

WYTHE 03: Wythe Gazette

01: Wythe Gazette (1821-1827)

The third newspaper published in Wythe County likely did not issue until late 1821, though an earlier date cannot be discounted because of the resettlement of its proprietor there in mid-1820. That removal was apparently prompted by financial failure in Abingdon, which also seems to be the cause of this Evansham paper's later demise.

The publisher of the *Wythe Gazette* was a practical printer named John Gano Ustick (421). Trained in Philadelphia, this son of noted Baptist minister Thomas Ustick (1753-1803) came to Virginia in 1804 to join John McMullin (298) in publishing the *Rockbridge Repository* at Lexington; after McMullin closed his fiscally-troubled paper in August 1805, Ustick moved to Abingdon where he began publishing the *Holston Intelligencer and Abingdon Advertiser* in January 1806, the town's first newspaper. That weekly was a stable venture as a result of its being "uncompromising in its Republicanism" and so supporting "the policies of Madison and supporting his administration upon all occasions." His partisan focus was reinforced by a retitling of the weekly in 1812 as *The Political Prospect*. Yet the monetary contraction that accompanied the Panic of 1819 apparently changed Ustick's situation dramatically. The publisher was compelled to cease publishing his Abingdon weekly sometime in 1819.

Probate records in Wythe County indicate that Ustick relocated to Evansham (now known as Wytheville) in early 1820. At that time he entered into a long-term lease for the printing office owned by the late Robert Engledow (158); he had published the *Republican Luminary* (Wythe 01) almost a decade before with William A. Dromgoole (149), his printer/brother-in-law; Engledow may have induced Ustick's relocation – as he had Dromgoole's in 1808 – but died before a partnership-agreement could be forged. That Ustick was then forced to lease Engledow's press reveals that he did not bring with him the tools he had used in Abingdon, likely evincing their seizure in Washington County as collateral for outstanding debts there; moreover, it is clear that Engledow's executors were wary of Ustick's financial standing, as the proffered lease forbade Ustick's removing the press from the town, so retaining their control of a valuable asset of the estate. So it is clear that Ustick suffered a major financial reverse in Abingdon in 1819, and was either pushed out of town by that problem, pulled to Wytheville by a proposition from Engledow, or most likely both.

The earliest surviving number of the *Wythe Gazette* was issued in June 1823, which yields a calculated starting date of November 3, 1821. But as Ustick is known to have been settled in Evansham by mid-1820, it is not impossible that the weekly was started far earlier than that date and suffered a suspension that interrupted the numbering sequence – so the inclusion of this title in this Index of pre-1821 Virginia newspapers. The termination of the *Gazette's* publication is equally obscure. The latest surviving number of this title was issued in May 1827, leading most authorities to report the weekly's cessation in that year; but the next paper issued in Wythe County began publication on July 4, 1828; so while it is clear that the *Gazette* expired sometime in those intervening fourteen months, it could have survived into

1828, which is when Ustick retired from the printing trade, according to a late nineteenth-century family history.

The timing of the demise of Ustick's journal seems to have been the result of both political and financial issues. The paper's surviving numbers indicate that its publisher became an ardent supporter of Henry Clay after 1820, so placing his paper ever-more out of step with the Jacksonian inclinations of residents in the southern Valley of Virginia, especially after the divisive results of the 1824 election. The succeeding *Western Virginia Argus* appears to have been a Jacksonian campaign sheet that ended its run with the Tennessean's victory that fall. So it is likely that Ustick's paper gradually lost support after 1824, and was closed before the 1828 election campaign, being replaced by the Jacksonian *Argus* that July.

Ustick remained in Wythe County until 1834 when he removed to Sumter County, Alabama, a county formed in 1832 out of the land concessions compelled from the Choctaw Nation in 1830. Settling in the county seat of Livingston, Ustick lived out his days surrounded by the next generations of his family; he died there in September 1844 at the age of sixty.

NB: The shift of Ustick's business from Abingdon to Wytheville has led to some confusion in bibliographic sources over its timing and the newspaper titles involved. The 1903 *History of Southwest Virginia* by L. P. Summers appears to be the source of that confusion, given the few surviving copies of each Ustick paper that he saw; his assessments were repeated by Cappon, though not by Brigham. Successions and titles reported here are drawn from more recent secondary sources and from records of the U.S. Newspaper Program (1982-2011).

Sources: LCCN No. 85-027034; not in Brigham; Cappon 1737. U.S. Newspaper Directory, Library of Congress; Kegley, Wythe County; Summers, Southwest Virginia; Ustick Family Register.