

WINCHESTER 07: Philanthropist

01: The Philanthropist (1806-1809)

The seventh newspaper issued in Winchester before 1820 continued a decade-long series of short-lived Republican journals printed on the same press by successive proprietors. The shortness of their lives reflects the dominance of the local Federalist weekly that each was intended to counteract. This sheet was the third title in the run, replacing a troubled paper that had expired a year earlier, and which then survived for three years.

During the 1790s, the *Winchester Gazette* of Richard Bowen (045) was the only newspaper published in this market town; it was a mercantile advertiser that served as the primary Federalist journal in the lower Valley of Virginia. Local Republicans first contested Bowen's primacy in July 1799 by embracing the plan of George Trisler (419) to publish the *Triumph of Liberty* there in conjunction with one John Hass (205). On Hass's retirement in early 1803, Trisler engaged journeyman Peter Isler (235) to conduct his press for him; at the end of that year, Trisler closed his partisan weekly and sold his entire office to Isler and Joseph Harmer (201), a former apprentice. The resulting firm of Isler & Harmer offered the next challenge to Bowen's *Gazette* in March 1804; but their *Independent Register* lived no more than a year, folding when Harmer left Virginia in early 1805 after Jefferson's second inauguration. Isler attempted to resurrect that weekly in January 1806, but failed in the effort; as a result, he too decided to leave Virginia, selling the press acquired from Trisler to his shop foreman, Joseph A. Lingan (266); he would issue this challenge to the *Gazette* in March 1806.

Lingan was a journeyman who came to Winchester from one of the many press offices in the District of Columbia. The date he arrived is uncertain, as is his origin; but he was clearly part of the Isler & Harmer office and may have worked on this now twice-sold press from its beginning. Although now the owner of a viable job-press, Lingan evidently needed financial assistance in order to publish a successor to the late *Independent Register*; he found such in the person of Matthias E. Bartgis (025), the fifteen-year-old son of the Frederick, Maryland, publishing entrepreneur Matthias Bartgis (024). The father had published Winchester's first newspaper between 1787 and 1791, but he was forced to close that weekly in the face of determined competition from Bowen's advertiser; now he had an opportunity to return the favor. The son had already been dispatched once as his father's representative in publishing the *Gettysburg Gazette* with William Underwood, frequently an associate of the father; that year-long association made the younger Bartgis a suitable assistant for Lingan, as well as a source of capital for the new project; consequently, he was noted first in the proprietary name of Bartgis & Lingan.

The first number of their weekly, *The Philanthropist*, appeared on Tuesday March 18, 1806. While their motto – "We will bestow Justice on the Oppressor and We will Vindicate the Oppressed" – presented a defiant attitude much like that of its predecessors, the partners' prospectus evinced a far more conciliatory posture:

"Sensible of our humble abilities, we will not promise too much, but hoping we

possess one quality in common with a great portion of our neighbors, namely *common sense*, which as a celebrated poet observes—"Can only be the gift of Heaven, Although no science fairly worth the seven"—with a small portion of it and an ardent desire to please our readers, our determination to vindicate principles purely Republican, we hope will offend no individual; as we are long-established in these sentiments, we shall oppose those doctrines which we believe are at enmity with them or PHILANTHROPY — as an advocate for Religious and political Liberty..."

In employing a line here by Alexander Pope (1688-1744) from the first of his *Moral Essays*, the young journalists were making an appeal to both the hearts and minds of their potential readers. They deemed common sense an essential part of political discourse, yet such was not based in "the seven" sciences, but rather in the divine; still, they went on to stress that their journal was wedded to those parts of the seven sciences (or liberal arts) that were the basis of all learning – grammar, logic, and rhetoric – and not the invective and ridicule that pervaded partisan journalism at this time. This perspective was one also fostered by the itinerant Virginia bookseller Mason Locke Weems (435), who had offered small measures of "political love powder" in two tracts entitled *The Philanthropist* in 1799; the fidelity of their views to those of the celebrated "bookselling parson" suggests that those works influenced both the choice of a title for their journal and its editorial direction.

With the appearance of the *Philanthropist's* second number a week later, Bartgis and Lingan made it clear that they were truly supporters of "the principles and policy of the present administration" that they claimed to be in their introductory address. Earlier that month, John Randolph of Roanoke, the vocal intraparty opponent of the Jefferson administration, made a speech before the House of Representatives assailing the president's foreign policy; the pair reported that they were declining to publish Randolph's speech, "it being lengthy, and impregnated more with ridicule than information." Thus the journalists demonstrated that they lacked any tolerance for the subversive attitudes of the so-called *Tertium Quids* in the face of the ever-more hostile opposition of the Federalist party and its organs.

The Philanthropist apparently maintained a consistent course over the ensuing three years. The lack of references to the paper in journals elsewhere indicates that the weekly did not engage in polemics, as the proprietors had promised, and so it was not quoted or abused by other journalists. Rather, the most controversial pieces seen in its pages are articles that were republished from some of the more provocative Republican sheets of the day, such as the Philadelphia *Aurora* of William Duane (1760-1835). The partners were similarly prudent in their business practices; as only twelve numbers of this paper survive, it is clear that they produced short print-runs every week, evidence of tightly-controlled expenses, but also of a limited distribution. That strategy replicated the one employed by the senior Bartgis for the entirety of his career; indeed, he replaced his son as a partner to Lingan with the end of the paper's first volume/year, so that the scion could start a new weekly in Rockville, Maryland.

Yet such a well-mannered approach was not one usually associated with the elder Bartgis, indicating that Lingan was the editor in this arrangement. However, it was an approach that served *The Philanthropist* well. When the Congress enacted the Embargo Act in December 1807, the belligerent tone of the country's Federalist papers rose to levels that probably

exceeded those seen during the Alien & Sedition Acts dispute a decade before. Bowen's *Gazette*, the voice of Frederick County's merchants, was especially harsh – a remarkable choice given the popularity of Jefferson's administration in that neighborhood. Then, at the height of this controversy, Bowen died, leaving his paper and press in the hands of William Heiskell (211), his shop's foreman; the son of Winchester merchant Frederick Heiskell, the new owner had been raised as a German-speaker, which made his English-language writings grammatically tortured. That disability was often ridiculed by Republican journalists for the duration of his tenure as proprietor of the *Gazette*, but not by Lingan; rather his approach was to simply dissect his opponent's comments in terms of the foundational "sciences" he had cited in the 1806 prospectus – grammar, logic, and rhetoric – and then let his readers decide the trustworthiness of Heiskell's remarks. It no doubt helped his business that the future of the *Winchester Gazette* was then very much in doubt; Bowen died intestate, so compelling Heiskell to collect all outstanding debts just as the flow of ready cash withered; the *Gazette's* financial situation was not resolved until after the election that fall, which limited its ability to entice voters away from the Republican party, even as the neighboring counties of Berkeley and Fauquier were drawn into the Federalist ranks via the exertions of the mercantile advertisers published in Martinsburg and Leesburg. Hence *The Philanthropist* helped assure an overwhelming majority for James Madison that fall in Frederick County.

Despite this success, and the apparently stable foundation supporting their partisan weekly, the partnership of Bartgis & Lingan came to an end in the spring of 1809. The latest number known is that of February 28, 1809, though its publication likely ceased two weeks later, as the March 14, 1809 issue would have completed paper's third volume/year. The weekly was then "suspended" in order to effect a settlement between Bartgis and Lingan. As Lingan still owned the press and continued as a job-printer as before, it is unclear how long it took for that settlement to be realized. But it is clear that the suspension became an actual cessation of *The Philanthropist* in fairly short order. Three months later, in June 1809, Lingan offered an entirely new weekly – *Democratic Lamp or Winchester Aurora* – in his name alone. Thus he would publish two different Republican papers with the press that Trisler had brought to Winchester in 1799; Lingan would also hand that mantle on to a successor in 1810.

Sources: LCCN No. 84025991; Brigham II: 1164; Morton, *Winchester*; Russell, *Winchester*; name authority file, Handley Memorial Library, Winchester; Dolmetsch, *German Press*; Wayland, *German Element*; Wust, "Matthias Bartgis"; Scharf, *Western Maryland*; Thomas, *History of Printing*; notices in *The Philanthropist* (1806-09).