WILLIAMSBURG 01: VIRGINIA GAZETTE I

01: The Virginia Gazette (1736-1780)

xx: **The Virginia Gazette (1780-1781) in Richmond.**

The first newspaper published in Williamsburg was also the first published in Virginia. Begun in 1736 as the official journal of the colonial government, the weekly issued without major interruptions, under seven successive proprietors, until the spring of 1780 when the town was abandoned as Virginia's capital by the newly-independent state government. The paper followed that government to Richmond, where it continued for just another year.

The title *Virginia Gazette* has been one adopted by numerous papers in the state, especially during the "long eighteenth century." That label was essentially an assertion by its publisher for the legitimacy of the journal's content, and has its origins in the manuscript newsletters circulated among government officials in the Renaissance era that conveyed authoritative information. In British North America, the first journals printed in each colony were closely tied to the imperial administration of that colony and so embraced the term "gazette" out of course, leading to our current understanding of the word as an "official publication of a government organization or institution, listing appointments and other public notices" [per *O.E.D*]. And that definition precisely fits the function of the first *Virginia Gazette* when it was inaugurated in August 1736.

Contexts

Printing was deemed a problematic technology in the first century of the Virginia colony's existence, one that had helped to unleash the English Civil Wars of the 1640s, and so was intentionally excluded from most of Great Britain's overseas colonies until the opening decades of the 1700s. But as its colonies in the Americas grew, it became ever more difficult to administer those places without the use of locally-produced printed matter, particularly legal codes and decrees. Thus when Sir William Gooch landed in Virginia in September 1727 to act as the resident governor, he had been granted the authority to bring a printing press into the colony if he deemed it necessary. He was well aware of a four-decade-long dispute over publication of the laws enacted by Virginia's General Assembly, and was determined to bring that conflict to an end by having a compilation of those laws published somewhere in North America. Hence, Gooch was pleasantly surprised to find a petition from the public printer in the Maryland colony awaiting him when he arrived in Williamsburg, one asking for permission to publish just such a collection of Virginia laws in the neighboring colony, and offering to print copies of the laws passed at each Assembly – called session laws – from then onward, completing both on reasonable terms. Presented with such a ready solution to this long-standing problem, Gooch moved to conclude a contract with that printer when the Assembly next met in the spring of 1728.

His petitioner was one William Parks (321). He is believed to be an experienced printer from England who migrated to Philadelphia in 1725; there he learned of the then-open public-

printing concession in Maryland and pursued that prized appointment until granted the post in March 1726. Once established in Annapolis, Parks directed his proposal to print the Virginia laws at his Maryland office to the Governor's Council in Williamsburg, who deferred a decision on the matter until a new resident governor arrived the following year. So when Gooch landed, Parks not only offered a solution to a problem he was instructed to resolve, the printer gave him a more expansive option in regular publication of the Assembly's laws as well, which would make the operation of the county courts more reliable. Consequently, Gooch pressed the Assembly to hire Parks, and a contract was negotiated in short order.

Initially, Parks was contracted for just the two projects seen in his petition. But it appears that he soon found that his Annapolis office was incapable of meeting the needs of both the Maryland and Virginia governments, and so obtained Gooch's "leave" to establish a second printing office in Williamsburg in advance of the May 1730 Assembly, in order to fulfill his contractual obligations. Once that new office opened, it soon became apparent that having a press so close at hand now made it possible to print other government documents as well, particularly blank legal forms. As a result, the Assembly decided in 1732, undoubtedly with Gooch's consent, to make Parks the colony's official printer with an annual salary disbursed quarterly – something he had been denied in Maryland, where he was paid only on delivery of his imprints to each individual county. Yet in accepting the position, Parks sought and was given permission to use his press to produce other materials, provided that their production did not interfere with the work required by the government.

The flexibility embodied in this arrangement eventually gave rise to the *Virginia Gazette*, though Parks did not move immediately to publish such a journal. His erratic compensation in Maryland had induced him to begin publishing a weekly newspaper there (the *Maryland Gazette*) in 1727 in an attempt to generate the revenue he needed to sustain his press; after he opened his Williamsburg office, Parks was compelled to suspend publication of that weekly until he secured a partner to conduct it in his absence; but when that partner left Annapolis at the end of 1734, the only paper then issued in Maryland ceased publication, and Parks was hesitant to repeat the experience. He used the moment to consolidate his business in Williamsburg, informing his Maryland patrons that he would continue producing the work still required of him there, essentially reversing the scheme he had proposed to the Virginia government in 1726. The change in his relationship with the Maryland colony began a process that ended in 1737 with his dismissal as its official printer for negligence. But that termination evidently had little effect on Parks, who had acquired a more reliable patron in the government of colonial Virginia.

Parks Era

While Parks had been granted permission to conduct a newspaper, if he wished, it is clear that he understood that such a project could not depend on official notices alone to pay for its production; such items were simply too random and infrequent. Rather, it would have to rely on merchant advertisers for its sustenance if he was to offer Virginians a journal of their own. Consequently, the growing number of Scottish merchants in the colony became a key element in his decision to publish a newspaper in 1736.

By the 1730s, Virginia was experiencing a transformation of its economy that resulted from the Acts of Union of 1707 which created modern-day Great Britain. That unification allowed Scottish merchants to establish trading outposts in England's overseas colonies, supplanting the preceding consignment system where colonists utilized connections with merchants in England to exchange their agricultural produce for manufactured goods; now, ever more numerous factor stores traded directly with individual planters, both large and small, on the empire's colonial periphery; these novel mercantile establishments depended on printing to advertise their goods and services.

For Parks, the arrival of potentially lucrative advertisers, combined with Gooch's need for a vehicle to disseminate authoritative information, provided an auspicious setting for starting publication of a *Virginia Gazette*. Nonetheless, he was also prudent in his approach to this new offering. Its novelty meant that many Virginians were unfamiliar with such a periodical. Hence, Parks timed its appearance to correspond with the opening of the 1736 Assembly, issuing for the first time on Friday, August 6th, the day after that session convened. That moment was one where the greatest number of people would be gathered in Williamsburg at any time that year, so representing the largest possible audience for his new weekly, as well as a large portion of his probable subscribers. And over the ensuing seven weeks, he presented those prospective readers a neatly-printed journal carrying original compositions alongside the standard content of republished news from European newspapers and local advertising; in doing so, Parks made clear his commitment to the *Gazette's* motto, that it would be a sheet "Containing the freshest Advices, Foreign and Domestick."

In the early months that he offered the *Virginia Gazette*, Parks published a series of letters from a pseudonymous writer called the "Monitor." Several scholars have debated Monitor's identity, with one making a particularly forceful argument that the letters were a collective effort of students attending the College of William & Mary, as they evince a transference of themes and characters from the classical literature that dominated the school's curriculum to a contemporary colonial setting. While that may have been the case, the Monitor letters were more importantly a part of a lively manuscript literary culture in Virginia, one that was regularly refreshed by exchanges of writings during the meetings of the Assembly and the quarterly courts that drew so many people to the capital. Parks clearly understood the attractiveness of these pieces among potential subscribers, and so made the Monitor letters the lead article on his front page in twenty-two of the first thirty numbers he published; indeed, the first number of his *Gazette* that did not carry a missive from the Monitor was the one he issued on the day after the Assembly adjourned on September 23, 1736.

Yet the scholarly focus on the Monitor letters misses the larger reality that Parks was very much beholden to the governing elites in Virginia, as well as to Gooch, as can be seen in the early numbers not carrying one of those letters. By December, the *Virginia Gazette* became a vehicle for a dispute over the official conduct of former governor Alexander Spotswood (1676-1740). In 1720, he had been given a £500 appropriation to construct public buildings in and procure arms for the newly-formed county of Brunswick; by 1736, the Assembly had asked him five times to account for those funds, and did so again during that summer's session; Spotswood declined to provide such an accounting and published a letter in "a Philadelphia newspaper" justifying his conduct both before and of late. Sir John Randolph

(1693-1737), then the clerk of the House of Burgesses, took exception to Spotswood's publication, and had a long letter printed in the *Gazette* on December 17th, filling three of the paper's four pages in detailing the House's attempts to determine whether those funds had been used for public purposes or for the former governor's personal ones. Parks was undoubtedly obligated to publish his letter, not just because he represented the Assembly in this matter, but because Randolph had been one of the colonial leaders assigned to the project to publish the laws of Virginia and so was one of those who had hired Parks for that purpose. Of course, Gooch was also obligated to defend his predecessor, and so Parks published a similarly long response from Spotswood the following week, evidently at his patron's direction. Having now presented off-setting arguments in this controversy, Parks determined to cease publishing further letters on this matter, as Randolph was soon on his death bed. But after Randolph's death in March 1737, Col. Edwin "Ned" Conway (1681-1763), an influential and long-serving Burgess from Lancaster County, resumed the public assault on Spotswood's conduct with a letter that filled one-half of the *Virginia Gazette* on April 22nd. But this time Spotswood did not rise to the bait, choosing instead to have his son John send Parks a letter that quoted Aesop's fable of "The Lion and the Ass" as an appropriate terminus for the dispute, one that left Conway in the role of the braying ass to Spotswood's lion.

This controversy was the first political altercation that found a public forum in the *Virginia Gazette*, clearly with the acquiescence of the Governor and the Assembly, if not with their consent. It would not be the last such exchange, but it became the model for all subsequent dealings of the kind during Parks' tenure as proprietor of the colony's only newspaper. By balancing the published pieces from each side in these exchanges, Parks managed to stay out of the dispute, and so preserved his public appointment.

However, Parks' inattention to the proceedings of the Assembly in 1749 created a situation where his *Gazette* appeared to take sides in a legislative dispute in the Assembly, putting his public post in immediate jeopardy. In addressing legislation that would realign the border between Orange and Goochland counties, the House of Burgesses demanded access to the journals of the Governor's Council on the issue from twenty years earlier; when the Council refused their demand, the two chambers became locked in a lengthy stand-off that was not resolved until the closing days of the session a month later. But when the dispute began, the Council had ordered Parks to publish resolutions that they had adopted defending their right to operate without interference from the House; yet Parks was away from his office then, and so did not receive the order until the day after the House Speaker and the Council President agreed to remove any mention of the conflict from the journals of each chamber, printing those resolutions on what proved to be the last day of the session. As a result, the Speaker – John Randolph, the son of the late House clerk – brought Parks before the bar of the House under arrest for infringing the House's privilege of keeping out of public view the record of its deliberations; Parks was saved by the intervention of Gooch, who prorogued the Assembly shortly after his printer's arrest.

This episode arose from the growing divisions within the colonial government between the Crown (Gooch), the old Tidewater elite (the Council), and the House of Burgesses. Parks was answerable to each part of this government, and all three needed agree that he should

continue to be paid for his services. While Gooch remained governor, Parks was protected to a certain degree; but in proroguing the Assembly in May 1749, the governor announced his long-awaited recall to London as his reason, so leaving the issues that had occupied that session to his successor. Yet Gooch also cast doubt on Parks' future, as well as that of his thirteen-year-old *Virginia Gazette*, by leaving Virginia. Consequently, Parks decided to travel to England as well, ostensibly to buy the supplies needed to refit his Williamsburg office, but more likely to forge a new patron/client bond with Gooch's successor before that unknown person embarked for America. Unfortunately, Parks would never see Virginia again.

Hunter Era

William Parks departed Virginia in late March 1750. He left his printing office in the hands of its foreman, William Hunter (230); then about age twenty, Hunter had been apprenticed to Parks following the death of his father in 1742; having attained his majority by 1749, Hunter was legally able to serve in his master's stead while Parks was in England; his skills matched those of Parks by then, allowing the *Gazette* to continue in its owner's absence. Yet Hunter soon found himself in an unexpected position; Parks succumbed to a respiratory illness on board the *Nelson* days after it left Hampton Roads; news of his master's passing reached Williamsburg in early June 1750, compelling Hunter to suspend publication of the *Gazette* until Parks' affairs could be settled.

The weekly resumed publication on January 3, 1751 under Hunter's imprimatur. The young printer had secured the use of the Williamsburg printing office from Parks' executors in late 1750, and would acquire that office outright in June 1751. He was assisted in this process by his half-brother John Hunter, a major Yorktown merchant, and John Holt (222), husband of his elder sister Elizabeth. It appears that there were not any competitors in the sale of the press, as Hunter had inherited Parks' commission to print a new compilation of the colony's laws – the first attempted since the collection that brought Parks to Virginia was issued in 1733 – and the Governor's Council wanted the project finished before the new governor could convene a new Assembly that might interfere in the process. Consequently, Hunter had little trouble in restarting the *Virginia Gazette*, employing a slightly larger sheet than Parks had used, with more advertising content than had been seen previously.

Subsequent events indicate that Hunter was the beneficiary here of his half-brother John's connections. In July 1751, Robert Dinwiddie, surveyor-general (*i.e.* revenue commissioner) for British North America, was named to replace Gooch as Virginia's resident governor; he had resided in Virginia in that earlier role and served on the Governor's Council under Gooch; therefore, he was a logical candidate for the vacancy created by Gooch's recall, and many saw his appointment as a certainty by the time Hunter took control of Parks' press office. During that previous residence, Dinwiddie became a reliable friend to John Hunter, a relationship that continued and deepened once the new governor arrived in late 1751; so it appears that the merchant's financing of his brother's purchase of the Williamsburg printing office was both a familial investment and the act of a friend supporting the work of the new governor, to whom the printer was now bound as well. It was a linkage that Hunter fully embraced by adding the colony's coat-of-arms to the *Virginia Gazette's* masthead.

Hunter's decade-long tenure as proprietor of the Williamsburg printing office was one that was shaped by his close association with Benjamin Franklin. The Philadelphian had started a relationship with Parks during the 1740s that resulted in the two men sharing ownership of a short-lived paper mill near Williamsburg; now the experienced publisher took the younger printer under his wing as a mentor, a friend, and a partner.

A central concern that they both shared was the difficulty in distributing the wares of their businesses – including their newspapers – across a rural landscape with few good roads and a rudimentary postal system. That system had been degrading since the death in 1740 of its primary advocate, Alexander Spotswood, the former governor turned postmaster general; so it is not surprising to see Hunter and Franklin discussing plans to rebuild the system as early as August 1751; thus when the last of Spotswood's self-interested successors died in early 1753, both men sought his commission as "His Majesty's Deputy Postmaster General for all His Dominions in North America" so as to effect those plans. Famously, Franklin was denied that appointment as its solitary holder, being asked to share the post with Hunter instead, apparently the result of the intervention of John Hunter, who was then in London, while the two printers were not. Yet in dividing the commission, the imperial government created a highly-effective partnership. Hunter took responsibility for all of the system south of Annapolis, while Franklin was responsible for that to the north; and within three years the pair had turned a money-draining sinecure into a self-sustaining system that could return its surplus funds to the imperial treasury in London.

The southern portion was the least developed element of the colonial post office, extending only to Edenton, North Carolina, so leaving both South Carolina and Georgia dependent on sea-borne communication alone. Hunter built a reliable network south from Williamsburg to Charleston, and began to add east-west spur lines that connected to the primary north-south trunk route. His efforts proved beneficial to press offices throughout the region, but especially his own; the new routes and the regularization of the older ones made it easier for him to distribute the titles available in his Williamsburg office. Consequently, that office produced ever-greater numbers of both the weekly *Virginia Gazette* and the annual *Virginia Almanack* over the next decade, items which were then readily dispersed by post riders.

This steady expansion in the numbers and distribution of the *Virginia Gazette* were Hunter's primary contributions to its influence and legacy. Under his editorial supervision, the paper manifested little controversy, reflecting its proprietor's ties to Robert Dinwiddie, despite the social and political discord unleashed in Virginia by the governor's administration from 1751 to 1758. But for a significant part of Dinwiddie's term, Hunter was not actually in control of his weekly, thereby allowing others to use the paper as a vehicle for a public debate of the divisive policies promoted by the King's proxy in Virginia.

Upon their appointment as deputy-postmasters, Hunter and Franklin made a series of joint inspection tours to assess the system's deficiencies and plan for their correction. In July 1754, however, Hunter's health failed while waiting to join up with Franklin in New York, who was then attending the Albany Congress; he did not return to Williamsburg until the following spring, even though he had not fully recovered after a winter in Boston. When his health did not improve once back in Virginia, Hunter decided to seek help in England and

announced his intention to depart the colony in September 1755; when he finally embarked for England in June 1756, he would be gone for the ensuing three years.

In Hunter's absence, the Williamsburg printing office was conducted by John Stretch (407), his bookbinder. It proved an inopportune time to be managing a newspaper and press, as the French and Indian War had erupted during his master's first absence in the summer of 1754, and then spread to Europe (as the Seven Years' War) just when Hunter left Virginia for England. Thus Stretch quickly found himself in the middle of a conflict between Dinwiddie and the General Assembly over their conflicting fiscal and military priorities. Hunter had clearly understood that he needed Dinwiddie's support and so had not published anything harmful to the governor's policies in his *Gazette* while he was still in Williamsburg. But once he departed, it seems that Stretch shifted his attention toward the Burgesses, the ones who actually paid for the office's public work, meaning the *Gazette* became a forum for those dissenting from Dinwiddie's approach; this led the governor to complain to his superiors in London of "the dastardly Spirit of our Common People." Dinwiddie's pleas to be relieved from this deteriorating situation were realized in January 1758. His final report in London that summer brought pressure on Hunter to return to Virginia and reassert control over his renegade printing office.

Hunter returned to Virginia in July 1759, bringing with him two reputable and experienced journeymen: Joseph Royle (368) and Alexander Purdie (345); within days of his return, if not hours, Hunter purged the office's personnel, Stretch in particular, and replaced them with Royle, Purdie, and likely others. Consequently, the *Virginia Gazette* slid back into its former role as the authoritative voice it was before Hunter departed – a loyal servant to governor and empire. More importantly, at least in the short term, Hunter also effectively masked the role that the new resident governor, Francis Fauquier, may have had in reestablishing government control over the office, thereby stifling any complaints among the Burgesses about Stretch's removal. Such a role is likely, as Fauquier promptly made Hunter a justice of the York County Court and induced the Assembly to increase his salary that November.

Royle Era

Once Hunter resumed his positions as office manager, newspaper proprietor, public printer, and deputy postmaster general for British North America, Joseph Royle became his primary assistant – and sometime surrogate – in those varied roles. A surviving account of Hunter's office in the spring of 1760 suggests that Royle well understood the necessity for the press to meet the mandates of the imperial government, and that he had little tolerance for the amusements afforded to visitors in the office by Purdie, his gregarious Scottish journeyman; Royle was all business, while Purdie was affable. Thus it was unsurprising that when Hunter finally died in August 1761, the sizable burden of conducting Virginia's sole printing office fell to the twenty-nine-year-old Royle alone.

The consequent shakeup of the office made Royle into both an independent tradesman and a member of Hunter's family. Over the following three months, Royle managed the press in the same fashion that Hunter had, resulting in his appointment as printer to the colony at the start of the next Assembly session in November 1761; two weeks later, he married

Rosanna Hunter, his late master's younger sister, with whom he had formed an early bond; their marriage provided continued support for one of Hunter's two dependent siblings. In his will, the late master printer offered Royle a half-interest in the office if the journeyman would conduct the business for the equal benefit of himself and his "natural son," William Jr. (231), who had been born to one Elizabeth Reynolds before his English journey. Royle accepted Hunter's conditions, securing new financing for the office from merchant William Holt, brother of the now-departed John Holt, who was married to his wife's sister Elizabeth. Holt had recently set-up a press of his own in New York City – after becoming a part of the printing trade in Connecticut as the partner of James Parker (1714-70), a long-time Franklin associate – so making this Virginia transaction one within the larger sphere of an extended family business. In forging these personal and professional alliances, Royle took firm control of his own destiny, despite suggestions to the contrary by some modern-day scholars.

The only element of Hunter's legacy that Royle did not acquire was his role as the deputy postmaster for Britain's North America colonies; that plum went to John Foxcroft, Francis Fauquier's personal secretary. This change in the existing arrangements reflects Fauquier's instructions to reassert the royal prerogative, and thereby limit dissent in the colony, in part, by monitoring the flow of information through this conduit. Controlling the content of the *Virginia Gazette* – which did not miss a beat in the shift from Hunter to Royle – was part of that effort. As a later commentary reported, it was common knowledge during the Royle years that his newspaper "was constantly carried to a certain house in Palace street to be inspected before it could be seen by the publick." So when political tensions began to rise after 1763, Royle found himself pressed from two directions: the governor and the House of Burgesses, with each wanting to use him and his press for their ends.

The pivotal test for Royle came in the spring and summer of 1765 with the Stamp Act crisis; his actions then are the source for the subsequent portrayals of him as someone hostile to the interests of Virginians. Once news of Parliament's enactment of the acts reached North America – one that imposed new taxes intended to raise the monies needed to retire the debt from the recent war with France and pay for the administration of Britain's now-larger empire – a fierce political debate erupted. In Virginia, the General Assembly was meeting when that news arrived in May, inducing Patrick Henry to propose five resolutions opposing the act and rejecting Parliament's authority to enact any legislation affecting the colonies; the House of Burgesses passed four of Henry's resolves and ordered that they be published in Royle's *Gazette*. Incensed, Fauquier had the resolutions torn from the manuscript journal of the House, ordered Royle not to publish them, and then dissolved the Assembly.

Eventually, the "Virginia Resolves" did find receptive publishers, starting with the nearby *Maryland Gazette* of Jonas Green and William Rind (358), but they never found space in Royle's weekly, in conformance with Fauquier's order. Shortly thereafter, Royle published a commentary written by Pennsylvanian Joseph Galloway (1731-1803) that argued a middle ground between the two extremes of the dispute, an essay that was published in only one other American paper, that of David Hall (Benjamin Franklin's partner) in Philadelphia. In this attempt to broaden the debate, Royle came across, at best, as supporting Parliament, or at worst, an unthinking tool of the now-reviled governor. Royle clearly felt threatened by the tense situation in the Virginia capital, just as his health began to fail; so he quickly left

Williamsburg to "recover his health," just as Hunter once had, landing in the New York City residence of brother-in-law Holt; he remained there until after the Stamp Act took effect on November 1st, leaving his foreman Purdie to conduct his paper and press in his absence.

Purdie was, of course, still constrained by what Fauquier allowed into print in "his" *Gazette*, which limited Purdie's reporting on the ensuing riots that summer and fall in America's port cities, as well as the continent-wide Stamp Act Congress convened in New York in October. That meeting forged a plan of non-cooperation with the act by simply refusing to buy any object or employ any service subject to the tax. Newspapers would require tax stamps, so all of the publishers in the colonies agreed to suspend publication their papers when the act took effect. Remarkably, the final pre-act *Virginia Gazette* issued by Purdie on October 26th included a half-sheet supplement that Fauquier did not censor, whether intentionally so or not being allowed to do so is unclear; the extra described the arrival of the colony's stamp agent, George Mercer, an attorney from Fredericksburg who had been in London for much of that year, and how he had been compelled to accede to the authority of the Assembly, promising not to sell stamps if that body did not want him to issue them – a victory for the Burgesses over the governor and Parliament.

Sometime in November 1765, Royle returned to Williamsburg, apparently in expectation of the birth of his second son Hunter (on December 10th); however, the printer still was not a well man, despite his New York stay. The cause of his decline remains unknown, but it was clearly some sort of wasting disease and his end came on rapidly after his return. On Sunday January 26, 1766, the thirty-four-year-old Royle succumbed to his disease, leaving behind a twenty-seven-year-old wife, two infant sons, and a complicated estate that would not be settled until early in 1775. But more importantly, publication of the *Virginia Gazette* still had not been resumed, even as publishers elsewhere defied the Stamp Act by issuing untaxed newspapers.

Breaking Entail

Royle's estate was still linked to young Billy Hunter as a result of his father's 1761 will; now Royle attempted a similar entailment to provide for both Hunter and his sons; in his will, he allowed Purdie a share of the family's printing business if he would provide for all three of the boys. But Purdie declined the offer, determined to chart his own course in business, free of encumbrances from his predecessors. He forged a partnership with John Dixon Sr. (140), a Williamsburg merchant who had also been Royle's business agent; together they crafted a plan to separate the assets of the printing office from both Hunter's and Royle's estates via a business that they alone profited from. Meanwhile, Dixon would provide for all the minor children, first by becoming Billy Hunter's guardian, then by marrying Rosanna Hunter Royle (together, they would have eight more children), and finally by assuming the administration of Hunter's and Royle's estates. Thus the firm of Purdie & Dixon drew on their predecessor's resources without responsibility for their debts; they bought the printing apparatus Royle had owned, rented the building Hunter had owned to house it, and continued the *Gazette* without interruption until Billy Hunter came of age at the end of 1774.

Still, Purdie & Dixon faced the challenge posed by those Burgesses who thought Purdie had

been too compliant to Fauquier. Landon Carter (1710-78) of Richmond County, for example, had avoided supporting Royle's office with his patronage by employing the Annapolis office of Jonas Green to publish his pamphlets on the Stamp Act dispute; now the Northern Neck Burgess became part of an effort to bring William Rind, Green's foreman, to Williamsburg to succeed Royle as Virginia's public printer. But with the General Assembly in adjournment until November 1766, Purdie was the only individual in Virginia with a press in the months after Royle's death, and so fulfilled the public-printing contract by default until that next session. Rind did not have a competing press in place until May 1766, two months after Purdie & Dixon began their partnership. And in that interval, Purdie waged a campaign in the pages of the *Gazette* to temper, if not to refute, the perceptions of his subservience to Fauquier, a shift that the governor complained of bitterly to his superiors.

Accordingly, when news of the Stamp Act's repeal reached Virginia, the event was loudly trumpeted in Purdie's *Gazette*. Then within days of that news, John Robinson – the long-serving Speaker of the House of Burgesses and Treasurer of the Virginia colony – died. It quickly became apparent that Robinson was bankrupt, and that by commingling his finances with the colony's, as was a common practice of the time, he had left the colony responsible for his enormous debts. The *Virginia Gazette* of Purdie & Dixon proved an open outlet for discussions of this controversy, often publishing correspondence from the principal arbiters of the ensuing settlement – especially from the new treasurer, Robert Carter Nicholas, as well as from others commenting on the affair. And then when Col. John Chiswell, a marriage relation of Robinson's, was released illegally on bond following his killing of a Prince Edward County merchant a month later, their *Gazette* benefitted from its ability to obtain and print the scandalous story before the Rind's alternative *Gazette* could. So by the time Rind was finally elected the public printer that November, Purdie & Dixon had successfully forged an identity that plainly separated them and their *Gazette* from the earlier prejudices.

Over the ensuing seven years, Purdie & Dixon published a newspaper that, for the first time in Virginia's history, was not supported by the public treasury. Their weekly's survival, which surprised the Assembly faction supporting Rind, resulted from a multiplicity of factors. Most significant was the diversified nature of the Purdie & Dixon office; unlike Rind – whose office was dependent on the Assembly's largess and was generally limited to producing his "official" *Gazette* – their business sold an ever larger variety of imported books, acted as a business-agent for distant merchants, and produced considerable numbers of job-printing items, while publishing almanacs and pamphlets in bulk for resale at merchant-factor stores throughout Virginia. While these pursuits subsidized their *Virginia Gazette*, but also gave it a broader advertising custom than Rind's *Gazette* had. The financial sustenance that all these activities provided their office meant Purdie & Dixon could offer a larger printed-sheet each week than Rind, with a correspondingly greater breadth of content, whether informational, entertainment, letters, or advertising; these features made their *Gazette* more popular with distant subscribers. That popularity meant that their newspaper was also aided by Dixon's control of the colony's postal system; designated as Hunter's successor as Virginia's post-master by Franklin in 1761, it appears Dixon now impeded distribution of Rind's *Gazette* to the advantage of his journal, if Rind's published complaints are to be believed. Collectively, these elements ended any dependence upon government subsidy that the original *Virginia*

Gazette still retained when Royle died in early 1766. Indeed, they combined to produce the first identifiably "modern" newspaper to be published in Virginia.

Dixon Struggles

Yet the long partnership of Purdie & Dixon eventually came to an end, as originally planned, at the close of 1774. Billy Hunter had now come of age and so was entitled to the interest in the establishment granted him in his father's will. On December 1, 1774, Dixon and Purdie announced the impending dissolution of their concern, with Purdie revealing that he would soon publish a new *Virginia Gazette*, the third of that title, which first issued on February 3, 1775. Meanwhile, Dixon retained the assets of their concern and formed a new partnership with young Hunter; he also retained the services of three printers trained in their office: Daniel Baxter (027), William Prentis (340), and Thomas Nicolson (315) – the tradesmen that Dixon now relied upon for their skills. Thus the original *Virginia Gazette* continued without interruption through this major transition, it's first without an accompanying death.

The new Dixon & Hunter press office was visibly larger than Purdie's was, but each thrived, a result of the growing customer base the two men had forged between 1766 and 1774. But this familial operation would now be forced into the background as the Revolution opened. Following his father's death, Hunter was dispatched to Philadelphia to acquire an education under the supervision of Benjamin Franklin; but as he was then resident in England, the task fell to William Franklin, his Loyalist son, who was now royal governor of New Jersey; it was a situation that led to a well-known, life-long friendship between them. Consequently, the Dixon & Hunter press office and its long-lived *Gazette* became suspect entities, increasingly scorned by Virginians as the war erupted and progressed.

With their *Gazette* being pressed financially by this perception, Dixon & Hunter struggled to sustain its publication. By the winter of 1775-76, all three of the then-extant *Gazettes* were forced to trim the size of their sheets for want of proper paper. By spring 1776, Purdie had returned his paper to its former scale, but Dixon & Hunter were compelled to reduce their sheet further, issuing a half-sheet, four-page edition that mimicked its prior presentation, though contained less than half of the content of the original. Tellingly, this *Virginia Gazette* never resumed its former size and composition while it was still published in Williamsburg. The successive reductions meant that the Dixon & Hunter *Gazette* carried far less editorial content than did Purdie's paper, being obligated by financial considerations to devote as much as four-fifths of the space available in their weekly to advertising. Moreover, they were left without the possibility of government support once Purdie became Virginia's new public printer in May 1775, following the unexpected deaths of William Rind in August 1773 and Clementina Rind in September 1774.

Yet despite the familial ties that had brought them together in 1766, Dixon and Hunter were politically estranged by the end of 1778. Dixon determined that he would continue in the print trade with the assistance of Thomas Nicolson, now the shop's foreman, and split the assets of Dixon & Hunter with his young partner. Dixon kept the press, the *Virginia Gazette*, and the right to collect their firm's many debts in the dissolution, while Hunter secured their considerable book stocks and maintained a bookstore in the printing-office building that he

now owned. The last Dixon & Hunter *Gazette* was issued about December 4, 1778, the date of the last number known, and reappeared as an imprint of the firm of Dixon & Nicolson on February 12, 1779, evincing a two-month publication suspension to complete the complex dissolution.

The separation evidently saved Dixon financially, no mean feat in the hyper-inflationary environment of Revolutionary-era Virginia. However, Hunter was destroyed fiscally by this abrupt ending; he saw scant patronage for his bookstore during the war, and was suspected of spying for the British fleet patrolling the Chesapeake; hence, he fled to Lord Cornwallis's protection when his Southern Army arrived in Virginia in the summer of 1781; accordingly, Hunter was forced to leave the state with his new patron after the surrender at Yorktown; impoverished and embittered, the Loyalist publisher left North America at the war's end, seeking patronage and assistance from an exiled William Franklin in London. Ironically, his subsequent Loyalist claim, filed under the terms of the Treaty of Paris of 1783, was rejected by British authorities who thought that he had overstated his losses.

Closing Years

The new firm of Dixon & Nicolson struggled through the remainder of the war years, but so too did Alexander Purdie. Supply shortages and financial disruptions plagued both offices, as they did all Virginia businesses during the war. While this meant that the original *Virginia Gazette* continued only in its reduced form, its advertising patronage provided sufficient motivation and compensation for its continuation.

In contrast, those common problems undermined Purdie; by the time that Dixon ended his affiliation with Hunter, his old partner and friend was under investigation by the Assembly for negligence in office as a result of growing delays in producing the public work caused by those problems. But before he could be cleared of misconduct, Purdie died unexpectedly in April 1779, leaving his office and his contract in the hands of his two untried nephews, John Clarkson (093) and Augustine Davis (119). Faced with marked uncertainty over the ability of Clarkson & Davis to complete the required work, the Assembly decided to split the public contract between Clarkson & Davis and Dixon & Nicolson – a decision that subsidized the older concern and its venerable *Virginia Gazette* for the first time since 1766.

Still, both of Williamsburg's two remaining printing offices – the Rinds' office having closed in February 1777 with the departure of that shop's foreman, John Pinckney (325), for North Carolina – now faced an unprecedented challenge. That 1779 Assembly had decided, at the insistence of then Governor Thomas Jefferson, to move the seat of the state's government to Richmond before the May 1780 Assembly met. With Purdie's affairs still in a shambles, Clarkson & Davis claimed a financial inability to relocate their office to the new state capital, and asked the Council of State for the funds needed to make the move. When their appeal was denied, Dixon & Nicolson became the new public-printers by default.

Dixon apparently understood the transitory nature of their situation, however, as Jefferson had been authorized to find and hire a more-reliable replacement for both Williamsburg presses in Philadelphia before the move to Richmond was completed. So Dixon simply sent his press office to Richmond in Nicolson's care, keeping his household in Williamsburg.

Throughout this process, the original *Virginia Gazette* continued to be published. The last number issued in Williamsburg appeared on April 8, 1780, the day after the business of the state government had ended in the town. The closing piece in its news columns was a short note announcing that the paper would move as well:

> "The printers hereof think it a duty … to inform their good customers in the lower parts of the country, and the public in general, that they propose removing their office to the town of Richmond immediately, which will suspend the publication of this Gazette two or three weeks; and as soon as they can get properly fixed, their best endeavors shall not be wanting to forward the paper by post as usual."

The next day, Dixon & Nicolson published a supplementary sheet that carried news received by mail after they had finished setting their paper the day before, seeming an effort to clear their office of outstanding advertising commitments before the move; that half-sheet marks the end of the original *Gazette's* residence in Williamsburg. The town would continue to be served for the rest of that year by Purdie's *Gazette*, now conducted by Clarkson & Davis.

The initial number of the *Virginia Gazette* issued in Richmond appeared on May 9, 1780, a week after the first General Assembly convened there; its last would be issued just a year later, on May 19, 1781. Over the course of those twelve months, Dixon & Nicolson and their weekly would both benefit and suffer from British military predations in the Upper South. Initially, their firm's position as Virginia's public printer, and that of their *Gazette* as the state's journal-of-record, was unexpectedly extended in October 1780 when the new press office of James Hayes (207), Jefferson's chosen successor in those roles, was lost to a British warship in the Chesapeake Bay while enroute to Richmond. But in January 1781, their office was one of many homes and businesses in the new state capital trashed by a British raiding party led by the turncoat Benedict Arnold. That event was followed in April by the arrival of the leading elements of Lord Cornwallis's Southern Army; the government fled west from the city, first to Charlottesville, and then Staunton; Hayes was finally about to start his long-delayed commission then and joined the exodus, leaving Dixon & Nicolson, once again, as the sole printers and journalists in Richmond. Still, the partners were compelled to suspend publication of their weekly following the issue of April 21, 1781, as a result of the military activity, even as they remained in the capital city; they attempted to resume publication on May 19th, but the number that they published that day proved to be the last of the original *Virginia Gazette*. Transport links and trade arrangements with the North were disrupted by the presence of massed British forces in central Virginia, and that situation continued until the Franco-American force under the command of Washington and Rochambeau laid siege to Cornwallis at Yorktown in September. Consequently, not a single newspaper was issued in Virginia thereafter until December 1781.

By that time, Dixon and Nicholson had decided to part company, bringing the possibility of resurrecting Virginia's first newspaper to an end. Nicolson retained the tools he employed to produce the *Gazette* in Richmond, and used them to publish a new weekly on December 29th – *The Virginia Gazette and Weekly Advertiser* – in partnership with William Prentis, another former Dixon & Hunter apprentice. Their journal found an energetic competitor in the semi-official *Virginia Gazette or the American Advertiser* of James Hayes, first issued just

a week before that. This rivalry contributed to Dixon's reluctance to return to journalism; he did not move to the capital city until 1783, when he too offered Richmond a new mercantile advertiser – *The Virginia Gazette and Independent Chronicle* – in league with John Hunter Holt (223), a son of John Holt and his wife's sister, who had published *The Virginia Gazette or Norfolk Intelligencer* in 1775, the first Virginia paper published outside of Williamsburg.

Sources: LCCN No. 84-024739; Brigham II: 1158-1163; Hubbard on Richmond; Rawson, "Guardians;" Wroth, *William Parks*; Arner, "Life of the Virginia 'Monitor';" *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*; York County Records Project files for Parks, Hunter, Royle, Purdie, Dixon, Nicolson, Clarkson, and Davis at Colonial Williamsburg Research Dept.; *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*; *Virginia Council Executive Journals* (1684-1775); *Journals of the House of Burgesses* (1684-1775); *Journals of the House of Delegates* (1776-81); *Journals of the Virginia Conventions* (1775-76), and notices in the succession of this *Virginia Gazette* (1736-81).