* editor, William H. H. Lynn (1836-95), was a brother of the colonel's wife; Lynn's report prompted Mauzy to question the gift in the *Spectator*, bluntly asking:

"We acknowledge that the above announcement contained in the *Vindicator* of last week surprised us. We had supposed that everything captured by soldiers in the Confederate service became the property of the Confederate States. *Have we been mistaken in this supposition?*"

The implication, of course, was that Harman was profiting from his service; the colonel then confronted Mauzy on a Staunton street and assaulted him for publishing an "insult" to his honor. The incident brought Harman before a "court of inquiry" which found that he had done nothing to dishonor his uniform, laying blame for the entire affair at Lynn's feet for having published an untruth, even though Mrs. Harman retained ownership of the disputed tea set. Yet the matter was quickly forgiven and forgotten as five weeks later Harman was injured and captured at Gettysburg, resulting in his death in an Ohio prison camp in January of 1865.

When the war ultimately arrived in Staunton a year later, the *Spectator* became one of its casualties as well. By the summer of 1864, the central Valley had developed into the chief of provision supplier for Lee's Army of Northern Virginia to the east; thus Grant sent his Army of Western Virginia into the area to destroy both supplies and transport systems there that could sustain Lee during Grant's summer campaign in central Virginia, before then moving on to Lynchburg to ravage the railroad interchanges there. That army, under the command of Maj. Gen. David Hunter arrived in Staunton on June 7, 1864, and devastated the town's commercial and transportation infrastructure in a four-day-long occupation. During that visitation, Mauzy's office – now comprising the assets of three papers: the *Spectator*, the *True American*, and the former *Harrisonburg Republican* of G. K. Gilmer – was ransacked by those troops and its types scattered in the town's streets. That action made the number of the *Spectator* published on May 31, 1864 the last one issued until after war's end; Lynn's *Vindicator* thus served as Staunton's only paper for the ensuing year, saved by the hasty removal from town of his smaller office just before the federal troops arrived.

The suspension of the *Spectator* forced by Hunter's forces was extended by the loss of a sizable part of the paper's support when Gen. Philip Sheridan's Army of the Shenandoah came to the area in late September, determined to incinerate anything that could be used to aid Lee's army entrenched at Petersburg; they burned much of that part of the Valley between the Blue Ridge and the spine of Appalachians betwixt Staunton and Harrisonburg, effectively bringing all commerce in the region to a standstill. Lacking the sustenance that commerce provided his business, Mauzy decided to wait out events in his former home of Lewisburg, thirty-five miles to the west, leaving the shattered remains of his office in the hands of his journeymen Strasburg and Argenbright.

Post-War Revival

When the *Spectator* finally reappeared in July 1865, it did so under the imprimatur of the

firm of Strasburg & Argenbright. In Mauzy's absence, the pair had painstakingly recovered the strewn type and rebuilt the smashed cases and chases normally used to carry that type. Their labors were entirely uncompensated as a result of Mauzy's now-destitute financial circumstances; in making himself a patriotic example at the war's start, he had invested all his accrued wealth in Confederate bonds, now totally worthless; thus he now owned tools that he could not use because he did not have the monies needed to pay for ink, paper, or labor. So he turned to a barter agreement with his journeymen: in lieu of wages, Strasburg and Argenbright became Mauzy' partners, with their investment in the firm coming from their labor, not from currency of uncertain value. And the first evidence of this arrangement can be seen in the issues of the *Spectator* published before Mauzy returned to Staunton in mid-August 1865. It is not clear just how long this unusual arrangement continued, but the young printers are known to have been a part of the firm of Richard Mauzy & Co. until 1882. With the issue of August 22, 1865, Mauzy reemerged as "editor & publisher" of the weekly, a designation he embraced until he retired in 1895, rather than that of "proprietor." His first address to his readers was a plaintive appeal for payments of their arrearages so that he could return the *Spectator* to its former size and scale, one in which he reported the loss of his fortune in service to the Confederate cause; that plea was followed by a justification of his editorial choices both before and during the war, in which his point was to reassert his devotion to his native state and its people; thus he ended with a charge to his readers that they should gladly take the post-war loyalty oath in order to be able to exercise their rights under the federal constitution:

"The allegiance of the citizens of the seceded States is now due to the U.S. Government, and it is their *duty*, as we have no doubt it is their *purpose*, to be faithful to all their consequent obligations. We will yield a cordial obedience to the 'Constitution and laws passed in accordance therewith,' but will claim and exercise the right to oppose by Constitutional means whatever law we may believe to be violative of the Constitutional rights of the citizens. No earthly power can force us to advocate a principle or policy which we may disapprove."

Mauzy's most pressing concerns, however, were financial, not political, and the dearth of currency in the Valley immediately after the war was an issue that he addressed frequently in his weekly. But he also looked beyond the immediate neighborhood to draw revenue into his business, as well as those of his advertisers; such can be seen in the series of advertising notices he placed in Alexandria papers from 1866 to 1868, with the following being typical:

"MERCHANTS OF ALEXANDRIA, who wish to secure the custom of Merchants and others living in the Valley of Virginia, as well as the counties farther west, as Greenbrier, Monroe, Highland, Alleghany, Pocahontas, &c., should advertise in the STAUNTON SPECTATOR, one of the oldest and most widely circulated papers in the State."

By 1868, these efforts appear to have stabilized the *Spectator's* finances, and Mauzy could focus sharply on the politics of Reconstruction. From the outset, his *Spectator* was a voice of conservatism, as it always had been; hence, he volubly opposed extending suffrage to freed slaves – and, indeed, to anyone who did not pay taxes – as well as any increases in taxes to pay for innovative social programs that would draw the limited available currency

away from efforts to rebuild the state's commercial infrastructure. Mauzy found an example of the threat posed by such "radical" policies in neighboring West Virginia; on an 1868 visit to his old Lewisburg home, he sent a letter to his partners for publication in the *Spectator* detailing what Virginians could expect from a similarly inventive government there:

"What do you suppose the tax is here for free schools alone? It is *ninety* cents on the hundred dollars' value of property—about twice that of the taxes in Virginia for *all* purposes. The taxes in the State of West Virginia under Radical rule amount to *two dollars on every hundred dollars' value of property*—such as no people can stand, but such as will be required in Virginia if the Radicals shall ever rule in that blessed State. In 1858, 1859, and 1860 the county tax of Greenbrier averaged \$3,500 a year, whilst the tax for 1868 is \$25,000. The county office-holders before the war numbered 55, and they now number 230. The salaries of county officers have been doubled and some trebled under Radical rule. Radicalism is more to be dreaded than war, pestilence and famine—it is the sum of all evils."

Consequently, the *Spectator* disapproved of the proposed Underwood Constitution in 1869, which guaranteed universal male suffrage, regardless of race or tax status. Mauzy and other conservatives reluctantly accepted that covenant after provisions that barred Confederate officials from serving in the new state government were removed; that acquiescence led both to the state's readmission to the Union and to the conservatives disenfranchising the state's non-white population, freed slave or not, in the end.

By the spring of 1882, Mauzy's fortunes had recovered sufficiently for him to acquire the shares of his journeyman-partners, David Strasburg and Newton Argenbright. In Strasburg's case, it appears that he hoped for greater fortune in publishing his own paper in Staunton; but when that short-lived effort failed, he relocated to Baltimore where he became a well-paid and respected job-printer. But for Argenbright, he had ambitions beyond the printing trade; having studied the law while working in the *Spectator* office, he now opened a legal practice in Staunton, and was later appointed as the clerk of the city's Hustings Court, a post he held until his death. Accordingly, Mauzy resumed sole ownership of the *Spectator* with issue of April 1, 1882, and remained such until December 1895.

Despite Mauzy's success in keeping his paper a voice representative of the community it served, changes in technology made its survival increasingly problematic, as they did for all small-town papers in the country in the last third of nineteenth century. The development of high-speed, high-volume presses employed by the metropolitan dailies allowed their papers to reach into the countryside in ever greater numbers, at ever lower costs, with ever greater efficiency. Concurrently, subscription services providing telegraphic reporting – such as the Associated Press (AP) – began to homogenize newspaper content, leading to fewer papers per locale as a result of the loss of their unique identities. Moreover, the ability of such services to provide voluminous content meant that more and more trivial information came into an editor's hands, a condition that Mauzy complained of more than once. Yet the *Spectator* continued to dominate the central Valley's newspaper market, regularly boasting a subscriber list that equaled, if not doubled, that of all its local competitors combined.

Consolidations and Demise

Nevertheless, time eventually caught up with Mauzy. In June 1895, he began soliciting bids for the sale of his paper; now seventy-two years old, he was finding the energy required to produce the weekly difficult to sustain. But with the country then beset by the devastating financial depression that followed the Panic of 1893 – the worst economic collapse in U.S. history before 1929 – it appears he did not receive a suitable offer in the ensuing months. So after he issued the Saturday, December 4, 1895 number of the *Spectator*, Mauzy sold the paper at public auction that afternoon. Before doing so, he bade farewell to his patrons in a remarkably short valedictory address:

"As 'Old Uncle Ed' had to 'lay down the shovel and the hoe'—the implements of his own vocation—so now we lay down those of our vocation—the lead-pencil, the scissors, and the mucilage brush—to take a long-desired and much needed rest from the many years of incessant, exacting labor which are duties devolved upon us, and for which our remuneration has been the impairment of vision and the loss of fortune. We flatter ourselves, however, with the belief that we have—what we value more than fortune—the esteem, respect, confidence, and goodwill of the community in which we have so long 'lived and moved and had our being'—believing that a 'good name is rather to be chosen than great riches,' which, as our experience proves 'taketh to themselves wings and flee away.'"

The high-bidder that day was Rudolph Samuel Turk (1848-1920); the Augusta County native was a Charlottesville-trained lawyer who had practiced in West Virginia and Kansas in the 1870s and 1880s; he returned to his native state in 1890 to settle his father's estate and so resumed his practice in Staunton then; the financial rewards gained in his successful legal career gave him the wherewithal to acquire the venerable *Spectator*, and then carry it on into the next century.

Still, Turk was novice at journalism, and so when news of the *Spectator's* sale to him broke publicly, there was a concern expressed among the Valley's other papers, that he was about to liquidate the office – the parts then being of greater value than the collective whole. Turk apparently recognized that he needed Mauzy's help in the short term, at least, if he was to continue publishing the paper, as he intended to do. Hence, he kept his predecessor on as his editor, as Mauzy reported two weeks later:

"When we issued the SPECTATOR of Dec. 4th, we thought that would be the last work we would do on a newspaper, but such is not the case; for, at the solicitation of the new Proprietor, and in accordance with the expressed desire of a number of friends and subscribers, together with our own wish to have the SPECTATOR published, and our willingness to aid in that object, we have consented to give him our services for a while, and, in making this announcement, we would express the hope that all whose names are on the list at present will continue their subscriptions, and that each one will constitute himself a voluntary agent to secure as many subscribers as possible. As the regular subscription price has been reduced from two dollars to only one dollar a year, quite a large number can be obtained, if proper effort be made."

Evidently, such an effort was properly made, as the following September, Turk was able to absorb the *Spectator's* longest-lived competitor, the *Staunton Vindicator*. William H.H. Lynn, Mauzy's war-time contemporary, sold his one-time secessionist weekly in 1876 to start a hugely-successful farm-implement business in Staunton. The paper's new proprietors were his editor, Henry C. Tinsley (1834-1902), and business manager, Thomas C. Morton (1839-1907); Morton, in turn, sold his share to his son, Arthur S. Morton (1861-1932), sometime in the mid-1880s. But the partners found that by the mid-1890s, Staunton could not support two journals of like political persuasion, ones supporting the conservative, segregationist Democrats; this environment meant that the firm of Tinsley & Morton was unable to sustain the *Vindicator* while it faced competition from the better-known *Spectator*. Turk clearly saw their dilemma as an chance to create a single, authoritative, Democratic paper in Staunton, and offered his competitors a mutually beneficial solution: Tinsley & Morton would dissolve their firm and sell its assets – the *Vindicator's* office and subscriber list – to Turk; he would then use those assets to enlarge and improve his paper, while hiring Morton as his business manager; that transaction allowed an increasingly-infirm Tinsley to retire from journalism without losing the small legacy he had accrued in his three decades with the *Vindicator*; it also seems that this was the moment that Mauzy finally retired from journalism as well. Thus reinvigorated, Turk issued the first number of the amalgamated journal on September 9, 1896, under the new title of *Staunton Spectator and Vindicator*. Yet it is still uncertain just how long Morton remained a part of this combined effort.

The timing of this consolidation could not have been better, or so it seems; the economic depression that had undercut both papers eased after that fall's elections, meaning that the commercial interests of the central Valley soon increased the frequency and scale of their advertising in Turk's weekly. Moreover, the merger also gave Staunton what one Lexington paper called "one of the strongest newspaper establishments in the Commonwealth" while also providing "the democratic party an influential and widely-read organ." And this was just what Turk wanted to create when he made his offer to Tinsley and Morton.

Yet the economic recovery also introduced new complications for this long-lived weekly. The first one was the arrival of daily competitors in Staunton; the *Staunton Daily News* was successfully started in 1891, indicating that Staunton had finally grown to a size and scale that it was no longer properly served by an avowedly-partisan weekly, but rather by a more frequently issued non-partisan advertisers founded on the subscription press services that Mauzy had once complained. Others were attempted in 1896 and 1898, before a second one, the *Staunton Daily Leader*, was realized starting in 1904. With these two daily papers in place, all of the less frequently issued journals in Staunton suffered a loss of readers and revenue. That decline made each of those sheets an object for acquisition, just as had been the *Vindicator*; yet the agents of such consolidations were now corporate entities and not the discrete partnership arrangements known previously. Thus journalism in Staunton was gradually divorced from the personalities of editors and proprietors, such as Mauzy and Turk, after the 1890s.

Such corporatization came to the *Spectator and Vindicator* in 1911. Once Turk passed his sixtieth birthday, he evidently decided to reduce his involvement in the weekly; but as he still embraced the traditional mindset of forging partnerships with specific persons, he

searched for a willing individual rather than an acquisitive corporation. He found such in Harold E. West (1866-1948), a reporter on the *Baltimore Sun*; in November 1910, he sold West a controlling interest in his journal, though he continued to edit the paper for ensuing six years. However, West quickly found that his Staunton situation paled in comparison to his former Baltimore one, and soon sought out buyers for his interests in the *Spectator and Vindicator*; so in April 1911, after just five months as a newspaper proprietor, West sold out to a local corporate group called the Staunton Spectator Corp., and returned to the offices of the *Baltimore Sun*. Then in November 1911, that company was acquired by the Augusta Printing Corp., parent company of the *Staunton Daily News*, which converted the *Spectator and Vindicator* into a weekly edition of that daily. The sale ended the independent identity of the venerable *Staunton Spectator*, even as the *Spectator and Vindicator* continued to be published until sometime in 1916. The lack of surviving numbers after 1911 makes the date that its publication ceased uncertain, but the end most likely came after Woodrow Wilson's reelection in November, given Turk's Democratic outlook and the president's local roots.

That the date of this long-lived journal's demise remains unknown evinces its marginality at the time it expired. The era of intensely-partisan journalism in the Valley had passed, only to be replaced by corporate journals designed to draw local interest to local affairs, rather than to the grand national debates that marked the era of the *Spectator's* birth. Still, given the paper's prominence for so much of the nineteenth century, its demise at the beginning of the twentieth seems a fitting conclusion, for America in this new era would be something that neither Kenton Harper nor Richard Mauzy could have comprehended.

Sources: LCCN nos. 83-026160, 85-026865, 85-054297, 85-026864, 84-024719, 86-071890, 84-024718, & 84-024720; Brigham II: 1155-1156; Cappon 1542, 1543, & 1550; Waddell, *Annals of Augusta County*; Peyton, *History of Augusta County*; Brown, *Freemasonry in Staunton*; Wilson, *Lexington Presbytery*; Tyler, *Virginia & Virginians*; Rice, *History of Greenbrier County*; Maxwell, *History of Hampshire County*; McCauley, *History of Franklin County, Penn.*; *Missouri Historical Records Survey* (1941); *Descendants of Henry Mauzy*; and notices in the *Alexandria Gazette* (1809-96), the *Richmond Enquirer* (1809-60), the *Richmond Whig* (1823-96), the *Washington National Intelligencer* (1810-60), the *Washington Globe* (1843), and the *Baltimore Sun* (1837-1911), as well as the above *Political Censor* (1808-09), *Republican Farmer* (1809-23), *Staunton Spectator* (1823-96), *Staunton Vindicator* (1860-96), and *Staunton Spectator & Vindicator* (1896-1911).