

WESTON 01: Western Star

01: The Western Star (1820-1822)?

The first newspaper published in Lewis County was a short-lived weekly that probably did not actually issue until 1821, so falling outside period covered by this Index. Title is included here in accord with an entry in the West Virginia bibliography of Norona & Shetler (1958).

The Western Star was a production of printer-publisher Gideon Butler (067). His origins are unknown, though he was a practiced journalist when he arrived in Weston. Butler had been a founding partner of the *Western Virginian* in Clarksburg with Alexander G. McRae (300) in late 1815; when McRae withdrew from the concern in April 1817, Butler ceased publishing that paper and reorganized his business before finally issuing the *Republican Compiler* in July 1818. His partisan perspective, however, led Federalists there in the summer of 1819 to bring William McGranahan (288), lately publisher of the *Monongalia Spectator* in nearby Morgantown, to conduct an *Independent Virginian* that would counter Butler's influence. After a year of apparently ruinous competition, Butler ceased publishing his *Compiler* in late July 1820 and advertised the sale of his press, claiming that a Republican paper was still a viable proposition in Clarksburg – although such did not issue there again until 1822.

It is clear that Butler then moved on to Weston, but the timing of his relocation is uncertain. Obviously, he had a press in hand when he began publishing non-newspaper titles there in 1821, suggesting that he had brought his Clarksburg press with him, after not having found a suitable buyer in the latter months of 1820. If so, Butler could have begun publishing the *Western Star* before year's end, as some authorities have supposed. Yet in the absence of any surviving copies, a starting date cannot be determined with any certainty. It is far more likely that this weekly did not appear until early in 1821, as issuing a new journal in a locale that had not supported one previously required an extended organizational effort before its first number appeared, often lasting as much as a year; so it seems Butler would not have had sufficient time to complete such a task in the four months that remained in 1820.

The lack of surviving issues also leaves unclear the date the *Western Star* expired. Donovan H. Bond, the long-time director of West Virginia University's School of Journalism, reported that Butler's office was lost to a fire in 1822, though a specific date has yet to be uncovered. Indeed, Butler's weekly is not even mentioned in the earliest published history of Lewis County (1920), reporting that the first county newspaper did not issue until 1847 – the *Weston Sentinel*, which actually began publication in June 1846 – so showing just how little impact the *Western Star* had made on the memories of county residents during its brief lifetime. And just as his paper has vanished as memory and artifact, so too has Butler; he is not again seen the archival record after 1822.

Sources: Norona & Shetler 1405; not recorded by the Library of Congress or in Brigham; Rice, "West Virginia Printers."