

WOODSTOCK 01: Woodstock Herald

- 01: The Woodstock Herald (1817-1820)
 - 02: The Woodstock Herald & Shenandoah Weekly Advertiser (1820-1823)
 - 03: Shenandoah Herald (1823-1825)
 - 04: Sentinel of the Valley (1825-1831)
 - 05: Sentinel of the Valley & Shenandoah and Page Advertiser (1831-1836)
 - 06: Woodstock Sentinel & Shenandoah and Page Advertiser (1836-1838)
 - 07: Sentinel of the Valley & Shenandoah and Page Advertiser (1838-1841)
 - 08: Sentinel of the Valley (1841-1848)
 - 09: The Tenth Legion (1848-1862)

 - xx: Shenandoah Herald (1865-Present)**
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The only newspaper published in the Shenandoah County seat of Woodstock before 1821 was a weekly advertising sheet that was instigated by the county-court's long-serving clerk. Its nearly half-century-long life came from its advocacy of the Jacksonian outlook of most residents, leading to the weekly becoming a well-recognized Democratic organ.

Following the War of 1812, the chief political and business leaders of Shenandoah County came to see that they needed a journal-of-record for legal notices and proclamations, as well as a mercantile advertiser to aid the development of the county seat, Woodstock. At that time, the only press in the county was the religious one conducted in New Market by the Henkel family, which was dedicated entirely to their Lutheran ministry. Thus that small market town depended on journals in Winchester and Staunton for such work, papers that were increasingly challenged by the growth of population and commerce throughout the valley, and so ever more focused on patrons in their particular locality.

Among those leaders was Philip Williams (446), the well-respected clerk of the county court who had served in the role since 1789; his grandfather had come to Virginia in the early 1700s and settled in Culpeper County; his uncle John migrated to Shenandoah County after the Revolution, where he was elected county clerk in 1784; he brought his nephew Philip to Woodstock to assist him, with the young Williams succeeding to that office at just eighteen-years-of-age upon the death of his uncle; he would serve in that office until June 1845. In late 1816, he determined to bring a printer to Woodstock to provide both job-printing and a newspaper there, so breaking the town's long dependence on the two larger entrepôts to its north and south.

Beginnings

His search for such a person came to fruition in 1817 when he met a printer from Alexandria named Benjamin Lewis Bogan (037). Born into a fairly well-off Spotsylvania County family, Bogan attended the College of William and Mary until the start of the War of 1812; he enlisted and presumably served with distinction, as he mustered out at the rank of Major.

At war's end, he settled in Alexandria where he learned the printing trade while employed by John A. Stewart (402), a major bookseller and publisher there, formerly partner to Peter Cottom (107), in the well-known firm of Cottom & Stewart. In July 1816, Bogan established a small printing office in Alexandria, probably serving as a job-press for Stewart, given their existing relationship; he was so employed when he was approached by Williams to come to Woodstock to discuss relocating his new press office to Shenandoah County.

Bogan travelled to Woodstock sometime in mid-1817 and was evidently convinced by what he saw there and who he met there to move to this Valley village. Williams financed the arrangement by becoming Bogan's partner in the new *Woodstock Herald*, which issued its first number on December 24, 1817.

While apologizing for a "considerable delay" in their initial publication schedule, Williams & Bogan reported that they were:

"...happy in commencing this paper at a period so propitious as the present; when the tumults of party are hushed; when in the possession of peace, prosperity, and all the blessings of civil and religious liberty, this country exhibits to the eyes of the world the superior excellence of the Republican form of government, and commands universal respect and admiration. Such distinguished blessings call for the highest gratitude to the Almighty Giver of every good, and become doubly dear when the situation of other countries is taken into view. ... The striking contrast between our condition and theirs, while it affords an evidence of intelligence and virtue in this country, without which no free government can exist, shows also the necessity of cultivating the human mind and extending the influence of truth by which alone the liberty we enjoy can be perpetuated. With due attention to these objects, we may fairly anticipate a long continuance of our liberties."

The new weekly was clearly an immediate success, confirming the partners' assessment of its potential viability. Its success is also evinced by Bogan's ability to buy Williams out of the business at the end of the *Herald's* first six months of publication. With issue of July 1, 1818, Bogan became sole proprietor of the weekly, and remained such until June 1823.

Over the course of those ensuing four years, Bogan forged extensive personal and business links to this Valley town. In June 1819, he married Sarah Ott (1801-67), a daughter Michael Ott (1772-1849), a sizable merchant-planter from a family of early Shenandoah County settlers; that union made Woodstock a significant part of his life from then on, especially as Bogan now joined other members of the Ott clan in non-publishing ventures. In November 1822, he used the proceeds realized from the *Herald* to combine with John D. Ott (1802-70), his wife's brother, and Mathias Zehring, Jr., her cousin, to buy "the entire stock of Goods of Mr. Michael Ott and Mr. Abraham H. Hoffman's" as the firm of Mathias Zehring & Co.; two years later, Bogan and Ott bought the interest of their kinsman-partner in this dry-goods concern. From 1823 on, Bogan also was involved in his father-in-law's dealings in land and town lots, eventually owning three 1/2 acre lots in Woodstock proper, as well as a farm in neighboring Hardy County.

In October 1822, as he began to pursue these ventures, Bogan offered to sell his weekly:

"The Editor wishing to decline the printing business, offers for sale this Establishment, with or without the accounts due the office. Those wishing to purchase can tell, from the face of the paper, the quality of the materials on which it is printed."

Bogan evidently failed to find a suitable buyer as, at the end of the ensuing May, he rented his paper and office to James H. Smoot (1799-1841), a young lawyer in the county. He then mortgaged the property involved to John A. Stewart, his old mentor, and William Johnston, husband of a sister of Bogan's wife and the town's postmaster, to infuse all of his business interests with new capital; following the death of Johnston's wife, the mortgage was sold in late 1830 to Samuel H. Davis (126), the publisher of the *Winchester Republican* and a close friend of Bogan's from his Alexandria days. Some histories of Woodstock report this transfer of Bogan's mortgage as a transfer of the ownership of his newspaper; rather, it was simply a restructuring of his indebtedness with the help of friends and family, while he retained an interest in the weekly until late 1834.

Transitions

Smoot's tenure as proprietor of Woodstock's sole newspaper was problematic, however. First, he was required to employ a printer, who apparently expected a share of the paper's profits, so reducing Smoot's income; that printer was Jonathan Foster (1803-24), seemingly the son of the like-named founder of Davis's *Winchester Republican*; so when Foster died unexpectedly in October 1824, Smoot was forced to reorganize his financial arrangements. This process was complicated by the fact that Smoot was then supporting the presidential candidacy of John Adams rather than that of Andrew Jackson, the favorite of most county freeholders. These circumstances obliged Bogan to resume sole ownership of the weekly to save the paper when Smoot was unable to settle his debts the following July:

"I hate prodigiously to say farewell; but poverty kicks a man out of doors, even when the savoury perfume from the kitchen reminds him that dinner is nearly ready. In plain parlance, had I cash enough, the *Shenandoah Herald* should be my own, but not being in possession of the needful, I must quickly back out, with the consolation that a hundred years hence I shall have forgotten all about it."

Smoot had renamed the journal during his two years at its helm, and would soon provide another title for the paper. Relieved of the fiscal obligations that had burdened him before July 1825, he now began soliciting subscriptions for another Woodstock weekly to be called the *Sentinel of the Valley*; but by the end of October, Bogan and his kinsmen had brought an end to that project; with the issue of the *Herald* published November 5, 1825, Bogan gave the weekly the title of Smoot's proposed competitor and folded his subscriber list into that of the older sheet. The price of the absorption was apparently a three-month-long minority interest in relabeled paper; yet by March 1826, Smoot had left Woodstock for Salisbury, North Carolina, where he proposed publishing another weekly, *The North Carolinian*; that paper never issued and Smoot returned to Shenandoah Country, where he later defaulted on his sureties as a deputy sheriff.

These 1825 reorganizations placed the recast *Sentinel of the Valley* even more deeply into the hands of the Bogan-Ott family. The business was now conducted under the firm name

of Ott & Bogan; brother-in-law John D. Ott became lead proprietor, while his cousin Samuel Ott (1793-1868) served as editor and Bogan divided his energies between his many business interests. During this period, they apparently employed a printer named William Keating; his identity is uncertain given the commonness of his name, though he may have been the like-named Alexandria apprentice who, in 1820, briefly fled his indenture with John Corse (106) and Nathaniel Rounsavell (367), the proprietors of the *Alexandria Herald* and Bogan's frequent correspondents before their journal closed in 1826.

Bogan ultimately divorced himself from this Woodstock weekly in late 1834; at that time, he and his familial-partners sold the paper and press to James H. Darlington (1804-79), the former publisher of the *Baptist Monitor and Political Compiler* in Bloomfield, Kentucky. The sale allowed Bogan to finally discharge the mortgage now held by S. H. Davis, who used the proceeds to acquire the *Wheeling Gazette*, in combination with those gained from a sale of his remaining interest in the *Winchester Republican*. Bogan had already relocated his still-growing family to the District of Columbia by then, evidently in late 1830; there he became a "general agent," a surrogate for buyers and sellers of property and land there, replicating his Shenandoah real-estate business; he continued in that role for more than thirty years.

Darlington's tenure as proprietor was just as problematic as Smoot's had been, if not more so; it was certainly shorter. First, he overextended his resources by enlarging the newspaper and refitting its press, which added considerably to his debts. Then his editorializing often found fault with Jackson's choice of a successor in Vice President Martin Van Buren, which soon alienated him from his Jacksonian patrons. A resulting loss of advertisers and readers cut into Darlington's revenues, just as pressure from county Democrats grew, so compelling him to yield control of the *Sentinel of the Valley* to a more-reliable partisan editor. In early 1836, as that year's political campaigns began, Darlington gave way to Robert F. Ferguson, Jr. (1815-82), a talented young lawyer in the county, who was eldest son of Winchester's Campbellite minister, Robert French Ferguson (1790-1862). The new editor promptly hired his younger brother, Jesse Babcock Ferguson (1819-70), as his shop foreman; he had trained in the office of the *Winchester Republican* and was then working at a Baltimore book-press, making him, perhaps, the most experienced tradesman employed in Woodstock to date; he remained part of the office until about 1840. Yet Darlington was still the legal owner of the press, and so the subject of law suits filed by his creditors for defaulting on his debts.

In November 1836, a court-ordered sale of Darlington's property resulted in the paper and press being sold to Samuel C. Williams (1812-62), the youngest son of the weekly's founder, Philip Williams. That purchase may have been facilitated by the new owner's close ties to the Bogan-Ott clan, the apparent beneficiaries of the forced sale – Williams was married to a daughter of John D. Ott, who had been named for Bogan's wife Susan. He issued the first number of his *Sentinel* on December 9, 1836 and continued to do so until May 1839.

Over the course of those thirty months, Williams conducted the *Sentinel* in harmony with the views and interests of this decidedly Jacksonian area of Virginia. Yet he would also be called to serve the county as clerk of its court. From 1835 to 1845, Williams served as his father's assistant, and over that time, he took on an ever-larger part of his responsibilities.

By the spring of 1839, it appears that the son decided that conflicting demands on his time embodied in his roles as assistant county-clerk and journalist required that he chose one over the other; so with issue of May 2, 1839, he sold the *Sentinel*. Williams succeeded his father as clerk in 1845 and served in his own right until his death in 1862.

The new owner of the *Sentinel of the Valley* was James Valentine Rigden (1810-44). He was a Maryland-trained printer who had turned to the Methodist ministry about 1830; in the winter of 1838-39, Rigden was responsible for the clerical circuit that included Shenandoah County and its neighbors, but he developed health problems that soon prevented him from riding his given circuit; so he retired from ministry temporarily, found relief in Woodstock, and purchased the highly-popular *Sentinel* from Williams to provide him an income while he recovered. Consequently, Rigden was the editor in charge of this Democratic weekly during the 1840 elections. Even as that campaign resulted in a victory for the Whigs, it confirmed the domination of the Jacksonians in Shenandoah and Page counties, which regularly gave Democratic candidates 90% of their votes from 1828 to 1860; such was the case in that year as well, despite the continuing economic crisis attributed on Van Buren, the Democratic incumbent. So it is clear that an outsider's transitory stewardship of the *Sentinel* did not at all damage that Democratic unity.

Indeed, it was during Rigden's tenure that the term "tenth legion of American democracy" came to be one commonly associated with the central Valley and the *Sentinel*. As Jackson's administration drew critics, it became evident that certain locales in the country contained significant concentrations of the president's supporters, places that were overwhelmingly agrarian and far from the urban settings where the Whigs thrived. This part of the Valley was such a place in Virginia, though others were seen in central New York and northeastern Pennsylvania. The loyalty shown Jackson in these locales was equated in the popular mind with that once shown Julius Caesar by his favored Tenth Legion, a familiar story then from the schoolbooks of that day; hence, the use of the term as a partisan descriptor for those particular regions, as both a complimentary and derogatory term. The phrase took on ever-greater significance after 1840 as the counties of Shenandoah, Page, and Warren – all once part of "Old Shenandoah" – were discussed collectively, without distinction, as Virginia's "tenth legion" in papers of both partisan persuasions.

In spring 1841, his health restored, Rigden decided to resume his ministry in the Methodist Church, and accepted a posting to Roanoke County, 150 miles to the south. Clearly, the new assignment required that he sell this Woodstock weekly, which he evidently did that May. Yet it also appears that Rigden's health remained precarious, as he died unexpectedly early in 1844 while serving at his ensuing posting in Hagerstown, Maryland.

Continuity

The *Sentinel of the Valley* now passed into the hands of Rigden's principal assistant, John Gatewood (1819-76). Years later, Gatewood recounted that he had joined the office in 1833 as a "devil" (*i.e.* as an apprentice), before rising to journeyman, then shop foreman, and last editor, before acquiring the business from his employer in 1841. That chronology indicates he was trained initially in the Bogan-Ott shop, and so had ties to the circle of county leaders

who helped their court clerk to launch the paper; indeed, his grandfather was part of the Shenandoah committee that supported Jefferson in 1800, together with Michael Ott. So it is not unreasonable to suggest that Gatewood's presence in that office in 1839 was key to the purchase of the weekly by Rigden and to local Democrats' acceptance of the young cleric as its custodian. And being just twenty-two at this time, that same circle undoubtedly enabled Gatewood's purchase of their partisan journal. One member of that group was certainly his father-in-law, Col. Samuel [Baehr] Bare (1790-1842), long a justice of the county court and commonly a delegate to the General Assembly between 1820 and 1840; Gatewood married his daughter Emily weeks before he bought the *Sentinel* from Rigden, and then moved the office into a Woodstock storefront that Bare had owned shortly after the justice's death. As a result of such firm support, this local tradesman conducted the weekly for two decades, becoming the longest serving proprietor in its history.

Over the course of the 1840s, Gatewood's paper was a determined foe of the Whig papers that thrived in Winchester and Staunton, as well as the larger ones issued in Richmond and Alexandria. The Valley journals helped deliver a majority vote for Henry Clay in the counties to the north and south of "Old Shenandoah" in 1840 and 1844, even as that Democratic bastion voted overwhelmingly for Van Buren and Polk. But when the national party split over the slavery question during the 1848 election, that unanimity was threatened. So in order to buttress the resolve of local Jacksonians, as well as to assist the state party's efforts, the publisher altered the title of his paper to stress the need for partisan loyalty at this critical juncture: on June 22, 1848, the *Sentinel of the Valley* became *The Tenth Legion*.

Still, the fickle economics of partisan journalism evidently complicated Gatewood's conduct of Woodstock's only newspaper. In 1850, he sold a half-interest in his long-lived weekly to Frederick Scheffer (1819-72), a recent German immigrant who kept a hotel in Woodstock; that same year, Gatewood printed a corrected and enlarged edition of Samuel Kercheval's popular *History of the Valley of Virginia* in an apparent effort to enhance his revenues. The infusion of capital resulting from these transactions clearly allowed Gatewood to continue publishing his *Tenth Legion*, as it survived until at least March of 1862.

In those dozen years, Gatewood's sheet evinced a decidedly pro-slavery viewpoint, despite the fact that less than 5% of the area's residents were slaveholders. That perspective was one consistent with the region remaining the "tenth legion of Virginia democracy," and so staying loyal to the state-party platform. Indeed, when Virginians were asked to vote on the ordinance of secession in May 1861, "Old Shenandoah" overwhelmingly agreed to disunion, while the rest of the Valley – both to the north and south – evinced considerable majorities against secession. So it is not surprising that Gatewood promptly enlisted in the volunteer militia regiment raised in the wake of that referendum, taking command of Company C in the Tenth Legion Minute Men. But as that unit was assigned to the defense of the Valley, and so did not leave the area, publication of Gatewood's paper continued uninterrupted even as hostilities commenced between Federal and Confederate forces.

But in February 1862, a Federal army under the command of Gen. Nathaniel Banks invaded the Valley, intent on disrupting the lines of communication and supply in western Virginia. The newspapers of the Valley became a particular target of those forces, with the presses in

the towns from Woodstock north being either seized or destroyed before that army at last withdrew in May. Consequently, Gatewood's *Tenth Legion* was one of the casualties of that focused campaign, ceasing publication in March 1862 when "Old Shenandoah" became the chief battleground between the opposing forces.

Legacy

Late nineteenth-century histories of the area all report that the *Tenth Legion* was published intermittently during the war, though there are no issues known extant today for any date after January 1861. If such was the case, those numbers were printed on presses not owned by Gatewood, given the fate of his press at Federal hands. Thus that reputed continuance has given rise to assertions in local folklore that Gatewood's association with the post-war *Shenandoah Herald* represents a resumption of a suspended paper, rather than the start of a new weekly. But the imprint record and the testimony of Gatewood's son indicate a clear break between the two periodicals.

When the *Shenandoah Herald* made its first appearance on October 6, 1865, its publication was reported widely throughout Virginia; those notices invariably described the *Herald* as being a "new paper" issued by the new firm of Trout & Gatewood, and that its success was probably assured by the participation of Gatewood, "formerly editor of the *Tenth Legion*, published at the same place before the war." James S. Trout (1838-1905) was a lawyer from Woodstock who had been Gatewood's second-in-command with Company C of the *Tenth Legion* Minute Men. Trout was the managing partner in this concern, as Gatewood was then living in Harrisonburg, where his son attended the academy that became James Madison University; he likely contributed to the *Herald*, but his absence from Woodstock indicates that this weekly not a continuation of the old *Tenth Legion*, but rather a successor.

The Trout & Gatewood partnership apparently expired in October 1868, as Gatewood then acquired a half-interest in Harrisonburg's *Old Commonwealth*, which had started publication just 5 days after the *Herald*. About six months later, Trout sold Gatewood's interest to John Henry Grabill (1829-1922), the person who is most often identified as the owner of this title from his ensuing 53-year-long connection with it. During that long tenure, Grabill frequently claimed the *Shenandoah Herald* had a direct connection to the original *Woodstock Herald*, which seems to be the origin of the oft-repeated accounts in the older histories of the town, especially as one of his daughters penned one of them. Yet during his tenure, Grabill was regularly a junior partner in the proprietary concern that actually owned the *Herald*, rather than being its principal, as has also been commonly reported.

Grabill first became sole proprietor in early 1871, when Trout removed to Front Royal to begin publishing the *Warren Sentinel*. But by mid-October 1876, the weekly's stated owner was the Shenandoah Herald Publishing Co., showing that Grabill had sold portions of the paper to others; among them were the Woodstock merchant Daniel H. Burner (1813-73) and lawyer Harrison Holt Riddleberger (1843-90), the future U.S. Senator. Burner's estate sold his shares shortly thereafter, with the *Herald* being reported as "Riddleberger's paper" in other journals. Riddleberger had been a part of the competing *Shenandoah Democrat*, and had broken with the party as a Readjuster, so instigating his shift to *Herald*; when that

paper folded in May 1884, he became the principal in The Herald Company when the *Herald* absorbed the defunct paper; this reorganized firm included Luther S. Walker (1857-1907), the new county-court clerk, and Grabill. This arrangement continued until Riddleberger died in June 1890, when his interest in the *Herald* passed to his widow, Emma Virginia Belew Riddleberger (1846-1916); after declaring herself sole proprietor, she did not yield control of the *Herald* to Grabill until July 1893, at least 17 years after he had last held such primacy.

The chain of ownership of the *Shenandoah Herald* is much clearer from this point on. Grabill remained the titular proprietor of the weekly until his death in February 1922 at the age of ninety-three; daughters Mary Caroline Grabill (1874-1979) and Eleanor Grabill Haun (1888-1976) succeeded their father. Early on, they were assisted in the effort by William Bland Allen (1873-1941), a grandson of John Gatewood, and John Blue Locke (1873-1949), another local lawyer. Mary (Marne) retained ownership of the *Herald* until 1953, when it passed out the Grabill family to a series of short-term publishers. In February 1974, the last of those owners sold the journal to the Page Newspaper Corp., a company formed by the politically-influential Byrd family of Winchester; that firm became the Page-Shenandoah Newspaper Corp. in 1984, and then Byrd Newspapers, Inc., which currently publishes a lesser version of the venerable weekly under the title of the *Shenandoah Valley Herald*.

NB: The standard histories of the towns and counties of the Shenandoah Valley reflect the influence of self-interested, late-in-life personal memoirs – particularly those of Civil War veterans – and the limitations of the primary sources used by John Walter Wayland (1872-1962), the renowned Valley historian, in his numerous studies. Modern scholars have been led astray in their regular, unconditional acceptance of the veracity of such narratives. This account results from a determined effort in assembling this Index to check such histories against the documentary record, particularly with contemporaneous newspaper articles.

Sources: LCCN nos. 95-079482, 86-092561, 86-071925, 85-054318, 95-079486, 95-079484, & 86-092553; Brigham II: 1168; Cappon 1728; U.S. Newspaper Directory; Library of Congress; *Artisans & Merchants*; Wayland, *Shenandoah County*; Johnston, *Old Virginia Clerks*; Gatewood, *Apache Wars Memoir*; Fuller & Page, *Woodstock 250th Anniversary*; and notices in *Alexandria Herald* (1816-26), *Alexandria Gazette* (1816-76), *Richmond Compiler* (1817-26), *Richmond Enquirer* (1820-61), *National Intelligencer* (1822-60), *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (1865-1922), *Staunton Spectator* (1865-92), *Lynchburg Virginian* (1865), and the *Baltimore Sun* (1876-93), as well as *Woodstock Herald* (1817-24) and *Shenandoah Herald* (1876-1910).