

## WELLSBURG 01: Wellsburgh Gazette

- 01: Charlestown Gazette (1814-1815)
  - 02: [Spirit of the Times] (1815-1817)
  - 03: Spirit of the Times and Wellsburgh Gazette (1817-1818)
  - 04: Wellsburgh Gazette (1818-1837)
- 

The only newspaper issued in Wellsburg before 1820 was a weekly advertiser published by print-tradesmen from Washington County, Pennsylvania. Its varying title has long masked its continuity, causing many authorities to suggest that Wellsburg could not actually support a newspaper before the 1820s. But its ties to the town of Washington and the new National Road there gave the paper a stability that let it survive for nearly a quarter-century.

The National Road was the keystone in the settlement of the Ohio River Valley downstream from Pittsburgh. Its construction began in 1811 with improvements to the road first built as part of General Edward Braddock's expedition against Fort Duquesne in 1755; then west of Washington's aptly-named Fort Necessity, a newly-built road was to traverse Washington County, Pennsylvania, to an Ohio River crossing at either Wheeling or Wellsburg; the War of 1812 slowed construction, so leaving a final decision on that river-crossing site until 1816. As Wellsburg was closer to the town of Washington than Wheeling, as well as being closer to Steubenville, then the largest town in eastern Ohio, many Washington residents thought the future of the Brooke County seat was brighter than that of the Ohio County seat, and moved to build commercial connections to Wellsburg, then called Charlestown.

### Origins

One of those Pennsylvanians was one Samuel Workman (459), a journeyman printer in the *Washington Reporter* office of William Sample (1786-1862); he had conducted that office and its paper during his master's absence while he commanded a county militia unit raised at the outset of the War of 1812; on Sample's return to Washington in the winter of 1813-14, Workman decided that he would publish a new weekly advertiser in adjacent Brooke County, and thereby benefit from the anticipated selection of Charlestown as the crossing point, while establishing himself as an independent tradesman. Accordingly, the paper that Workman established there in April 1814 was called the *Charlestown Gazette*.

That place name, however, seems to have been a factor in the recommendation made by the National Road's surveyors to cross the Ohio River at Wheeling; in 1814, there were two Charlestown in Virginia, the other being the seat of Jefferson County, and that duplication created confusion among migrants to the interior northwest; moreover, the route they had mapped across southern Washington County to Wheeling was less problematic than that to the north, and that fateful reality was something that became manifestly known in Brooke County shortly after war's end. In the fall of 1815, those surveyors would formally endorse Wheeling, and President Madison would approve their chosen route in the spring of 1816.

This was evidently a bitter pill for Workman to swallow. His paper was a mildly-Republican

journal, befitting its rural setting, and so had been an active supporter of both the Madison administration and the expansion of the Ohio River Valley export-trade that was the *raison d'être* of the town's existence. Now he decided that his fortunes had been ruined by the surveyors, and so advertised the sale of his press office in May 1815. Yet it appears that he did not receive a fitting offer and continued publishing his *Charlestown Gazette*, although probably in reduced circumstances, given the scarcity of surviving numbers today.

Still, the choice of Wheeling did not stifle the growth of this river-port town as much as was feared. Its proximity to Washington made Charlestown a workable alternative to Pittsburgh for water-borne transport, circumventing that town's growing dominance of the region's commerce. In return, Charlestown residents gained improved access to goods and services linked to the new National Road just twenty miles to the east, even as it by-passed Brooke County. These circumstances led to the growth of local industries – such as glass production and flatboat building – that gave the town a new identity; and with that identity came a new place name in December 1816: Wellsburg.

The first newspaper to carry that new name was also published by Workman: the *Spirit of the Times and Wellsburgh Gazette*. Yet the earliest surviving number of this weekly (from October 1817) indicates that this sheet was first issued in late December 1815, a full year before the change in name. This suggests that Workman reorganized his business between June and December that year, with the old *Charlestown Gazette* giving way to the new *Spirit of the Times* at some point in that interval; as it also indicates that the change in its title antedated the change in the town's name, the full title that Workman employed initially becomes a point of conjecture in absent surviving copies; given the form Workman utilized in 1817, his recast weekly was probably called the *Spirit of the Times and Charlestown Gazette* with the new place name supplanting the original one in January 1817, once news of the General Assembly's renaming-legislation reached the town.

Eventually, however, Workman was pulled back to Washington; his older brothers, who were his father's business partners, were either dead or dying, so threatening the family's financial footing; moreover, Sample's political undertakings drew him ever more frequently away from his *Reporter*. So in returning to his hometown, Workman could move beyond the constraints of a small-town newspaper to embrace a larger role in society; he could use his new-found wealth to assist the family's business affairs, as well as study law there, so as to become his family's legal counsel; he could also go back to Sample's employ and thereby accumulate the means to acquire the *Reporter* once elective office finally prevented Sample from owning a newspaper. Hence in January 1818, he sold his *Gazette* to printer John Berry (033) and returned to Pennsylvania; on June 1, 1819, Workman became the sole proprietor of the paper from whence his Wellsburg venture originally sprang.

### **Successions**

John Berry was a journeyman originally from Beavertown, Pennsylvania; he had printed the *Ohio Federalist* in St. Clairsville, forty miles west of Wellsburg, in conjunction with Charles Hammond (1779-1840) from May 1813 until November 1814; Berry then apparently joined Workman in Brooke County as his shop foreman. In buying his employer's newspaper, Berry

was following a course common in that era, especially in the small towns of the American interior, as had Workman in Washington. And like other new proprietors, Berry apparently made the journal his own by shortening its title to the *Wellsburgh Gazette*.

The change in ownership sharpened the *Gazette's* political edge, leading quickly to a dispute with Sample's ever-more Whiggish *Washington Reporter*. In October 1818, Sample printed a story that accused Berry of siding with his Democratic opponent, John Grayson (1783-1871) of the *Washington Examiner*, in a dispute over the veracity of Sample's reporting on a suit in the Washington County courts. Berry promptly countered Sample's assault by publishing an account of an ill-fated business transaction with the editor in 1816. While conducting the *Gazette* office for Workman, he evidently exchanged supplies frequently with the *Reporter* office; after completing one such exchange in April 1816, Sample told Berry to collect the balance due from that transaction from Workman; when he approached his master about payment, Berry was told that Sample had lied to him about any monies that he owed to his former master. Berry soon decided to sue Sample for the funds owed him, but found that he could not attend the scheduled court session in Washington; so he simply wrote a letter for Grayson to publish in his *Examiner* in May 1817 detailing Sample's fraudulent dealings; remarkably, Grayson failed to do so, leading Berry to file suit against Sample in the Brooke County Court; he won that case by default, and had the editor arrested for non-payment of the judgement against him when he next came to Wellsburg, so forcing him to resolve the debt in order to regain his freedom. Consequently, when Sample clashed with Grayson in 1818, he attempted to besmirch Berry's reputation by essentially reversing the narrative, claiming the printer was a swindler for not having paid for materials that he had delivered to Berry in 1816; that deceit brought a swift rebuke from Berry, reprinted by Grayson, in which the details of the formerly private exchange became public, supported by the court's records, thus proving Sample's duplicity.

This exchange is informative as Berry stated in his public exposé that "Messrs. Grayson and Sample ... are both of different politics for me." Indeed the three editors would soon evince the tri-partite division that marked the 1824 presidential election. Berry's *Gazette* became an avid supporter of John Quincy Adams, while Grayson's *Examiner* became a Jacksonian sheet and Sample's *Reporter* – having regained control of it from Workman in 1821 – became a resolute voice for Henry Clay. Yet the Ohio Valley counties of northwest Virginia would be strongly supportive of Jackson in 1824, and Berry clearly recognized the peril in continuing a pro-Adams paper in such an environment. So before the brewing political storm could end the viability of his weekly, he sold the paper in November 1822 to John Gruber (1797-1885), a young schoolmaster from Washington County with decidedly Jacksonian proclivities; yet Berry retained ownership of the Wellsburg printing office, so turning the *Gazette* into his customer, rather than his responsibility, and thereby profiting from its continuing success. Indeed, Berry seems to have been quite an entrepreneur in these years; in April 1812, he acquired the "tavern stand" adjoining his office and converted it into a hotel and reading-room with an "assortment of well selected Newspapers from various parts of the Union." This amalgam of business ventures eventually allowed Berry to retire in about 1827 to a life as a gentleman-farmer in northern Washington County, where he was killed accidentally in August 1867 while felling a tree.

As for Gruber, little can be said about the effect of his editorial efforts, as there are not any issues of the *Gazette* surviving from January 1824 to March 1827, a period that corresponds to the height of the heated 1824 campaign, and the subsequent dealings that made Adams president and left Jackson claiming that a "corrupt bargain" had deprived him of that office. Several of Gruber's political commentaries were republished in Grayson's *Examiner* in 1824, evidently a reflection of his standing in Washington County, but such pieces do not seem to have found an audience beyond the Wellsburg/Washington neighborhood. Indeed, a few recent histories of the town do not even mention Gruber's association with the paper at all, focusing instead on Rev. Joseph Doddridge (1769-1826), who is identified as the weekly's editor in 1824; the brother of the region's congressman, Philip Doddridge (1773-1832), the Episcopal minister and Brooke County justice authored the celebrated *Notes on the Settlement and Indian Wars of the Western Parts of Virginia and Pennsylvania from 1763 to 1783*, which issued from Berry's press that year; hence, Doddridge is regularly presumed to be the leading figure in the *Wellsburgh Gazette* office after Berry's withdrawal.

Gruber apparently had tired of journalism by the fall of 1826 and was then planning a move across the Ohio River to conduct a mercantile concern in rural Jefferson County, south of Steubenville, where he resided in 1827. It may be that the introduction of a second weekly paper in Wellsburg in September 1825 – *The True Republican and Wellsburgh Advertiser* of Solomon Sala – complicated matters for him; Sala was an associate of Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), a founder of the Disciples of Christ church headquartered at nearby Buffaloe Creek, as well as a member of his congregation; Sala promptly found himself in contention with Grayson over his faith and Campbell's evangelicism undercutting established churches in the neighborhood; that quarrel likely spilled over to Gruber's *Gazette*, making its survival problematic, and so inducing the journalist to move on to other pursuits.

Yet the date of Gruber's departure from Virginia is known only from a notice that appeared in Grayson's *Examiner* on October 28, 1826:

"We have received the first number of a new paper which has recently been commenced at Wellsburg, Va. by *Mr. Thomas Service*. It is printed on a super royal sheet and in all respects appears worthy of public patronage."

Grayson's phrasing suggests that Gruber had closed his *Gazette* before its apparent sale to Service, though that possibility cannot be confirmed, from an absence of surviving numbers and Service starting a new numbering scheme when he began publishing his newspaper. But Service's use of the same title that Gruber and Berry had indicates that his journal was a continuation of theirs, and so the linking of his paper to those of his predecessors in all of the standard bibliographies, a convention followed in this Index.

### **Perseverance**

Thomas Service (1795?-1839?) is the most enigmatic person associated with this periodical, even as he was its longest-serving proprietor. The italicization of his name in Grayson's note suggests that he previously had some association with the *Examiner*, while the *Reporter* did not again mention a sale or transfer of the *Wellsburgh Gazette* after Sample's ugly exchange with Berry in late 1818. There are several people named Service in the federal censuses for

Washington County in 1820 and 1830, although not one named Thomas, and his orphaned daughter died there in 1848, all implying familial ties to the county, even as a death notice for his wife appeared in New York City papers in early 1829.

In contrast to such uncertain origins, the editorial course Service followed in his *Gazette* was clear; it was openly Jacksonian. However, only four numbers of the paper under his control survive from the period of March 1827 to December 1830 – when a fairly complete series of surviving issues running through June 1833 begins – leaving his influence in Jackson's 1828 campaign undefined. That affiliation profitably carried his *Gazette* through the growing tide of opposition to Jackson in the early 1830s in western Virginia, where Brooke County stood out as a solidly Jacksonian place.

Yet, Service did face renewed competition in the form of a new weekly started there in May 1833. Sala apparently ceased publication of his *True Republican* in 1832 in order to expand his role in the Campbellite ministry; this opened a door for Daniel H. Polsley (1803-77), an up-and-coming Wellsburg attorney, to offer a Whig alternative to Service's *Gazette*; joining with Samuel R. Jones (b. 1808), also a printer in Campbell's circle, Polsley would conduct the new *Western Transcript* – originally known as the *Brooke Republican*, in an seeming attempt to connect with the supporters of Sala's late *True Republican* – until December 1845. With Polsley appealing to the region's anti-Jackson elements, in combination with the Campbellite colleagues of Sala and Jones, it is evident that Service was feeling pressed by October 1833, as he advertised the sale of his press then in Grayson's *Examiner*. That notice is remarkable as the publisher described eleven of the twelve founts of available type as "nearly as good as new," suggesting he had been able to refit his office during the 1832 campaign season, and that his fortunes had declined rapidly thereafter.

The only surviving number of the *Wellsburgh Gazette* after June 1833 is one issued March 10, 1836; as that bears Service's name, it is evident that he did not find a suitable buyer for his office in late 1833 and continued its publication, despite the seeming difficulties, much as Workman had done in the paper's earliest days. The latest reference to the paper found elsewhere is one published in a Canton, Ohio, weekly conducted by Sala's relatives in March 1837. That brief mention indicates that Service closed his *Gazette* sometime thereafter, but the exact date remains an unknown, as is his ensuing fate. He does not appear in the 1840 census anywhere in the country, and his daughter's 1848 obituary reports that he was then "the late Thomas Service." It seems clear that both he and his weekly were dead by the time that Dr. Andrew Hazlett issued the *Jefferson Democrat* in Wellsburg as a party campaign paper during the 1840 elections, or else that periodical would not have been necessary.

---

Sources: LCCN nos. 84-037801, 85-059573, & 84-037882; Brigham II: 1169-70 & 1175; Norona & Shetler 1383, 1389, & 1384; Rice, "West Virginia Printers;" Schweiger, "Campbell's Passion for Print;" Crumrine, *Washington County*; McFarland, *Washington and Washington County*; notices in the *Washington [PA] Examiner* (1814-67), the *Washington [PA] Reporter* (1818-48), and the *Wellsburg Gazette* (1814-33).

Brigham's discussion of Workman's paper reflects confusion between the two Charlestown then a part of Virginia's landscape; he was obviously unaware of the existence of the Brooke County one before 1816.