

MARCH OF THE “CORPS EDITORIAL:” DEVELOPMENT OF JOURNALISM IN NORTH  
CAROLINA, 1796-1860

by

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North Carolina print culture enjoyed significant and steady expansion after the appointment of James Davis as state printer in 1749. Though often marginalized in a national context, North Carolina’s newspapers developed in influence and number steadily from 1749 to 1860. First called to publish a uniform rendering of state law, North Carolina’s leading newspapers became heavily politicized in the 1790’s despite the pressures of the 1798 Sedition Act. The first attempt to create a nonpartisan, popular paper emerged in 1808. As politicized weeklies sought patronage from officeholders and their benefactors, nonpartisan success proved that subscribers and advertising patronage could fuel profits independently from politics.

This thesis follows a chronology of newspaper development and economy in the state as it evolved during the late colonial and antebellum period. It examines the financing required to both establish and maintain presses and surveys the returns on newspaper investments for owners, the benefits to professionals engaged in the day-to-day printing trade, and the significance to North Carolinians. This study argues that editors leveraged political power was steadily augmented and leveraged into commercial success by editors during the period from 1749-1861.



March of the “Corps Editorial:”

The Development of Journalism in North Carolina, 1796-1860

A Thesis

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By

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## INTRODUCTION

North Carolina's newspapers filled an organizational void in party politics throughout the Early National and Antebellum periods. Alongside partisan papers grew nonpartisan, religious, and temperance newspapers. In aggregate, antebellum North Carolina possessed a vibrant, diverse print culture serving political, economic, and social interests throughout the state. The U.S. Census of 1850 indicates that slightly less than 75 per cent of white North Carolinians over 20 years of age were literate. The free black adult population possessed a similar literacy rate. North Carolina's early journalists capably (and profitably) published to a demanding and diverse reading public.

At the heart of these printing enterprises stood a collection of exceptional North Carolinians who were partly responsible for the journalistic tradition in the state as it exists today. The state's major editors during the antebellum period were resourceful, empathetic, and enterprising. Those who developed flourishing subscriber lists, ad revenue, and political patronage were extraordinarily influential in state and local affairs alike. The wielding of that influence differed as it evolved across several generations.

James Davis, Andrew Steuart, and Adam Boyd pioneered printing in North Carolina during the second half of the eighteenth century. The General Assembly summoned Davis, then printing in Virginia, during April of 1749 to serve the state government's printing needs.<sup>1</sup> Davis moved to the capital in New Bern and started North Carolina's first newspaper, the *New Bern Gazette*, in 1751.<sup>2</sup> Steuart first moved to North Carolina around 1759, because governor Arthur Dobbs wanted to remove Davis, but the General Assembly disagreed. Steuart was left jobless on

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<sup>1</sup> George W. Paschal, *A History of Printing in North Carolina* (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1946), 5.

<sup>2</sup> *New Bern Gazette*, November 15, 1751.



arrival and settled in Wilmington to begin the *North Carolina Gazette and Weekly Post Boy* in 1764.<sup>3</sup> Steuart's tenure depended upon wealthy patrons:

On settling in Wilmington [Steuart] was encouraged and patronized by the most respectable people in the colony; but he soon lost their confidence and fell into discredit. It is said that he opened some letters to a gentleman of distinction and made their contents known.<sup>4</sup>

Without the trust of the politically powerful in Wilmington, Steuart had no hope of continuing his paper. He discontinued the *Gazette* in 1767, after only three years of operation.

Adam Boyd succeeded Steuart in 1769, purchasing the press after Steuart's death. Boyd's tenure as the third and final colonial North Carolina editor was unremarkable other than a 1775 incident when the Royal Governor Josiah Martin witnessed his publication of inflammatory remarks against the crown. According to nineteenth-century historian Stephen Weeks:

It was in the *Cape Fear Mercury* that Gov. Martin saw on June 20, 1775, 'a most infamous publication importing to be the resolves of a set of people, styling themselves a Committee for the county of Mecklenburg, most traitorously declaring the entire dissolution of the laws, government and constitution of this country.'<sup>5</sup>

Boyd's connection with the *Mercury* ended with his enlistment with the Continental Army that same year. Although Stephen Weeks has identified some evidence that papers were published during the Revolutionary period, he was unable to locate copies in the late nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> This study examines these colonial printers' successors during the antebellum period.

The first generation of editors in the Early National Period conducted bitter feuds in the name of partisan politics, most notably in Raleigh during 1798-1800, when Federalist and Republican papers squared off in pursuit of political influence. This work examines the strategies employed by rival editors in Raleigh to gain influence around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Along

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Weeks, *The Press of North Carolina in the Eighteenth Century* (Brooklyn: Historical Printing Club, 1891), 30.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

with fighting amongst themselves for patronage, editors reaffirmed the culture of slavery for their own benefit, and in the case of Allmand Hall, catered to the unique needs of the planter class to expand the editor's role in the community. Hall's unique advertising strategies demonstrated the ability of the North Carolina editor to establish his paper in its community through its *economic* potential, instead of the more prevalent *political* avenues to success.

After the War of 1812 and the onset of the Era of Good Feelings<sup>7</sup>, Thomas Henderson Jr. singlehandedly brought a nonpartisan weekly to prominence. With it, he developed a moral imperative that became the foundation for North Carolina's unique brand of journalistic ethics. This credo was grounded in the understanding that every editor owed due service to his state – specifically, his readership. Honesty became a non-negotiable virtue, but its meaning faded as Henderson left the profession and the emergence of Whigs and Jacksonian Democrats gave rise to a second wave of partisan newspapers. Thomas J. Lemay served as a major standard bearer for this new wave of partisan editors, along with Seaton R. Gales, son of Joseph Gales, a major player in the partisan editorializing of the First Party System. It was in this climate that the apprenticeship system produced an editor of truly transcendent ability and purpose. This was a man who served as an employee in Lemay's print shop before thoroughly eclipsing his success. William Woods Holden's takeover of the *North Carolina Standard* in 1843 constitutes the culmination of editorial development in antebellum North Carolina.

The level of sophistication and growth charted from the Federalist Period to Holden at the peak of his powers was remarkable. In the space of two generations, editors went from seeing their liberties nearly demolished in 1798 with the passage of the Sedition Act to having in

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<sup>7</sup> A period between the First and Second Party Systems characterized by minimal political partisanship and many unopposed or lightly contested elections nationwide. Note that hereafter the Federalist and Republican (or Democratic-Republican) parties were replaced by the Whig and Democratic parties, opposed against and for the policies of Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, respectively.

Holden a newspaper editor whose influence made him a de facto party leader. Along the way, North Carolina papers commercialized, responding to the demands of the reading public to include news, literature, and public service as part of a new understanding of ethical editorial practices. Leading editors, whose success demonstrated that service to the community was essential to improving readership and maintaining influence, endorsed and propagated these practices.

## CHAPTER I:

“To Excite any Unlawful Combinations Therein:”

A Historiographical Account of the Rise of Partisan Editors, the Sedition Act of 1798, and  
Nineteenth Century Printing

If an American “everyman” exists, an American Editor has always served alongside him, borne of a basic need more instinctual than intellectual. News is that daily satiation of curiosity the everyman’s mind has thrived upon since our nation’s birth. Editors helped to develop that curiosity as they profited from it. Their backs were once strained with the friction of the press machinery, laid with type dictated to them by men in dainty white wigs. Their lot began to change before our first president fled to Mt. Vernon, and, by the election of 1800, editors were men of power, but not prominence.

When they received direct attention, it was overwhelmingly negative. Everyman’s thirst for knowledge in the new nation reflected inevitably a taste for all things political, and editors hastily created partisan weeklies to answer the call. Retired editors, in their amateur monographs, never fully grasped these papers’ significance in fomenting a true political party structure. As historians professionalized in the early twentieth century, they discounted the role of the press in the politics of the 1790’s, with specialists in journalism history even going so far as to describe partisanship as the trade’s original sin. Closer study during the 1960’s of the relationship between the Federalist-Republican conflict began a trend towards recognition for the period’s editors, who have begun to be studied in a far more complimentary and expansive fashion within the past five years.

The earliest published account of the American press was written by retired New England printer Isaiah Thomas in 1810. The prose of his self-published memoir, *The History of Printing in America*, possesses a pedantic, nostalgic quality – that of a man who has lived to see the world change, and slowly leave him behind. In many ways, it had. Printing had become more than simply copying papers from overseas and parroting prevailing views – the practices of the old artisans among whom Thomas stood foremost. Beginning in the 1790’s, printers had hybridized into printer-editors; partisan newspapers had begun to gain a substantial and controversial influence in the United States.

Information had become a commodity. Printers were taking sides in the Federalist-Republican schism by the material they chose to publish, and political elites were rewarding their loyalty with increased influence through appointments and patronage. Unable to reconcile this new wave with his old guard, Thomas’ wrote largely of printing’s ancient origins, along with a narrative transition to a modernity terminating happily in the revolutionary period. *History of Printing* was a competent amateur account of the trade’s origins prior to and during the revolution, but at 61 years of age, the stout old printer dared not stray into an exposition concerning his partisan successors. A Federalist, Thomas remained aloof from political debates, unlike his successors in the trade.<sup>8</sup> As historian Jeffrey Pasley has noted, Thomas and other revolutionary-era printers clung to neutrality until “conversion to zealous patriotism was the most prudent and profitable force.” It was only after independence that men like Thomas were outmoded by their politicized successors.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America: with a Biography of Printers* (Worcester: Press of Isaiah Thomas, 1810), 1-10, 49.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey L. Pasley, *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2001), 36.

The clearest glimpse available of Thomas' attitude towards his profession's transformation in the 1790's comes from his inclusion of sections of Samuel Miller's *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*. The "official historian" of the Presbyterian General Assembly in the early 1800's, Miller had grown fearful of partisan editors and the influence they commanded: "When an instrument so potent is committed to the weak, the ignorant, and the vicious, the most baneful consequences must be anticipated." Though Thomas qualified the inclusion of these words with an expression of disagreement with Miller over his characterization of editors as "men of small talents, of little information, and of less virtue," it is clear that Thomas deemed partisanship a quality the profession would have done well without.<sup>10</sup> Although he offered scant commentary regarding the controversy surrounding the Sedition Act of 1798 or the Federalist defeat in 1800 (likely a sore spot in his memory), some later journalism historians sought to vindicate Thomas' anti-partisan bent as objectivity became the central tenet of the twentieth century American press.<sup>11</sup>

Thomas' contributions to the historiography of the American press stood alone until 1850, when Joseph T. Buckingham published a second amateur work. He had begun his career as an editor for a Federalist-leaning paper around the time *History of Printing* was published. His book, *Specimens of Newspaper Literature: With Personal Memoirs, Anecdotes, and Reminiscences*, was similar to its predecessor—an amateur account devoid of citations and replete with anecdotal evidence. For these reasons, as well as its date of publication long after the period, professional historians of Sedition Act-era journalism have largely avoided Buckingham's work. Despite its historiographical obscurity, *Specimens* makes contributions that Thomas' account lacks. Buckingham included many accounts of controversies caused by the

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas, *The History of Printing in America*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-21.

transformation of partisan press during the 1790's. Striking among them is his account of the first recorded libel suit to be filed in the United States. In 1790, Massachusetts legislator John Gardiner sued Edmund Freeman, editor of the *Herald of Freedom*. In a pioneering (if brief) bout of historicism, Buckingham became the first historian to demonstrate the significance of the partisan movement within the larger narrative, using the suit against Freeman as a reference point: "It was an arduous and difficult task to draw the proper line between the *liberty* and the *licentiousness* of the press. It was a matter of vast importance, in which the government, as well as every class of citizens, was concerned."<sup>12</sup> Freeman won the suit, earning an early victory (slightly ahead of the ratification of the First Amendment in 1791) for editors in the newly-independent United States. This account—as well as the entirety of *Specimens*—goes unrecognized almost entirely in later works' characterization of the Sedition conflict, though Buckingham's career as an editor receives some brief mention.<sup>13</sup>

By the publication of the final memoir-history of the nineteenth century, the war between Federalists and Republicans and the subsequent rise of the partisan editor existed almost exclusively in preserved newspapers, legal documents, and letters. Thomas and Buckingham had made brief but important contributions to a larger understanding of the period's significance, but those works were soon out of print, lacking a large readership. In 1872, Frederic Hudson, retired editor of *The New York Herald*, published the most polished, well-researched amateur history to date: *Journalism in the United States, from 1690-1872*. Though his assertions appear to be based only upon a reading of generally Federalist-leaning papers from the 1790's, Hudson attempted with some success to depict the importance of the response of the partisan press to the passage of

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph T. Buckingham, *Specimens of Newspaper Literature: With Personal Memoirs, Anecdotes, and Reminiscences* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1850), 323.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 323-28. For examples of the use of Buckingham's work in later histories, see James M. Lee, *History of American Journalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), 26, 132.

the Sedition Act – something neither of the previous gentlemen editors’ histories had done – through inclusion of a quote attributed to former President John Tyler: “In a moment of weakness Congress gave way to the adoption of the Sedition law, and the press, so far from being restrained, seemed rather to increase in its bitterness. The government resolved upon prosecutions against the most violent.”<sup>14</sup> Tyler speculated upon the Federalist justification for the law’s passage: “The law of libel, it was said, was made to be more potent than the letter of the constitution which guaranteed the freedom of speech and of the press, and the fire of popular indignation blazed brightly and fiercely.”<sup>15</sup> Hudson understood the 1790’s as “days of peril” for his predecessors, and seems to grasp more than the other amateur historians a sense of the importance of the events leading to and following the passage of the Sedition Act. Although he cited no sources, he exhibited an understanding of the partisan press borne of considerable research and reflection: “...it took the editors some time to make up their minds what to say on the important topics of the day. This was part of the discipline of the party press.”<sup>16</sup> Hudson broke historiographical ground through developing an understanding of early political parties’ fundamental organization around newspapers and their editors. While the bulk of *Journalism in the United States* is mainly preoccupied with minutiae and obscure anecdotes, the author possessed a uniquely clear understanding of the historical importance of the inception of the partisan press.

Unfortunately, the first professional scholar to publish a journalism monograph discredited the validity of Hudson’s work on the basis of its amateur qualities. In 1917, James M. Lee’s *History of American Journalism* was published, declaring of Hudson, “This book, which aimed to cover the period from 1690 to 1872, contains many interesting sketches of editors and

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<sup>14</sup> Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in the United States, from 1690-1872* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1873), 214.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.



their papers, but is so full of errors, and is so biased in its point of view, that it cannot be accepted as an authority even for the period with which Mr. Hudson was most familiar.”<sup>17</sup> Thus Hudson’s historiographical contributions fell into obscurity amongst the new wave of professional scholars.

Lee’s outright repudiation of *Journalism in the United States* is problematic. A journalism professor at New York University, he had previously published a history of American schools of journalism, and his prose here alludes to a deep interest in providing not only a history of American journalism, but one specifically tailored to mold future American journalists. The narrative in *History of American Journalism* has its ideological apogee in Lee’s appropriation from Walter Lippman: “...public opinions must be organized for the press if they are to be sound, not by the press as is the case today.”<sup>18</sup> This was reflective of an intellectual movement among journalists of that period away from the “scare-heads” and sensationalism that had marked the reign of the Yellow Kid.<sup>19</sup> Lippman, Lee, and others in the field aspired to create a balanced, objective press in the United States. Hudson’s colorful depictions of partisan vitriol, when examined with only a shallow reading, contradicted their new goals.

Having granted Hudson only a cursory reading, Lee could not fit the editor’s account within his narrative comfortably. Tellingly, Lee touts Thomas’ equally suspect (but more conservative) memoir-history as “the standard work for the period which it covers.”<sup>20</sup> The conflict and partisanship of the 1790’s became to Lee an antecedent to yellow journalism and a bugbear representative of the profession’s sordid past. Hence, he depicts a press strikingly

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<sup>17</sup> James M. Lee, *History of American Journalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), vii.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, vii-viii.

<sup>19</sup> The Yellow Kid was a news strip character appearing in the papers of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, and the figure from which the term Yellow Journalism was derived. For further information on the Yellow Kid, see: Christopher B. Daly, *Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation’s Journalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 127.

<sup>20</sup> Lee, *History of American Journalism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), xi-xiii.

different from any ever seen in the amateur accounts—editors of the period had no clout: “[Political Leaders] divided themselves into parties of which the common people knew little or nothing. To get the people to take sides on political questions they founded newspapers which, while giving a little news, did more to advance and spread the doctrines of party leaders. . . .”<sup>21</sup> Editors were hacks; they published little more than “bulletin boards for party leaders,” and their papers “abounded in little else than libelous and scandalous personal attacks.” A fear of glorifying the press of the Early National Period, particularly the 1790’s, pervaded Lee’s prose as he described the press of that decade. Depicting the Sedition Act helps to clarify the point he sought to illustrate through his interpretation: “That the American press from 1790 to 1800 was probably as powerful in its influence as at any time in its history, is not to be denied. But the violence and vituperation of the party press led to the first attempt on the part of the American Government to regulate the newspaper press.”<sup>22</sup>

In general, Lee depicted the partisan period as a time when constitutional freedoms were abused—exemplary of evil, irresponsible journalism. Moreover, though he did not explicitly make the connection in his book, the parallels between partisanship and sensationalism likely alarmed him. To his credit, the treatment of the Sedition Act period contributes to the historiography an excellent synthesis of the transformation that the editorial profession underwent during the 1790’s. The grizzled old editor Thomas, through his obsolescence during the period he wrote and published his memoirs, alluded implicitly to the change. But Lee was the first to truly detail the transition that printer-editors made from artisans to the young nation’s first professional politicians and party officials. Lee likely struggled to relate this concept to the students of his day, for by 1917 political parties had long since developed infrastructure external to newspaper

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 101-02.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 106.

editors. Lee's modern take on political advertising in the press was one of moderation: "It must be confessed that in the past much of this political advertising has been too personal and too bitter to be effective among intelligent newspaper readers." To Lee, libel was libel, be it 1790 or 1890, and the press was destined for something greater. The press of the Sedition era was powerful, but dangerous. The period's significance remained steeped in obscurity into the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup>

As a professor of journalism, Lee exhibited a conflict of interest with regard to the press overlooked by his contemporaries, the progressive historians. Unfortunately, more general histories, beginning with Charles Beard's *The Rise of American Civilization*, offered little recognition to the editorial guild during the 1790's. The key players in Beard's work during that time were the founding fathers; he referred to Benjamin Franklin Bache – though not by name – as a key antagonist precipitating Washington's retirement from politics, after having been "spattered with the mud of political criticism."<sup>24</sup> In Beard's account of the response to the Sedition Act, the identity of the editors is veiled within the greater Republican designation: "[Republicans] denounced the legislation as despotic and its sponsors as tyrants. They invoked the protection of the First Amendment to the Constitution, which expressly forbade Congress to make any law respecting freedom of speech and press. They appealed to the rights of citizens and states."<sup>25</sup> This was an important historiographical step towards what became the prevailing view of the period surrounding the passage of the Sedition Act. It set a precedent that would be followed by many succeeding historians to refer to editors and their resistance to the Sedition Act as a Republican resistance, which, while accurate, also muddied the waters. Generalization

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 447.

<sup>24</sup> Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 371.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 376-77.

obscured the significance of the conflict's key actors. The act targeted editors; they resisted it directly. Beard's work did not reflect this fact. The first generation of professional historians had failed the partisan editors. The specialist disdained their temerity, while the progressive historian discounted the primacy of their role in the period.

Frank Luther Mott discredited editors again a decade later in his 1941 monograph, *American Journalism*. Heavily influenced by the progressive historians' narrative, Mott inserted the notion of national destiny into his narrative history of the American press. Combining the ideas found in Lee and Beard, he argued that partisan journalism "had its roots deep in the Revolutionary press."<sup>26</sup> Thus the bygone Isaiah Thomas and his artisan brethren become the fathers of the partisan movement in a sentence. Although Mott remarked that few revolutionary papers survived to the turn of the nineteenth century, he happily credited them as antecedents of the partisan press without citing documentary evidence. Mott fails to satisfyingly trace this relationship in *American Journalism*, but did the most competent job to that date of describing the key consequence of the Sedition era:

[The partisan press] resulted also in the emergence of the newspaper editor. Up to this time, conducting a newspaper had been chiefly a matter of selecting, without much initiative, the conventional items of newspaper content, and printing and distributing them. Newspaper conductors were, in the main, mere printers and publishers, and they so regarded themselves.<sup>27</sup>

The author expounded clearly upon the importance of the transition from artisanal printer-editors to men who were both professional journalists and professional politicians.

The recognition of this groundbreaking change seems to be at odds with the conclusion that the movement had its roots in the revolutionary artisans, but perhaps Mott merely intended

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<sup>26</sup> Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States through 260 Years: 1690-1950* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1941), 113.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

to give the praise due to predecessors of any great new chapter in history, for he never offered analysis of the gap between men like Isaiah Thomas and the new guard of partisan editors like Benjamin Franklin Bache. Mott's greatest contribution to the historiography of the era was his nuanced portrayal of the Alien and Sedition acts. He was the first historian to recognize the immigration status of several outspoken partisan editors, and introduced the hypothesis that the Alien and Sedition Acts were passed together with the explicit intent to both silence outspoken editors and send those of questionable immigration status into hiding. One editor "had been indicted for libeling President Adams, and fearing the operation of the Alien Acts, he went into hiding for two years. Later he was killed in a duel in Virginia."<sup>28</sup> Mott cited the foremost Republican paper of the period, Benjamin Franklin Bache's *Aurora*, as an example of libel prosecution under common law, rather than the act. Bache died while imprisoned during litigation of this suit, and Mott related how "his successor, Duane, boldly refusing to modify his criticism of Adams in the face of this threat, was the defendant in several actions under the law pending when it expired." Mott's editors thus displayed courage in the face of antagonists such as the "bullying" Judge Samuel Chase, a vindictive Alexander Hamilton, and the ever-criticized John Adams.<sup>29</sup>

Mott's Federalists are scheming and tyrannical; his Republican editors play the hero in his narrative. Moreover, rather than simply punishment for libelous sensationalism, the Alien and Sedition Acts gave impetus to increasing partisanship among editors: "aversion to the Acts did much to defeat Adams and elect Jefferson, and thus put an end to Federalist rule." Additionally, Mott ably demonstrated that partisan editors from both parties shared innovations that augmented their collective influence, as Federalist editor Noah Webster's practice of including editorials in

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 148.

each paper found favor amongst the greater fraternity of editors: "...by the end of this period many of them were ready for the definite recognition of a column or two of comment by the editor as a part of the standard newspaper."<sup>30</sup> Thus from Lee and Beard to Mott, there is an increased emphasis upon the activism and personal qualities of partisan editors, along with qualification of the power wielded by political elites through the passage and enforcement of not only the Sedition Act but the accompanying Alien Acts as well.

If Mott can be said to have been the first professional historian to capture the unique qualities that many of these partisan editors possessed, then the efforts of two subsequent works in the 1960's elevate them to heroic status by comparison. In *The American Printer: 1787-1825*, Rollo G. Silver identified the man rather than the events as the true phenomenon:

He lived in a hard and critical time which demanded of him extraordinary stamina and versatility for survival; and he insisted on surviving. A practical realist, he saw the output of his printing press as a primary tool in the building of a new country. The fact that he had under his control the chief means of communication brought him pride in his craft, and he regarded his craft as a high profession.<sup>31</sup>

Written in 1967, Silver's work reflected the influence of the New Left on American historiography. His study is brief and preoccupied mainly with working class, artisanal printers and the changes they underwent after the revolution. It serves as a thoroughly researched, modern version of the history Thomas wrote in 1810, though smaller in scope. Silver made thorough use of Thomas' letters and business-related documents, as well as those of Noah Webster, editor of the Federalist *American Minerva*. Silver's work recognized some of these editors' contributions to American letters, and used their correspondence to illustrate accurately the conduct of the daily business of a press; but the overall tone of the book is one generally abounding in pedantry. It never truly tried to make a point about its subject, other than that

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 151-53.

<sup>31</sup> Rollo G. Silver, *The American Printer, 1787-1825* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1967), vii.

printing was hard work, worthy of pride as a "high profession."<sup>32</sup> If that is indeed all that Silver sought to accomplish in *American Printer*, then by most measures he succeeded. But ultimately, his work was a product of New Left interest in the artisanal, commercial aspects of printing, rather than a *partisan* historiography.<sup>33</sup>

The works present in the historiography to this point have shared similar characteristics. All have, in one fashion or another, recognized that, during the period of the 1790's, American editors gained power, and underwent a transformation from humble artisans to political actors. Similarly, all have fallen short of solidly demonstrating the manner in which this transformation took place, nor have they illustrated the significance of the partisan press within a larger historical context. In 1969, Donald H. Stewart addressed these shortcomings in his meticulously researched piece, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period*. In adapting his doctoral dissertation, Stewart competently brought the press to the forefront of the political struggles of the 1790's.

Like later authors on the subject, Stewart examined nearly every publication in print during the period from 1789-1801, "about 550 papers."<sup>34</sup> He was the first professional scholar to adopt a consistent methodology for his examination of the period's papers, organizing arguments posed by papers chronologically by topical categories. Moreover, he was the first scholar to examine all of the newspapers of the period systematically, which required travel to over forty-five libraries, covered by a fellowship from Columbia University. From his unprecedented access

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 93-94.

<sup>34</sup> Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1969), x.

to source materials, a clear and consistent methodological research approach, and years of industrious labor, Stewart's work was and is the definitive work on the period.<sup>35</sup>

The work appears to have been motivated in no small part by the historiographical anonymity in which partisan editors had foundered before the publication of *Opposition Press* in 1969:

Accordingly, it is surprising that scholars, politicians, and propagandists have paid so little attention to the instrumentality by which (if contemporaries were correct) in eleven short years, and apparently almost out of thin air, a successful opposition political party was created.<sup>36</sup>

The author was referring to the consensus among Jefferson's administration and the Federalist press that Republican newspapers had not only led the charge to victory in 1800, but had created the organization framework capable of such a turnaround. Stewart characterized the influence of the press as "fluctuating" throughout history. The ability of the press to reflect the "life and interests" of the American people, however, remained a constant. This assumption helped to illustrate that, during the 1790's, newspapers could, perhaps, have been more important to political and social understanding than any other source. Moreover, Stewart recognized, more so than any previous historian, the intellectual independence of the partisan editors, as evidenced by his qualification of one editor's relationship with Thomas Jefferson: "Not that [Phillip] Freneau was any man's mere mouthpiece. The ideas he espoused and the phraseology he used were essentially his own."<sup>37</sup>

Alongside these assertions of editorial freedom are acknowledgements of the considerable aid editors received from Thomas Jefferson, John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and other powerful figures. Yet Stewart portrayed the relationship between these men and printers as

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., xi-xiii.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 9-10.



collegial rather than deferential and emphasized that patronage was far from essential to success: "Many editors, subsidized or not, took a positive role in party organization and electioneering; a few even ran for office." Stewart also created criteria to judge the relative influence of specific papers:

Since quoting from other newspapers was a universal practice of the day, those that were most copied must have possessed the greatest influence. If the Federalist press frequently berated many of these same publications we have another clue to their influence. Surely the majority of papers whose editors underwent prosecution for sedition are especial thorns in the side of the administration.<sup>38</sup>

Stewart's work marked enormous progress within the historiography. Never before had the extant sources been so thoroughly examined, nor had a methodology been so consistently applied in order to divine a meaningful measure of the significance of newspapers within the larger historical narrative as well as in relation to one another. Crucially, Stewart had conceptualized the aspects of partisanship that previously had never been brought into focus within the historiography.

Later accounts have made more pointed attempts to make sense of the changes the historiography of the partisan period has undergone from Thomas to Stewart. Jeffrey Pasley describes the Lee narrative as an example of journalism history's "origin myth" calculated to "treat aggressive news reporting as the press's preeminent, essential, teleological function."<sup>39</sup> He offers an updated interpretation more appreciative of the activism that partisan editors undertook. Editors were not the puppets of party elites nor were they libelous rabble; in Pasley's view, editors were self-made men who became the first true professional politicians, volunteering their efforts to provide a framework for campaigns—the foundation of modern political party infrastructure. The gentility of early political elites meant they needed third party advocates to

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 605.

<sup>39</sup> Pasley, *Tyranny of Printers*, 414.

assist in conducting their campaigns, and a forum where they could express their views anonymously—a distinction Stewart had not made in his analysis of that relationship. Certain printers seized opportunities to gain influence from further down the social ladder. Pasley highlighted the unique opportunity for social mobility provided by the rise of the partisan press in his 2001 monograph, *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic*.<sup>40</sup>

What was the condition of the American newspaper readership during the Sedition era? In a brief but thoughtful exposition as a part of the History of American Journalism book series, Carol Sue Humphrey presented the Sedition Act controversy as an early *de facto* referendum on constitutional free speech. In another broad survey written for popular audiences, University of California at Berkeley Journalism professor Thomas C. Leonard emphasized that newspaper reading was integral to the "fellowship of drinkers," the tavern community composing much of the electorate during the 1790's.<sup>41</sup>

Charles G. Steffen is currently refining the concepts brought forth by these recent works, appreciative of Leonard's "incisive analysis of newspaper circulation" but emphasizing that "because he generalizes about the nineteenth century as a whole, the significance of the early national period is obscured."<sup>42</sup> Steffen brings the newspaper reader into clearer focus in his 2003 article, "Newspapers for Free: The Economies of Newspaper Circulation in the Early Republic." Emphasizing figures that demonstrate the availability of newspapers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Steffen interprets data on circulation and estimated total readership. Newspapers were transformed from everyday commodities into a form of public property. This

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas C. Leonard, *News for All: America's Coming-of-age with the Press* (New York: Oxford UP, 1995), 6-7.

<sup>42</sup> Charles G. Steffen, "Newspapers for Free: The Economies of Newspaper Circulation in the Early Republic." *Journal of the Early Republic* 23.3 (2003): 381-419.

task was accomplished by cooperation between editors and the public. The public wanted the news, and the editors first balked at subscriber delinquency and threatened legal action. Eventually, they came to understand that increased readership was an investment, even if subscribers did not pay, and higher circulation figures meant both more ad revenue and more interest from political leaders. Though Steffen visits these concepts only in brief form (his full study on the subject has yet to be published), he raises certain new questions that are somewhat problematic for Pasley's work. Where Pasley mentions editors' gripes about subscriber fee delinquency only fleetingly, Steffen contends that the partisan press put political leanings ahead even of their own personal economic interests. Steffen reframes editors' financial struggles as far more central to their concerns—particularly with regard to the printers of the 1790's, many of whom had already lost state printing appointments and were in dire need of revenue.<sup>43</sup>

Rosemarie Zigarri qualifies Republican editors' influence in her essay, "Gender and the First Party System." She points out that major Republican editor Philip Freneau promoted the enfranchisement of women as a potential party plank, but his "arguments fell on deaf ears, even among members of [his] own party. As a whole, the Republican party of the early republic was not as receptive to women as the Federalists, either in institutional or rhetorical terms."<sup>44</sup> Zigarri demonstrates that recent specialists have helped to balance the bias of scholars like Pasley towards Republican editors. The recognition of Federalist successes during the period will improve the ragged reputation of their editors in addition to Noah Webster.

As generations passed, memories faded. Gentleman editors reflected on the period in which they lived, caught only fleeting glimpses of the larger significance of their stories, and

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<sup>43</sup>Carol S. Humphrey, *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783-1833*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996.), 58-59; *Journal of the Early Republic* 23.3 (2003): 381-419; Pasley, 397-98.

<sup>44</sup>Rosemarie Ziggari. "Gender in the First Party System," In *Federalists Reconsidered*, ed. Doron Ben-Atar et al. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 126.

succumbed to modernity's march. As historians professionalized, that decade of brilliance was recognized, but the editors of the period were perceived largely as men lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time, rather than true instigators of the momentous changes that took place in those short few years. Only once a historian undertook the laborious task of systematically examining the contributions of each publication did it become clear that these men made contributions comparable to many of the Founding Fathers so long credited as their puppeteers during the conflict. Stewart's study has opened the door for modern scholars to probe more deeply into the class consciousness of both editor and reader, in order to discover precedents for our democracy, as it exists today, never before considered in the prevailing narrative. The historiography awaits the completion of Steffen's work on newspaper circulation economies; and still other unanswered questions remain.

Southern newspapers receive dismissive treatment regardless of their party affiliations. This work seeks to remedy that deficiency through an examination of the development of the editorial profession in North Carolina from the turn of the nineteenth century to about 1860. Leonard W. Levy briefly recognized the journalistic tradition in the state for a grand jury's refusal to indict Regulator Hermon Husband for the charge of sedition – under the English Common Law rather than the Sedition Act, passed and briefly maintained three decades later by the United State government. Levy suggested that the grand jury's failure to indict “suggests a growing popular repugnance for the doctrine of crown libels.”<sup>45</sup>

The political agency of newspaper editors after the War of 1812, particularly in North Carolina, has yet to be thoroughly examined. One journalism scholar of the period, Gerald J. Baldasty, has identified the nineteenth century as a period of dynamic newspaper development. Baldasty charts a trend towards increasing political autonomy in American papers, given that

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<sup>45</sup> Leonard W. Levy, *Emergence of a Free Press* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 73.

“early in the century... their content was dominated by politics and advocacy, reflecting their close ties to political parties and interest groups.”<sup>46</sup> He argued that papers achieved this autonomy through the inclusion of news intended not to persuade or subdue, but to *inform* and *entertain*. The development of antebellum North Carolina newspapers supports this interpretation.

William Woods Holden is the foremost representative of this editorial development, but scholars have largely been preoccupied with the editor’s political career during Reconstruction.

William C. Harris described the historiography of Holden aptly:

Because of the unpopularity of Reconstruction and the causes for which he stood, historians during the first three decades of the twentieth century – and in some cases even later – reinforced the distorted contemporary interpretation of Holden.<sup>47</sup>

The distortions to which Harris refers relate to the editor’s administrations as governor. There is far greater harmony regarding Holden’s rise to power. His successful editorial administration of the *North Carolina Standard* in Raleigh majorly contributed to this success. Holden’s origins, particularly his training in editorial practices, are discussed at length in this thesis. While most Holden biographers have examined these origins with an eye (or in some cases, both eyes) pointed towards his controversial gubernatorial campaigns, this study examines his editorial career as part of a culmination of the trade’s development in the state.

Harris argues that Holden concerned his early maneuvers at the helm of the *Standard* with “establish[ing] his credentials as party editor in the highly charged political atmosphere at the state capital.”<sup>48</sup> The twentieth century scholarly consensus echoed another Holden scholar’s determination that the editor believed “the duty of the Democratic Party... was to give [the

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<sup>46</sup> Gerald J. Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 3.

<sup>47</sup> William C. Harris, *William Woods Holden: Firebrand of North Carolina Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 3.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

laboring men] voice and secure their allegiance.”<sup>49</sup> Holden researchers routinely assume that the editor’s political ambitions were fully formed from the outset of his editorial career, and therefore directed the innovative policies he developed as a journalist. Thus Holden, despite being the only editor in the scope of this study with a serious historiographical treatment, has been largely viewed as aspiring politician rather than editor.

One of the most important aspects of Holden’s editorial career has similarly been examined only from a political point of view by most historians. Holden’s relationship with Thomas J. Lemay, the man who turned the *Raleigh Star*, the state’s first nonpartisan weekly, into a Whig paper, was extremely important to Holden’s growth and helped prepare him for running an extremely successful paper. Yet Horace W. Raper, for instance, notes of the relationship that “[Holden] was steeped in strong Whiggish political philosophy, as Lemay and Heartt were both strong Whigs.”<sup>50</sup> Raper and others have overestimated Lemay’s political influence over Holden. Raper later contradicts his own estimation of Lemay’s influence by recalling a feud between the two men that led to Holden’s withdrawal from the Edenton Street Methodist Church.<sup>51</sup>

Most Holden scholars focused on Holden’s political development at the cost of the various tricks of the editorial trade that Lemay developed and Holden later improved. Scholars have written of Holden as if the humbly-born editor was running for office every day of his life, when in actuality, as chapter IV will indicate, Holden received a far greater inheritance from Lemay than political dogma. His apprenticeships helped create continuity from generation to generation of North Carolina editorial philosophy.

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<sup>49</sup> Edgar E. Folk and Bynum Shaw, *W. W. Holden: A Political Biography* (Winston Salem: John F. Blair Publishing, 1982), 47.

<sup>50</sup> Horace W. Raper, *William W. Holden: North Carolina’s Political Enigma* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 8.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

The scholarship of American journalism has excluded any serious examination of North Carolina's editors. The partisan wars between Raleigh newspapers during 1790s and 1800s were overshadowed by similarly explosive battles in New England. After the War of 1812, the growth of the state's first major nonpartisan weekly has largely been ignored, because it was transformed into a Whig journal as the Jacksonian era loomed.

North Carolina's one genuine editorial celebrity, William Woods Holden, has attracted attention from political scholars. Viewing Holden's editorial career purely as a political springboard is as problematic as the exclusion of many earlier editors from the period that helped contribute to Holden's success both directly and indirectly. The apprenticeship system and the initiative on the part of Raleigh editors to cooperate across party affiliations have been largely overlooked.

## CHAPTER II:

### “Newspapers Enough?”

#### North Carolina Editors and the Sedition Act, 1797-1808

North Carolina newspaper editors have never enjoyed the same historical reputation as their counterparts in the north. Anti-Federalist editors in New England are credited with weathering the Sedition act of 1798, realizing victory with the election of 1800 and subsequent rise of the Republican Party. Federalist editors are likewise well documented, particularly men such as Noah Webster (of dictionary fame), and other men whose careers as editor-printers propelled them into political success and affluence.<sup>52</sup>

An examination of Abraham Hodge, William Boylan, Joseph Gales, and Allmand Hall reveals ambitious men who ultimately became powerful men, with successful careers in politics, law, and agriculture. Their response to the greatest threat to early American journalism, the passage of the Sedition act in 1798, illustrates their adaptability and ultimate staying power in Southern society. Moreover, their success as printers, and more important, what that success ultimately allowed them to accomplish, provides a window into a better understanding of North Carolina at the turn of the nineteenth century.

These were not politicians, lawyers, or farmers who merely dabbled in printing. Their successful printing and editing ventures established them in society, strengthened

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<sup>52</sup> Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers*, 36. Recent work in the field has contributed greatly to the study of the Republican editors of New England, but a thorough examination of Southern editors is still lacking.



them politically, and helped to ensure their economic security. Viewing these men as printers first reveals their later accomplishments as the windfalls fairly due to shrewd editors in North Carolina during the period. The newspaper reading public of the state was politically diverse, loyal to its papers, and craving for dramatic conflicts and intrigues. The latter would be provided the two leading journalists in the state by the turn of the nineteenth century, William Boylan and Joseph Gales.

### **Prelude to Conflict: The Establishment of Raleigh's First Editorial Rivalry**

Boylan was heir apparent of the Federalist printing establishment in the state, coediting and eventually solely administering the *Raleigh Minerva*. Boylan's predecessor was his uncle and benefactor, Abraham Hodge. At Hodge's invitation, Boylan had moved from his native New Jersey in 1796 to serve as editor for the *Fayetteville Daily Advertiser*. Reputedly the operator of Washington's military press at Valley Forge, Hodge also founded papers in New Bern, Fayetteville, and his native Halifax, home of the *North Carolina Journal*. Hodge was the first North Carolinian to own multiple weekly journals; to administer them, he hired an assortment of editors. Hodge's Federalist loyalty was routinely rewarded in North Carolina – during the period from 1785 to 1797, Hodge won election as state printer from the General Assembly twelve consecutive times (his reign was interrupted briefly in 1798 by rival editor of the *Wilmington Gazette*, Allmand Hall).<sup>53</sup> After the law requiring state printers to reside in Raleigh, Boylan sought the state's printing patronage by transforming the *Fayetteville Advertiser* to the the *Raleigh Minerva* in 1799.

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<sup>53</sup> Paschal, *A History of Printing in North Carolina*, 16.

Meanwhile, Democratic-Republican leaders in North Carolina, disappointed in their showing during state elections in 1798, wished to establish a strong Republican paper in Raleigh. Joseph Gales came to answer that calling in October of 1799, establishing the *Raleigh Register* and beginning a rivalry of both a commercial and political nature with William Boylan. Having worked on a Republican paper in Philadelphia and experienced persecution of the press in his native England, Gales ultimately proved a formidable opponent to the *Minerva*.<sup>54</sup>

### **The Partisan Papers of Raleigh, 1798-1803: *Register* vs. *Minerva***

In the course of a few short years, Gales and Boylan had become bitter rivals in a war of words. Their papers were heavily bound to the political ideologies they supported: the *Register* was a Jeffersonian paper supported by North Carolina Democratic-Republicans. The *Minerva* supported the Federalist Party, which had dominated state politics since the Revolutionary War. Neither Gales nor Boylan was native to North Carolina, one of few similarities they shared. Both were imported to the region by influential members of the parties their papers supported.

In many ways, the political fortunes of the opposing parties they represented hung in the balance during their struggle for editorial influence. Their struggle took place alongside the passage of a law that threatened to severely restrict press freedoms in the face of bitter personal attacks by editors bent on furthering their political agendas. It is crucial to understand the nature of the editorial feud in the context of the Sedition Law. Vitriol entertained readers and sold subscriptions, but had also drawn the ire of the national government, particularly the Federalists. But as will be seen after the election of 1800, editors of both parties were forced to consider the potentially disastrous implications of the restriction of press freedoms.

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<sup>54</sup> Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers*, 155.,

The Sedition Law was enacted on July 14, 1798, making the printing of “scandalous and malicious writing or writings against the government of the United States” punishable by up to two years in jail and a fine of up to two thousand dollars.<sup>55</sup> Though no North Carolina cases would be tried, “only one verdict of ‘not guilty’ was returned in the numerous prosecutions under the Sedition Act of 1798.”<sup>56</sup> The same year, North Carolina passed a statute requiring all future state printers to take up residence in Raleigh, ensuring that the state’s capital would serve as the proving grounds for the state’s most powerful papers during the nineteenth century.<sup>57</sup>

The *Register*’s early weeks in Raleigh met more success than might have been expected for a state that had been for so long dominated by the Federalist printing interests. Gales’ move to Raleigh seemed to reflect an already growing Republican base in Wake County, rather than to instigate such a trend. Even so, the state’s new capital was still in its infancy, as Gales’ wife, Winifred, observed upon the family’s arrival there:

There were not more than one thousand inhabitants and at least one-third were slaves or free colored persons; but there the governor and executive officers resided, the legislature sat... for so this sub-urban village was dignified.<sup>58</sup>

Thus this sub-urban village was host to two weekly newspapers when one could hardly be justified by population alone, demonstrating the viability of political patronage as a model for economic sustainability in the face of low subscription rates.

Although Gales’ inaugural issue on October 22, 1799 featured only one paid advertisement (the others were for the editor’s own wares), by issue three he had landed three new advertisements over his 20-line limit for new ads. These ads were likely custom priced at an

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<sup>55</sup> The Alien Act, July 6, 1798; Fifth Congress; Enrolled Acts and Resolutions; General Records of the United States Government; Record Group 11; National Archives.

<sup>56</sup> Levy, *Emergence of a Free Press*, 128.

<sup>57</sup> Powell, William S., Ed. *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979) Vols. 1 and 3, 154-55, 205.

<sup>58</sup> Gales Family Papers. Wilson Library, University of North Carolina. Chapel Hill, NC, Folder 1: 139.

unspecified rate down to their exact number of lines. Two new ads, along with four recurring ads from the first two issues, also appeared in issue three, at the advertised rate for all ads of 20 lines or less: 50 cents for the first issue, and 25 for each succeeding appearance. By the *Register's* one month anniversary in November, Gales had five recurring ads in a single issue, four of which exceeded the 20-line limit.<sup>59</sup> Readership was similarly plentiful, and steadily increasing: "When the legislature met in December, our subscription list which was already respectable, was greatly increased."<sup>60</sup>

The Gales family found that attending to North Carolina's scant literary culture could also serve to supplement their income:

We had also opened a book and stationery store, and this was doubly welcome, for heretofore the supply of mental aliment had been meager and precarious... few books of values were re-printed in this country, and our importations found ready and profitable sale.<sup>61</sup>

The Gales had discovered a readership starved for good works and capitalized on it almost immediately after arriving in Raleigh.

Additionally, Gales was publishing ads on behalf of the state and local government by November 5, 1799, including Sheriff's public auctions from multiple counties as well as notices from the fledgling University of North Carolina. It is as yet undetermined whether such ads were paid, or were printed as a public service. Since public announcement ads by William Polk are uniquely marked as published by request of the state, it appears that both UNC and local government funds were diverted towards the *Register* from its inception, a clear recognition of the new weekly's seemingly substantial circulation.

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<sup>59</sup> *Raleigh Register*, October 22 - November 19, 1799, May 27 - July 8, 1800.

<sup>60</sup> Gales Family Papers, Folder 1: 140.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

Moreover, ads posted by public servants were generally less than 20 lines when the message's brevity permitted – thriftiness perhaps indicative of a payment rendered. The auspicious patronage of private and public interests from the paper's inception perhaps emboldened Gales, who showed remarkable strength of character in May and June of the following year by chronicling as his top story for six consecutive weeks the trial of Thomas Cooper, a Republican editor accused of libel under the Sedition Law. The coverage was completed prior to the first issue in July, which covered Independence Day proceedings as its lead, while including on page four a poem “from an English paper” entitled “NO LIBEL TO THINK.”<sup>62</sup> The sedition debate was especially alarming to Gales, who had fled prosecution for libel in his native England to practice printing in the United States, the destination he once described as “that blessed asylum for the oppressed of all nations.”<sup>63</sup> He had not expected the threat of press persecution to ever loom so menacingly in his adopted home. The Sedition Act's intended target, indecorous political mudslinging in the press, was a staple of period papers, and North Carolina was no exception.

Followers of the *Raleigh Register* on December 10, 1804, likely suffered from a twinge of either alarm or delight upon reading a rare local invective written by editor and publisher Gales. He furiously lashed out against one “cold-blooded assassinator of private character, the secret plotter against his neighbour's fame.”<sup>64</sup> This was no far-flung account of a foreign villain or domestic anecdote from out of state, standard fare in the *Register* since its inception in 1799. Rather, this “scientific desperado, that butcher of good names” was none other than Boylan, editor of the *Register*'s cross-town rival, the *Minerva*.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., July 8, 1800.

<sup>63</sup> Gales Family Papers, Folder 1: 51.

<sup>64</sup> Joseph Gales. “William S. Boylan, esq.” *Raleigh Register*, December 10, 1804.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Though Gales kept an unmistakable presence as a publisher of pro-Republican material on a weekly basis, it was extraordinarily rare for him to attach his real name to a politically motivated address. The missive serves as a demonstration of both the Federalist and Republican strategies for politics in print. Specific issues of policy took were secondary to questions of honor and decorum. Both papers personalized politics, with the understanding that blows struck to human representatives of policy, rather than policy itself, had far more influence upon public opinion. Gales went so far as to demonstrate the means by which both he and Boylan customarily concealed their activism: “[Boylan’s] very name is an antidote to the calumnies you so industriously, so *honestly*, and with such consummate art have circulated, under the signature of *A Citizen of Johnston*.”<sup>66</sup> The public unmasking of not only Boylan, but the entire convention of editorial anonymity through the submitted material mask, was a significant moment in a conflict by that point over half a decade old. The gloves were off. And for Gales, this published invective was the final resort against an opponent he had been sparring with since October of 1799, when he had first moved to Raleigh as a Republican challenge to the established Federalist press in the state.<sup>67</sup>

Wake County remained closely contested to the day the electors submitted their ballots in the election year of 1800. Hodge was again elected to the office of state printer. The *Minerva* completely ignored the ongoing trial proceedings against Cooper that summer. On May 6, a Federalist elector made an address “To Freemen of the Fayetteville district” for his bid to elect John Adams as president.<sup>68</sup> Having moved from an established base in Fayetteville, the *Minerva* had an exceptionally broad reach and certainly many perceived it as a regional paper rather than

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<sup>66</sup> Gales, *Raleigh Register*, December 10, 1804.

<sup>67</sup> Pasley, “*The Tyranny of Printers*,” 155.

<sup>68</sup> *Raleigh Minerva*, May 6, 1800.

one confined to the capital. The May 6 issue also included a series of ads selling horses covering almost 83 per cent of the 3-column spread on page 3. Lucrative and entrenched, The *Minerva* appeared invulnerable.<sup>69</sup>

Yet its political fortunes were waning, and change was very near to the horizon. In 1800, *Minerva* owner and state printing magnate Hodge was 45 years old, with an estate that included six slaves. Hodge officially retired from printing in 1803, two years prior to his death. Though 1803 was the documented year of Boylan's takeover as sole editor and publisher of the *Minerva*, he likely had been managing the day-to-day business of the weekly earlier than that year. Regardless, by the time of his uncle's retirement, Boylan was well established and experienced, and a rivalry between himself and Gales was well developed.<sup>70</sup>

The election of Thomas Jefferson upset the balance of power in state government, as Democratic-Republicans gained a dominant voice in the general assembly, despite Gales' falling ill during the 1800 election season, while his "dear wife, aided by our then assistant Mr. Davison, conducted the Register with great spirit and effect."<sup>71</sup> Gales' outright attack on Boylan's character in December 1803 in the *Register* appears to have been largely intended to counter defamations allegedly made by Boylan earlier that year. The motivations for Boylan to attempt such an attack appeared at least two years earlier. Politically, Boylan and the *Minerva* faced new concerns following Republican victory in 1800. For three weeks, beginning February 10, 1801, the congressional debate on the Sedition Law and the possibility of its renewal through Thomas Jefferson's term was the leading story in the *Minerva*. Now it was the *Register* that ignored this debate, just as the *Minerva* had completely ignored the prosecution of Republican editor Thomas

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> *Raleigh Minerva*, January 3, 1803.

<sup>71</sup> Gales Family Papers, Folder 1: 145.

Cooper's Sedition Act trial during the summer of 1800. The Cooper trial coverage represented a calculated political move, given the unfavorable light in which it painted Adams during its proceedings.

The *Minerva's* coverage of the Sedition Law debate at the end of the Federalist administration's dominance certainly suggests a certain degree of trepidation on the part of editor Boylan, who perhaps feared that if the law were renewed beyond its expiration on the end of Adams's term, it might well be used against its original proponents during the Jeffersonian administration. Gales' exclusion of coverage of the debate on the law can be interpreted as certainty that under the new administration, it was unlikely to be renewed and would pose no threat to the *Register* in any case for the next four years.<sup>72</sup>

Joseph Gales' victory in 1803 over William Boylan as state printer underscores the effect that Hodge's retirement coupled with Republican resurgence in the state had on the two papers. The tabulation of the vote for printer was documented in the *Register* of November 28, 1803: "Mr. Horn, from the joint balloting for a Public Printer, reported, that Joseph Gales had 107 votes, William Boylan 3, and Allmand Hall 1. The former was therefore declared to be elected." Understandably, a similar bulletin never hit the presses of the *Minerva*. Abandoning the press that had faithfully printed state laws and miscellany for over a decade, the assembly's overwhelming support of Gales signaled the success of the *Register*. Likewise, Boylan's subsequent attacks on Gales demonstrate the resiliency of the *Minerva* in spite of waning political support. As indicated by the statement published by Gales on December 10, 1804,

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<sup>72</sup> *Raleigh Minerva*, February 10-24, 1801.



Boylan had kept himself abreast of his rival's performance as state printer and had attempted to cast doubt regarding his competence to meet the responsibilities of that office.<sup>73</sup>

Boylan's criticisms of Gales, so far as can be determined from the nature of his defense of December 10, appear to have been personal as well as public. On the subject of his English birth, Gales insisted "I would, had the choice been left me, have rather been born a *republican*, and if it will assuage your wrath, not only a republican, but an AMERICAN."<sup>74</sup> Boylan had apparently contrasted his native birth (though he was no native North Carolinian either) with Gales, who was born in England. In a nod to his political benefactors and colleagues, Gales mentions that "it was the pre-eminent Republican character of North-Carolina that brought me to Raleigh."<sup>75</sup> Boylan similarly cast aspersions upon aspects of Gales' past, particularly time he had spent in Europe, which the latter addressed and corrected.

The embittered nature of their rivalry appears to have developed at a very early stage, as suggested by Gales' describing his initial move to Raleigh as "a *crime* you [Boylan] have never forgiven."<sup>76</sup> The rivalry between these two men was perhaps even more personal than it was economic or political. Gales lacked the kind of family connections that Boylan enjoyed, and there is evidence from his diatribe that at one point his original office building in Raleigh burned and much of his property was damaged.

Yet Gales provided for a household of thirteen, including two slaves who, Winifred Gales recalled, "aided us in conducting our printing, paper-making, and farming concerns."<sup>77</sup> This recollection is the only explicit evidence of slaves' use in North Carolina printing endeavors. If

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<sup>73</sup> *Raleigh Register*, November 11, 1803.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Gales Family Papers, Folder 1: 141.

Gales, an Englishman, took advantage of slave labor after decades without it earlier in his life, widespread use of slaves in presses across the South appears probable. With one important exception to be discussed in chapter four, North Carolina's editors were elevated to their positions by preexisting wealth or political connections, rather than by a workmanlike existence as an apprentice that led to later elevation, as in northern states. Slavery appears to have all but demolished apprenticeship among Southern printing enterprises.

Moreover, Gales' victory as state printer indicates that, by 1804, he was not only on the rise but established in Raleigh society and politics. His position was secure, and he likely understood that Boylan's attacks were more a desperate act of frustration at losing the state printing position than anything else. Gales' success in state politics would later lead to a successful political career in the state and continued affluence.<sup>78</sup>

The seemingly petty nature of the feud between these two editors belied the extent of the success and influence both enjoyed. Much, certainly, was at stake for both men. In other ways, their use of invective in their own newspapers, under their own names, broke with tradition and demonstrated the growing personal influence of both men, borne out by the respective success of each of their papers. Moreover, the relative diminution of the *Minerva*'s political importance after 1800 was unrelated to its success in launching Boylan into public life, as well as maintaining a wide readership despite changing political fortunes.

Boylan left the *Minerva* in 1810 to pursue his political fortunes and other business ventures. Gales later served as mayor of Raleigh for nineteen years. Their conflict, while ferocious during the early years of the nineteenth century, had no serious consequences on either

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<sup>78</sup> 1800 Census, Wake County: Gales, Joseph.

man's success in public life. It is illustrative of how lucrative the state printing position must have been, as well as the recognition and political clout that followed it. When they were later pursuing political positions and not directly in opposition to one another, tempers appear to have cooled, and no further record of the once vicious conflict can be found in the historical record. The incident may be best understood as the unfortunate meeting of two men of great ambition, mindful of the importance of representing their opposing political interests in a public forum.<sup>79</sup>

### **Allmand Hall and *The Wilmington Gazette***

In the fledgling newspaper industry in North Carolina during the tumultuous turn of the nineteenth century, the *Wilmington Gazette* was an influential force, and its publisher, a unique and intriguing figure within the social structure of the Old South. Through an examination of its extant issues during the period from 1798-1806, the role of the press in the political and social fabric of the Old South can be better understood.<sup>80</sup>

The *Gazette* was printed by Allmand Hall, who was the sole publisher except for a brief period of partnership with Samuel W. Clark during the spring of 1804. Little is known about Hall; a 1946 monograph classified his newspaper as Federalist, and his personal politics are assumed to have been in line with his paper – but the paper thoroughly supported Jefferson throughout his first term in office. He likely lived in Wilmington as well as somewhere in Rowan County; a local history of that area names an Allmand Hall as a delegate to the Diocese for Christ Church of Rowan and an “ancestor of quite a number of distinguished Episcopal families

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<sup>79</sup> Fred Donnelly, “Gales, Joseph (1761–1841),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/63598>, accessed 20 March 2012]; Powell, William S., Ed. *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), Vols. 1 and 3, 154-55, 205.

<sup>80</sup> Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America*, 1-10, 49; Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers*, 36.

in North Carolina.”<sup>81</sup> As did many early newspaper printer-editors of the period, he served as state printer in 1798, but was soon replaced after having “rendered very unsatisfactory service.”<sup>82</sup> Hall’s failure as state printer may have had to do with his geographical distance from the state capital, which would have made receiving the information needed to perform his duties a protracted affair. It is more likely that Hall performed poorly simply because his attention was occupied elsewhere. Hall posted a notice in his own paper as attorney and executor for the estate of George Merrick in 1807. Throughout the period in which Hall published the *Gazette*, legal notices enjoyed a hefty portion of the third printed page of most issues, and followed a format displaying the attorney plus the party for whom they were acting on behalf – indicative of the paper having been published by a man intimate with the legal profession. These notices, along with letters to the editor and other advertisements, are bookended by pages 2 and 3 with “Important News,” a smattering of international miscellany alongside national news, copied wholesale from New England newspapers, particularly Philadelphia papers like *The Aurora*. Between practicing law and publishing the *Gazette*, it is unlikely Hall could have satisfied the requirements of the North Carolina legislature for long, but its stipend would have represented only a small portion of his earnings. As a study of the *Gazette* from 1800 to 1805 has attested, Hall kept his paper and his practice in clover with the patronage of the elite planter class of Wilmington, North Carolina.

Though classified as a Federalist paper in Paschal’s twentieth century work, the *Gazette* displayed a consistent Republican loyalty during the period from 1800 to 1808. This Jeffersonian bias manifested itself through the publication of letters. A definite political agenda

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<sup>81</sup> George Washington Paschal, *A History of Printing in North Carolina*. (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1946), 19.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

is difficult to ascertain, but pleasing the rural populace through publication of conservative letters to the editor is fairly prevalent. In October 1804, Hall included an article from the pro-Jefferson *Aurora*, along with a letter written by an individual seeking nomination as an elector to reelect Jefferson for a second term. A week later, former North Carolina governor Samuel Ashe's letter, which also requested nomination as elector for the district of Wilmington, was published. He, too, advocated the reelection of Jefferson and the continuance of stable governance by a competent administration. Prior to the election of 1800, this Republican partisanship was less apparent; likely because of the passage of the Sedition Act of 1798 and Hall's appointment as state printer that same year, with most political sections of the paper consisting only of the day-to-day activity of the state assembly and Congress.

During both its neutral and partisan phases, politics generally remained secondary in importance to international news stories borrowed from New England papers. The reliance on larger papers to the north for front-page news was common throughout many early papers in the Old South, and frequently a cause for their exclusion from studies of newspaper politics in the period—they are generally perceived as mere parrots of New England editors. But after 1800, many issues of the *Gazette* still included a large section of politically-charged, pro-Republican letters, generally espousing the spirit of agrarian values and conservative foreign policy. If Hall's own politics strayed from this standard, it was not apparent in his newspaper. The politics of local planters, many of whom had perhaps been or were currently clients of Hall in court, were consistently reflected in the *Gazette*.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *Wilmington Gazette* (Wilmington, NC), April 28, 1807; October 23, 1804; October 30, 1804; September 24, 1804.

As a legal administrator of planter estates, Hall was no stranger to workings of the domestic slave trade in North Carolina. Though it is uncertain as to whether or not Hall owned slaves at any time in his life, he often published postings concerning auctions for slaves as well those advertising slaves for private sale. In some cases, ads instructed readers to contact the publisher of the *Gazette* for more information – thus Hall sometimes served as an intermediary for private transactions among slaveholders. Many notices describing runaway slaves also appeared, all written in a curiously uniform structure.

A monetary reward was almost always mentioned initially, followed by a physical description and rumors of the slave's whereabouts. But unlike some other Old South papers of the period, famous for sometimes violent requests related to the slave's capture, the *Gazette's* notices request that the runaway be imprisoned in a local jail. The consistency of this format, along with the implicit involvement of the publisher in planters' legal affairs as indicated by other classified materials, suggests that Hall had certain requirements or at least made consistent editorial modifications to all submitted runaway slave advertisements. In this runaway advertisement from 1806, the law is the power demanding the slave's return to captivity, rather than any show of force:

Ran-away from the subscriber about three weeks ago, a negro man named Jack, yellow complected, about five feet ten inches high; has a large scar between his eyes, which appears to have been occasioned by the kick of a horse, and is about twenty-seven years of age – he is well known in Onslow County, in some part of which I suppose he is now lurking, having heard of his being in the neighbourhood of Swansborough. I will give the above reward for taking up and confining in jail the aforesaid Negro, and in addition thereto will pay all reasonable expences for having him delivered to me on Topsail Sound, thirteen miles from Wilmington....<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., March 25, 1806.

Absent from this posting is the emotionally-charged writing of an unhappy planter. Instead, the prose was direct, clear, and consistent with similar postings. The request was for imprisonment with local authorities and those who might harbor the runaway are threatened with legal action. The similarity of other runaway notices to the one above suggests that Hall did his planters the service of publishing their notices in his own prose, protecting them from any legal concerns and clearly representing their interests to the public.

In Hall's newspaper, the jail was the center of slave news – slaves were either to be sent there, or had already been apprehended. The posting seemed to imply that any slave foreign to the local community was a menace: "Taken up and committed to jail in this town, on the 12<sup>th</sup> January last, a black boy about 5 feet 4 inches high, and has lost one of his fore teeth – he calls himself John and says he belongs to Samuel Waddlesworth of Charleston."<sup>85</sup> A child had apparently been jailed for over three months by the time that notice was published, with no further information as to what his fate ultimately would be. Perhaps the intent was to spur associates of Waddlesworth in the area to communicate with the planter to determine the validity of the boy's claim, although usually such a request would include an individual to whom information should be brought. The Wilmington jailer, Henry Wright, is mentioned; perhaps inquiries were routinely made to him in such matters. The notice concerning the jailed slave boy terminates the third page; following it on the next is a poem: "When young in life, nor known to sorrow | How lightly flew the gladsome day! | Gay dreams of bliss brought on the morrow, | And gilt the sun's declining ray."<sup>86</sup> Thus the *Gazette* exhibited daily upon its pages the paradox that had already entrenched itself in the society of the Old South. Hall could make certain

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., January 20, 1806.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

requirements of his readers, but he could not escape the overwhelming reach of the slave system and its difficult questions even in his newspaper. The legal system he served was itself subsidiary to the planter class.

An exception to the standard format in reporting runaways appeared in the April 10, 1800 issue, under the unusually bold, almost inch-high heading, “OUTLAWRY.” This notice, which the state had submitted to the paper, was over half of an entire column long and detailed the activities of seven slaves who had run away from multiple owners and were “lurking in swamps, woods, and other obscure places, committing injuries to the inhabitants of this state.” One of the slaves was listed as a cooper, and a note below the posting informed readers that two of the slaves had returned home, though it was still “lawful for any person or persons whatsoever to kill and destroy the said runaway slaves” who remained at large. Wilmington was not only a central location for the trading of slaves permanently but also a market for those who wished to hire slaves temporarily. The terms usually began in the spring and ended on January 1 of the following year. Descriptions of slaves’ conditions usually provided less detail than sale ads, focusing instead on selection: “Will be sold: The household furniture, and hired out until the first day of January 1801, sundry negroes – the terms of sale, six months credit with approved security.”<sup>87</sup> As a bustling center of the North Carolina slave trade, Wilmington possessed a thriving African American community, famous for its “John Kuner” festivals involving masked dancing and fellowship harkening to African traditional origins. As scholar Nancy R. Ping relates, “The surviving antebellum Wilmington newspapers took only indirect notice of the ‘John

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., April 10, 1800.



Kuner' custom at first; later, as racial and sectional tensions mounted prior to the onset of the Civil War, the editors ridiculed the 'John Kuners' with venomous verbal jabs."<sup>88</sup>

The overtly racist commentary on the events Ping discovered in her research dates from as early as 1858, and indirect references in the *Gazette* were not abundant. Frequently appearing, however, were reminders of the dear value placed upon slaves in the Wilmington community. Memorably, a notice in 1800 sought the capture and imprisonment of "Johnny... of a yellow complexion, about 5 feet 10 or 11 inches high, straight and well made, and has lost some of his fore teeth."<sup>89</sup> The reward was astronomical relative to the average offer for a runaway – one hundred dollars. Runaways in Wilmington were every bit as industrious as they were recalcitrant, and wealthy masters would pay dearly for the return of strong, intelligent slaves. Allmand Hall was the first editor in North Carolina to recognize the demand for a forum allowing for the organized retrieval of runaways.

Even the most basic commercial interests of the *Gazette* were served by merchants who catered to planters, with Hall's paper profiting as their intermediary. A recurring advertisement, about one-fourth of a column, appealed to rice planters "Who may be in want of Dupre's new invented Pendulum Screen (under patent)," which was capable of sifting "ninety hundred weight per day... with the labour of one hand."<sup>90</sup> Thus manufacturers with the capital to pay Hall's advertisement fees offered rice planters a means of easily increasing their slaves' productivity. The promise of such gains exemplified the type of economic potential necessary to make a

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<sup>88</sup> Nancy R. Ping, "Black Musical Activities in Antebellum Wilmington, North Carolina." *The Black Perspective in Music* 8.2 (1980): 140-41.

<sup>89</sup> *Wilmington Gazette*, July 31, 1800.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

product worth advertising in the Old South. The paper also served as a means of demonstrating the law's ability to maintain patriarchal hegemony over women, as John Miller wrote of his wife:

Notice is hereby given to all and every person or persons, of having any dealings with June Miller, my wife, in her giving any Deeds, Wills, Bills of Sail, or any legacies from this date, the 29<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1806. – And I hereby further forewarn all and every person or persons, of having any dealings with her or harbouring her, under the penalty of the law. – The reason I advertise her is, because she said she would leave me and give my property to her older children and leave me and my younger children to suffer.<sup>91</sup>

Thus the *Gazette* served as a means of seeking recourse in the face of marital disputes, sometimes precipitated only by a woman's threatening to act. Hall could be applied to by men whose sovereignty had been encroached upon by women or slaves, to seek recompense by alerting his fellows to the incident.

In the pages of the *Gazette*, the disenfranchised appeared generally only as villains, either out of line or out of literal place, and decreed illegally so. It is difficult sometimes, as in the case of Miller and his wife, to understand specifically which laws were broken. Situations seemingly of only a temporary nature sometimes precipitated rather extreme reprisals: "My wife Levisa Stacks, having left my bed and board without cause, I do hereby forewarn all persons from crediting, or harbouring her on my account, as I will not henceforth pay any debts of her contracting."<sup>92</sup> These and other cases in the *Gazette* suggest that the law could bear some liberal interpretation whenever the hegemony of white men and, specifically, the planter class, was challenged. Hall understood this by virtue of complicity. If he suffered some inner disquiet, his paper never reflected it.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., April 10, 1800.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., May 6, 1806.

Much in the *Gazette*'s classified section points to a well-developed fraternity of slaveholders, well-established by the turn of the century. The power that slaveholding commanded is evident in advertisements offering 1300 acres of land "low for Cash or Young Negroes."<sup>93</sup> The land is described in terms of the amount of hands it would require to produce a good crop. The language is that of the slaveholder; the currency is the slave. Considering the dearth of specie during that period, it seems likely that the sale was accomplished through the transference of young slaves. The ability to buy land with slaves illustrates how deeply the trade had pervaded even coastal North Carolina by the beginning of the antebellum period. Hall catered to this group of individuals because their advertisements and their legal needs likely kept his printing office and legal practice in business. An advertisement for an "apprentice to the printing business" placed by Hall in 1806 notes that he "keeps constantly on hand, at the Printing-office, a large collection of BOOKS, among which are School Books of almost every kind."<sup>94</sup>

The editor no doubt hoped to employ an industrious, literate youth of planter privilege by luring him (or his parents) with the promise of a free education. He was relatively more coy than M. Melville, who posted in Hall's paper a request for an apprentice in the "clock and watchmaking business." Melville's requirements were explicit: "None need apply except he can come well recommended, and is of genteel connections." Other artisanal tradesmen sought lucrative business from slaveholders, as is the case with a Wilmington cobbler: "The subscriber respectfully informs his customers and the public in general that he carries on the Shoe-Making Business as formerly, and will execute all orders forwarded to him for Negroe Shoes with

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., December 30, 1806.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., August 30, 1798.

dispatch, at ninety cents per pair . . .”<sup>95</sup> Thus, after showing the proper deference, an artisan provided planters with all the information necessary to do business with him. Unlike planter postings, which in most cases lacked explicit terms, the artisan-class offered its wares and stated its prices publicly. This not only prevented haggling, but also suggests that gentlemanly negotiations behind closed doors were not the privilege of the artisan class in the Old South. The stated price of his services represents the artisan as an enterprise rather than a person with a well-known family name. Most likely, few had heard of W.H. Beatty outside of his customer base, and the journeyman understood this. Hall could mediate between this poorer class of whites and planters by being one of the few well-educated men in Wilmington not to be mainly dedicated to a slaveholding enterprise. His unique position as both newspaper editor and lawyer provided him with considerable leverage to conduct the affairs of planters in the area. In Hall’s self-published postings, often at the behest of estate sales, he referred to the gentry he names with the “esquire” suffix, an Old World term of deference that he never bestows upon himself.

Generally, Hall referred to himself as either “the Printer of this *Gazette*” or “Attorney at Law,” or both, as the circumstance required. In cases where the gentry had given Hall license to perform business on their behalf, he made that explicitly clear: “The Printer is authorized to barter the [unintelligible] lands for young Negroes.”<sup>96</sup> Hall not only served as the executor of estates, but as a sometime slave trader, entrusted with securing the best human property available for the benefit of planter heirs not wishing to be tied to their parents’ land. He served as a caretaker for a system of which he was not himself a true member, but as an ancillary

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., November 25, 1806.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., July 8, 1806.

beneficiary, maintaining a certain degree of social status and wealth from outside the planter class by supporting it wholeheartedly.

Hall was neither planter nor pauper, but an educated, unique member of the Old South machinery, a newspaper editor capable of bending the law to serve the needs of his betters—the threat of law, however vague, is often cited in planter classifieds as a threat to subdue any number of actions by women, slaves, or criminals.<sup>97</sup>

In the study of the American press during this period, little attention has been paid to the readership of papers like the *Gazette*. What was the condition of the American newspaper readership during this period? Charles G. Steffen attempted to bring this group into clearer focus in his 2003 article, “Newspapers for Free: The Economies of Newspaper Circulation in the Early Republic.” Emphasizing figures that demonstrate the availability of newspapers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Steffen interprets data on circulation and estimated total readership. Newspapers evolved from everyday commodities into a form of public property, largely through cooperation between editors and the public. The public wanted the news, and the editors first balked at subscriber delinquency and threatened legal action. Eventually, they came to understand that increased readership was an investment, even if subscribers did not pay; higher circulation figures meant both more ad revenue and more interest from political leaders.

Although the article visits these concepts only in brief form (Steffen's full study on the subject has yet to be published), it raises important new questions about newspapers and their role in early American history. Steffen reframes editors' financial struggles as far more central to their concerns—particularly with regard to the printers of the 1790's, many of whom had failed

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, July 22, 1806.

to gain state printing appointments and were in dire need of revenue. Steffen's research, while raising many important questions for newspapers and their role, examines areas largely outside the Old South. He focuses on New England simply because more extant records exist, not only of the papers themselves, but more business-related papers as well.<sup>98</sup>

Perhaps planters had simply adopted printer Isaiah Thomas' attitude towards his profession's gentrification from artisanal origins. His view can best be gleaned from his memoirs, which included sections of Samuel Miller's *A Brief Retrospect of the Eighteenth Century*. The "official historian" of the Presbyterian General Assembly in the early 1800's, Miller had grown fearful of editors and the influence they commanded: "When an instrument so potent is committed to the weak, the ignorant, and the vicious, the most baneful consequences must be anticipated." Though Thomas qualifies the inclusion of these words with an expression of disagreement with Miller over his characterization of editors as "men of small talents, of little information, and of less virtue," it is clear that he deemed radicalism a quality the profession would have done well without. Planters likely would have agreed with Miller and Thomas' conservative view on the role of the printer in society, and Hall wisely employed deference in order to advance his personal interests.<sup>99</sup>

Many papers in the south, like Hall's, were not well-preserved. Of the circulating issues, few were kept in public meetinghouses and inns; more were strewn about the households of farmers and artisans, and probably had secondary uses after they were read, leaving only a handful of surviving copies. Moreover, Hall appears infrequently within the historiography.

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<sup>98</sup> Charles G. Steffen, "Newspapers for Free: The Economies of Newspaper Circulation in the Early Republic." *Journal of the Early Republic* 23.3 (2003): 381-419.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas, *The History of Printing in America*, 18-21.

Little remains of his papers other than his publications, which only begin to hint at his significance. Like his contemporaries in New England, Hall was part of a new class of editors who were more than simple artisans. Though he was a victim of a very different set of social and economic forces, he gained power and influence for himself, his newspaper, and his party. He increased his influence by developing a distinct and crucial role as both lawyer and newspaper editor, both of which fostered the reliance of the planter class of Wilmington. Using his erudition in the legal trade, Hall likely established a firm set of rules in the advertisement of runaways which discouraged the use of violent language and helped to ensure that slaves were returned within the constraints of the legal system and not through violent, vigilante means.

He also helped to perpetuate many of the slave system's grave injustices, as illustrated by his account of the slave boy, presumed a runaway, incarcerated for months without trial. Study of Hall and his *Gazette* indicates that an educated upper-middle class was able to exist in the antebellum South, profiting from a symbiotic relationship with planters who reaffirmed their hegemony from within. This helps to explain the entrenched stratification of the Old South society by the mid-nineteenth century. Southern papers were unique; it is understandable that they have often served as source material only for material pertaining to the topic of slavery.

The peculiar institution's presence on the pages of the *Gazette* is striking in its consistency. Even in rural North Carolina around 1800, the voice of the yeoman is thoroughly drowned out by slaveholders. Of course, the distribution of wealth likely influenced who dominated the classified section; but from a cultural standpoint, mentions of yeomen farmers are few and far between. Even artisans required whites of a genteel status for apprenticeships, and many slaves receiving mention are classified by a trade. The *Gazette* belonged to the slaves and

their masters while the men that served them, like Hall, quietly made their livings on the periphery.

Allmand Hall, Joseph Gales, and William Boylan used their positions as editors to further political, legal, and social ambitions. Only Hall was a North Carolinian; Gales was from England; Boylan, New Jersey; Hodge, New York. For Hodge and Hall, their papers further increased the degree of influence and wealth to which they had been born. Gales and Boylan came to North Carolina expressly to pursue printing careers, and leveraged their success in that station to wealth and political power. Each of the four men owned at least two slaves by 1800, according to census data. Hall, in particular, took advantage of the unique needs of the planter class to support the slavery system by facilitating the return of runaway slaves and enjoying healthy ad revenue from related advertisements. By encouraging political discourse and providing utility to slaveholders, newspapers were soon embedded in early antebellum North Carolina. In the case of Raleigh's first two newspapers, relationships between editors were adversarial, not collegial. Printers in Raleigh competed directly for readers, political followers, advertising patronage, and state printing contracts (awarded annually by the General Assembly). In spite of often furious verbal sparring, the Raleigh editors each gained a political following and business connections that served them well later in life.<sup>100</sup>

Thus it appears that, as early as the late eighteenth century, journalism served as an avenue to affluence and prestige in North Carolina, in spite of the limitations of a rural population, slavery, and illiteracy. Years after Hodge, Boylan, Gales, and Hall had fought their political battles during the tumultuous years from 1798 to 1803, a new, nonpartisan Raleigh paper, the *Star*, opened its doors in 1808 with the lead:

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<sup>100</sup> 1800 Census, Wake County: Gales, Joseph, Boylan, William. New Hanover County: Hall, Allmand. Halifax County: Hodge, Abraham.



There are, doubtless, many who think that this State has already Newspapers enough, and that this City in particular stands no need of another; having already one on each side of the great political questions which at present agitate this country.<sup>101</sup>

Thus in the face of cynics, the *Star*'s staff remained unconvinced of potential failure. If Gales, Boylan, Hall, or Hodge could do it, so might they. Such was the success, and the influence, of these ancestors of modern American journalism.

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<sup>101</sup> *Raleigh Star*, November 11, 1808.

## CHAPTER III:

### The Nonpartisan Interlude and the Rise of the Second Party System, 1812-1840

Thomas Henderson, Jr. and Thomas J. Lemay

The *Star*'s steady growth following the War of 1812 suggests that cooled political tempers had given way to greater interest in a nonpartisan weekly. The war earned Thomas Henderson, Jr., the honorific "Colonel," and helped to endear his paper to postwar North Carolinians. By January 1, 1815, Henderson obtained sole ownership of the Raleigh-based *Star and NC Gazette*.<sup>102</sup> For the next ten years, the editor-publisher built a successful printing practice around the first and only nonpartisan newspaper in the state. Yet, the state's General Assembly showered Henderson with patronage, electing him to the state printing office from 1812 to 1822, the longest consecutive tenure in that office since partisan editor Abraham Hodge's fifteen-year run during the Federalist era.

Henderson made his editorial debut under the employ of Hodge's heirs on October 13, 1806, managing the recently deceased state printing patriarch's *North Carolina Journal* in Halifax.<sup>103</sup> The decision to hire Henderson was most likely made by William Boylan, who had succeeded Hodge as editor of his flagship paper, the *Raleigh Minerva*. Boylan was executor of Hodge's estate, and ultimately sold the *Journal* to William W. Seaton on March 9, 1807, shortly after Henderson became editor.<sup>104</sup> Boylan wrote of Henderson dismissively, unimpressed with his twenty-year-old employee's ability to manage the *Journal* in just under five months of

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<sup>102</sup> *Raleigh Star*, January 3, 1815.

<sup>103</sup> *North Carolina Journal*, October 13, 1806.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, March 9, 1807.

service: “[Henderson] will remain at Halifax for some weeks, in order to make settlements with those who have become indebted to the office since the death of Mr. Hodge.”<sup>105</sup>

It is likely that Henderson was on hand and helped to proof and print the introductory letter written by his successor at the *Journal*, published in the final issue under the Henderson byline. This letter, unique for its candor and openness regarding the labors of the editorial profession, appears to have been developed by conversation with fellow editors, possibly between Henderson and Seaton. This is, perhaps, the first time an editor in the state had openly recognized the uniqueness of his profession, and sought to draw attention to its nature publicly:

In every other business, a failure from want of capacity or want of attention, is a private matter, or at most, confined to a few persons who feel interested for an obscure individual. Not so the editor of a newspaper – his attempt is a public concern, and his failure exposes him to public censure.<sup>106</sup>

Boylan’s decision to sell the *Journal* to Seaton rather than allow Henderson to develop his abilities, whatever its justification, likely stung Henderson as a public failure in need of remedy.

Henderson certainly would have subscribed to the notion that “the Editor has no claim on the public but what he must derive from his unremitting endeavours to render the Journal an impartial and useful vehicle of information.”<sup>107</sup> This was the first appearance of an idea that developed itself over time and was handed down by successive generations of editors in the state: a sense of editorial responsibility not to party politics, God, or the advertising dollar, but to the readers directly. This was a break from a standard established by Hodge, Boylan, and Gales; who arguably sought primarily to influence and secondarily to inform. Quality and impartial content was for the first time being recognized as an avenue to editorial influence:

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

If, however, to relate facts with impartiality, and investigate measures with candor; to exert all his feeble powers to aid the cause of liberty and republicanism; to estimate public men by their actions, and not by their professions; and to advocate virtue and humanity, however calumniated and however oppressed, will entitle him to success, he will spare no pains to deserve it.<sup>108</sup>

Seaton's time alongside Henderson in those weeks following the *Journal* purchase had a shaping influence on the latter's policies in his later career. Seaton questioned the heavily Federalist editorializing of Boylan and Hodge, remarking that "he who is a violent partisan, must be prejudiced, and his opinions, even when just, lose their due weight."<sup>109</sup> Henderson's *Journal* issues had largely been reprints of Boylan's *Minerva*; Hodge's heir had kept the young editor on an extremely tight leash. No original content had appeared from Henderson during his tenure as editor; but another opportunity was about to emerge. Unceremoniously demoted from editor to bill collector, Henderson gained experience that commended him to Dr. Calvin Jones, with whom he co-founded the *Star* in 1809. Boylan's battles with Joseph Gales and the Republican *Raleigh Register* left Henderson with a bitter taste in his mouth. For the entirety of his tenure at the *Star*, he eschewed partisan politics. This decision ultimately found vindication with the arrival of the "Era of Good Feeling."<sup>110</sup>

By the time he consolidated sole direction of the *Star*'s content in 1815, an opportunity for a unique type of periodical emerged. Henderson's audience developed an apparent desire for a paper free of partisan vitriol – the main non-commercial content in papers prior to the *Star*. What they wanted in its place was less clear at the outset, but Henderson's content decisions from 1815 to 1822 and the subsequent growth of the *Star* into the state's premier weekly during the 1820s constituted a pioneering success in nonpartisan journalism. These decisions became

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> *Raleigh Star*, January 3, 1823.

evident from the *Star's* front page, which Henderson developed into something unlike any paper preceding it.

The *Star* immediately developed a reputation as a public forum, where discourse could be politely conducted. He was the first editor to lead his entire paper with readers' submissions, and had no aversion to letters discussing content in the *Minerva*, *Register*, or other rival weeklies. Nor was any particular subject matter censured. One leading submission opened: "I noticed in the *Minerva* some time ago, some remarks quoted from the Good Journal, complaining of parents who get their children bad examples of speech...."<sup>111</sup> The goal was a constructive discourse, capable of engaging as wide an audience as possible. Readers communicated anonymously in the *Star* as they had never before. A young lady, under the pseudonym "Flora," listed the names of Raleigh's most handsome beaux in the form of riddles, in reply to a similar list from an earlier *Star* issue by a young man.<sup>112</sup>

Henderson made space for these more lighthearted, popular pieces by summarizing national and foreign news rather than reprinting it from other journals in its entirety. This gave the *Star* more original content than any other paper in the state – the majority of which was derived from the readership! With weekly space for reader-submitted poetry, humorous sketches, and free marriage and death notices (a tradition maintained from Henderson's days with the *Halifax Journal*), the *Star's* popularity made for an easy sell to John Bell and A.J. Lawrence, his successors in the business. Henderson had developed a unique model for printing success based upon the principles first described by his successor in Halifax. He built influence by making a paper with content that readers desired, and was able to subsist from customer satisfaction rather

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<sup>111</sup> *Raleigh Star*, February 20, 1818.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, April 11, 1823.

than political patronage for more than a decade. The rising ad patronage of *Star* weeklies during Henderson's tenure indicates that his readers did not desire of more than a summary recap of recent political news. As state printer, Henderson was expected to print the state's laws in the first several issues of the new year. These were often coupled with promises of new sketches, poetry, and letters as soon as the laws had been published in their entirety.<sup>113</sup>

The *Star* was the beneficiary of the political climate in the state, where both Federalists and Democratic-Republicans had lost popular support. A smaller paper in Fayetteville alluded to Democratic-Republican troubles in 1816: "Your cause is in a starving condition if you shiver in your shoes at our noticing it – it's rotten – no one will come near it, if a single individual can [put] the vermin in your camp in motion."<sup>114</sup> Apathy towards politics in general was evident as late as 1823, when Bell and Lawrence remarked:

At this 'Era of Good Feeling,' it is almost superfluous to say anything respecting the political character of this publication. Suffice it to say that the editors are Americans, not only by birth, but in sentiment; and that no local or sectional feelings shall have any influence on their editorial conduct.<sup>115</sup>

Bell and Lawrence, had they seen an advantage to be derived from politicizing the *Star*, would have done so at the point of their takeover in 1823. They had purchased the paper from Henderson outright and had no personal obligation to follow his neutral course. Their decision to do so suggests that, as late as 1823, a major newspaper in North Carolina had the most to gain by remaining above partisan politics. Henderson reassured *Star* readers in his final issue that "in a political point of view, as far as I know, it will continue to sustain its *neutral* character."<sup>116</sup> Both the incoming and outgoing editors believed that remaining nonpartisan was the best course for the *Star*'s survival.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., January 17, 1818.

<sup>114</sup> *Carolina Observer*, August 22, 1816.

<sup>115</sup> *Raleigh Star*, January 3, 1823.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

That would change only three years later, when Thomas J. Lemay took over in 1826 and eventually turned the state's first nonpartisan journal into a Whig Party organ. Henderson's reign over the *Star* was characterized by shrewd calculation of his readers' appetites. He was the first to obtain an influence derived from intent to entertain and inform above all other concerns. His template was continued with virtually no alterations from 1823-26 under Lawrence and Bell. Lemay's decision to politicize the *Star* did not constitute a complete abandonment of the Hendersonian model. Rather, Lemay built on the successes of his predecessor, continuing to entertain while simultaneously seeking the political patronage attained by an earlier generation of North Carolina editors.

Henderson's immediate successors, A.J. Lawrence and Thomas Bell, made few alterations to the *Star's* content. Though they promised technological improvements, such as fresh type, it seems apparent that their acquisition of the paper was largely to maintain the preexisting subscription list and earn a steady income on their investment.<sup>117</sup> Henderson had publicly recognized the support the *Star* was enjoying at the time of his departure: "Of public patronage – the most liberal, and unvarying – no one has received more."<sup>118</sup> Bell and Lawrence were solely in control of the *Star's* content from 1823 until 1826, when Thomas J. Lemay became a partner after apparently purchasing Bell's stake in the paper.

Lemay may have served as Henderson's apprentice and was on staff during the three year ownership of Lawrence and Bell. This seems likely in light of the series of innovations implemented by the young editor, particularly after he took sole control in 1835 at only 33 years of age. Cognizant of the reemerging political polarization in the state, Lemay took the

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

opportunity to transform the only nonpartisan weekly in the state into one of its foremost Whig papers.

He pioneered the use of a separate subscription policy for out of state readers, suggesting that the *Star* was the only weekly during the entire antebellum period that had an appreciable audience beyond North Carolina. A shrewd businessman, he introduced a unique set of scaling advertisement rates to take advantage of the consistent postings by Sheriffs and City Clerks. Although he frequently sparred with the Democratic *North Carolina Standard* once he embraced the Whig cause, he helped to organize the first ever state editorial convention in 1837, creating a forum for the discussion of journalistic ethics and practices. These major breaks from the status quo established by Henderson, Bell, and Lawrence suggested Lemay's dissatisfaction with the methods of his predecessors and mentors. This may very likely have been the case with Lawrence and Bell, who took control of the paper when Lemay was 24 years old, and likely lacked only the financial wherewithal to succeed Henderson.

Lemay's editorial practices reflect a concept of responsibility that Henderson once described as "due service to the state."<sup>119</sup> Both editors demonstrated a sense of this principle throughout their careers. This due service appeared to have been understood as a moral rather than a fiscal obligation. For their service as state printer, Lemay and Henderson received payment. The moral editorial imperative appeared to be the promotion of literacy as a vehicle for open, decorous discourse throughout the state. Lemay's decision to politicize the *Star* did not signal the return of Federalist-era editorial invective – instead, he cooperated with his rival papers in Raleigh, even sharing public printing patronage with the *Raleigh Register* and the *North Carolina Standard*.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.



The *Star* was, quite possibly, the widest-circulating newspaper in North Carolina when Lemay took sole control as editor in 1835.<sup>120</sup> The partner he bought out, Alex J. Lawrence, promised readers that Lemay would “contend for the Republican principles he has ever supported... a strict construction of the constitution.”<sup>121</sup> This was the same man who had, upon purchasing a neutral *Star* from Henderson in 1823, declared any talk of editors’ political affiliations to be pointless. This departure was a sign of changing political climes. In 1832, the *Carolina Watchman* published its first issue with an unequivocal declaration of Whiggish loyalty: “The Editor deems the excuse of the power of making *Internal Improvements* by the general government, in the higher degree inexpedient.”<sup>122</sup> And while “Literature, Science, Politics, Agriculture and Commerce” were all promised due promotion, the *Watchman*’s leads were disproportionately political. Such was the character of North Carolina editors during the Second Party System. Free of his partnership with Lawrence, Lemay introduced a slew of innovative changes to the *Star* that would be emulated by his contemporaries and protégés alike.

One of his earliest changes after assuming full control was the requirement that out of state subscribers pay “the whole amount of the year’s subscription in advance.”<sup>123</sup> In-state subscribers had to pay only half of the \$3.00 per annum fee at the beginning of year. Lemay may have instituted this change to obtain additional capital, since he probably had to buy out his former partner’s share in the paper. It also saved him the trouble of contacting out of state subscribers midway through the year if they were delinquent on the second half of their payment. The fact that Lemay implemented the policy suggests a confidence in the demand for the paper among out of state subscribers – a confidence unique to the *Star* during the period.

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, September 1, 1835.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Carolina Watchman*, July 28, 1832.

<sup>123</sup> *Raleigh Star*, September 3, 1837.

Likewise, a 25 percent increase in advertising rates for notices by Sheriffs and City Clerks suggests a certainty that local government depended on communicating to its citizens through the *Star's* pages.<sup>124</sup> Given that these notices were a weekly mainstay in the *Star's* pages, Lemay likely increased his weekly advertising revenues by a substantial amount through the implementation of this policy. In these cases, Lemay took advantage of the size of the subscription list he inherited to improve his paper's finances. He also used the *Star's* considerable reach to support the growth of journalism throughout the state.

Lemay was not above posting advertisements of his own in rival papers in an attempt to extend his reach through all possible channels. He published a paid ad in the *Register* headlined "Advertising":

"Hard times now; can't advertise as usual," says the customer. "Quite the contrary," says the *Star*, your store is full of goods, and you want customers;—now is just the time to let the world know what you have on hand.<sup>125</sup>

Lemay's overt cross promotional aggression represented a new form of open discourse that Henderson had promoted between newspapers. This unique advertisement provided a mutual benefit, but one more directly commercial than Henderson's open discourse or Boylan, Hodge, and Gales' direct attacks. Lemay's operation was a standout by virtue of its businesslike operation; in another state first, he hired and shared his byline with another editor beginning in 1836. Apprentices were never given byline billing, so it is likely that David Outlaw was the first hired co-editor in the state.

Lemay would later famously board and train William Woods Holden as an apprentice. He never gave Holden co-editor billing, even though his apprentice played a documented role in selecting the *Star's* content. In light of this, it was likely that Lemay could afford to employ a

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> *Raleigh Register*, June 14, 1837.

salaried editor to assist in the day-to-day content management of the *Star*, although the sudden disappearance of Outlaw's byline in the Spring of 1836 suggests the arrangement may have left Lemay dissatisfied.<sup>126</sup>

Advertisements for new periodicals posted in the *Star* during the Lemay era shed light on the process that would-be editors had to endure in order to get a paper off the ground. First, a prospectus was developed and published in major papers, particularly the *Star*. Prior to publishing the prospectus, Lemay appeared to have included notices that it would be appearing soon. All of this advertising space appears to have been granted free of charge. In one such notice, Lemay announced: "We wish him [prospective editor] success and shall publish his prospectus so soon as we can find room for it."<sup>127</sup> Lemay advertised on behalf of both national and smaller in-state papers. He would often outline the process by which editors could best support their fledgling sister enterprises:

We sincerely hope that every editor in the state, without distinction of party will unite in recommending this work – publish the prospectus, hold it up to the attention of the public, receive subscriptions, and exert their influence in extending its circulation.<sup>128</sup>

This call to arms was representative of Lemay's general attitude towards his rival editors: Where only a couple decades earlier, William Boylan and Abraham Hodge had conducted weekly political warfare, Lemay sought to promote a collegial atmosphere among his contemporaries. This change indicated the growth of the state in the years since the old rivalries. North Carolina was able to support a larger host of editors throughout its borders, with fewer concerns over the scarcity of patronage or subscribers' fees.

This spirit of cooperation was most evident in 1837, when Lemay coordinated with Weston R. Gales of the *Register* and Thomas Loring of the *Standard* to organize the first ever

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<sup>126</sup> *Raleigh Star*, January 14, 1836.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, March 29, 1837.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, June 7, 1837.

statewide editorial convention. Such an initiative was unprecedented, and Gales, in particular, was openly reluctant to participate. He published a column alongside the boilerplate announcement of the convention that appeared identically in the *Star, Standard, and Register*. In it, Gales admitted that “we had some doubts as to the necessity for any such convocation.”<sup>129</sup> Gales’ reservations appeared to stem from the fear that any less than a perfect turnout would prevent any meaningful result:

It is essential to the success of any measures that may be devised, that every Press in the State should be represented, and we trust this will be the case – in person, if practicable – if not, by proxy.<sup>130</sup>

Their exact purpose in holding such a convention was never explicitly described. The stated purpose in the public notice was “taking into consideration such matters, in relation to their business, as may be deemed expedient.”<sup>131</sup> Gales made further allusion to the potential adoption of “measures” which would govern all papers in the state if agreed upon, and would be “highly beneficial to its conductors in a pecuniary point of view.”<sup>132</sup> This likely referred to the standardization of advertising markup rates. Gales had recently adopted the 25 percent markup for Sheriff and City Clerk notices that Lemay originally introduced, and was the first to offer a discount to advertisers willing to pay for a year’s worth of space in advance—a substantial 33.5 percent off the base pricing.<sup>133</sup> A standardization of the advertising pricing model statewide could have allowed for an easier transition toward higher rates.

Gales’ fears were ultimately realized, as poor turnout meant no statewide accord could be reached. Despite scheduling the event for September, when “the season will be most delightful for travelling,” few editors were willing or able to travel to Raleigh and subject themselves to

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<sup>129</sup> *Raleigh Register*, June 19, 1837.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, September 11, 1837.

regulation from their competition.<sup>134</sup> If the convention yielded any meaningful accord among those who attended, it was not reported by its organizers. The “corps editorial” remained uniquely loyal to their individual proprietors’ personalities for the remainder of the Antebellum Period.<sup>135</sup>

The collusion between Loring and Lemay was, perhaps, the most surprising aspect of the Editorial Convention’s organization. When Lemay sparred in the political arena, it was almost always with Loring’s Jacksonian Democrat organ, the *North Carolina Standard*. These conflicts were relatively tame compared with the battles between the *Register* and the *Minerva*. Lemay routinely accused the *Standard* of “misrepresentation of the facts.”<sup>136</sup> Thus even in the pursuit of political favor among Whigs, Lemay sought to come across as a defender of journalistic integrity rather than a party mouthpiece.

The partisan spin routinely included in the *Standard*’s pages was an affront to Lemay’s principle of due service to his readership, which he interpreted to include accurate portrayals of current events. He nicknamed Loring the “spoils-editor,” and portrayed him as deriving a corrupt pleasure from conducting deception: “A base attempt is made by the spoils editors to misrepresent the motives and opinions of the Whigs.”<sup>137</sup> Lemay was most frustrated with Loring’s attempts to bring attention to the divisions between Northern and Southern Whig factions over the slavery issue. In his defense of Whig unity, Lemay insisted that abolition sympathies were so pervasive that they were inevitably affecting both parties:

Is [Loring] not aware that almost every man in Massachussetts, and in fact, *every* Northern State without respect to party, is deadly hostile to the domestic institutions of

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., June 19, 1837.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> *Raleigh Star*, March 1, 1837.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

the South! Does [Loring] not *know* the existence of a deep and continued current that is running against us of the South, on the subject of slavery!<sup>138</sup>

The Democrat had clearly struck a nerve. Lemay's editorial tone was rarely provoked into performing this type of fear mongering. His loyalty to the Whig party led him to occasional outbursts against the *Standard*, but only as a reactionary measure.

Lemay had been at the helm of the *Star* for eight years when the *Standard* was founded in the capital by Loring's predecessor, Philo White, in 1834 (Loring would take over in 1836).

White recognized the potential for a Democratic paper based upon national election results:

It is an anomaly in the political history of the times, that a State... which has on three several occasions, by large and triumphant majorities, supported and sustained ANDREW JACKSON for the Presidency... should have no paper at its capital... still devoted to his cause.<sup>139</sup>

White and Loring alike would soon be frustrated by the unfolding complexities of this anomaly: while Jackson was incredibly popular among North Carolinians, the Whig politicians in the state with the aid of their two principal papers, the *Star* and *Register*, were firmly entrenched in the General Assembly and the governorship. White and Loring's inability to upset this establishment and gain traction for the *Standard* is best understood through a comparison with William Woods Holden, the subject of the following chapter. They were unable to connect with the Whigs' natural opponents in the state, literate yeomen farmers who were captivated by Jackson but apathetic towards state politics. White promised "prompt obedience to the *popular will*, that most important principle of Representative Government."<sup>140</sup> Would-be Democratic voters needed to be captivated in order to be captured, and neither White nor Loring had the talent or empathy to win their allegiance.

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> *North Carolina Standard*, November 7, 1834.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

Whigs had shared power with Democrats in state and local government since the advent of the Second Party System. Historian Max R. Williams has described the 1830s as a period when Whigs and Democrats were “perfecting party organization and devising techniques necessary to win elections.”<sup>141</sup> The sudden onset of party rivalries out of the peace of the Era of Good Feeling took years to develop, with the early edge going to the Whigs. Yet as Williams has noted, “Although the Whigs were initially more vigorous and imaginative in [campaigning], by 1840 both parties were formidable institutions.”<sup>142</sup> The benefits that Lemay reaped from his allegiance with the entrenched Whig power do not appear to have been substantial. In 1837, he shared public printing appointments with Gales and Loring. Collusion with Gales, also a Whig, is understandable, but the inclusion of Loring is particularly surprising. The arrangement broke with the tradition of designating all patronage to a single appointee. Lemay was named “Printer of the Laws and Resolutions,” Loring was “Printer to the next General Assembly,” and Gales was “Printer of the Journals.”<sup>143</sup> This was likely an arrangement agreed upon by the editors themselves which the General Assembly subsequently approved. The sharing of printing patronage across party lines and the nonpartisan editorial convention speak to the growing sense of fraternity between editors, and the development of the profession’s respectability.

The inclusion of a column by a Democratic Mississippi editor in the *Star* provides some clues as to Whig stinginess. Lemay offered the prefatory warning that this was to be read as a “good-humored article,” in an apparent attempt to prevent any readers from taking offense.<sup>144</sup> Lemay may have included the column as a not-so-subtle insult towards Loring, who, as will be discussed in the following chapter, was losing money printing the *Standard*:

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<sup>141</sup> Max R. Williams, “The Two-Party System,” in *The North Carolina Experience*, ed. Lindsey S. Butler et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 243.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *Raleigh Star*, February 16, 1837.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, May 31, 1837.

Think ye good, fat, sleekheaded, pure, and unbribed Whig editors, who are constantly crying out against the ‘spoils’ men and the [Democratic Party’s] liberality to its editors—think of a democratic editor, a whole-hog Van Buren man, to nigh starvation, that one No. 3 mackerel per diem, and a half bushel of corn meal for a fortnight, is almost his whole allowance.<sup>145</sup>

Again, the patronage plum in North Carolina was split three ways. Thus Loring was keeping himself fat and sleek headed with the subscription list he had developed from the Henderson era and the conduct of his healthy advertising business, not from Whig spoils.

That Raleigh could support three newspapers simultaneously speaks to the voracious appetite that readers in the state had developed in a relatively short span of time. A recent study of the dearth of library facilities in the state laments: “The 1840 Census soon revealed what many had suspected, that with twenty-eight percent of its adult white males unable to read, North Carolina had the highest illiteracy rate in the nation.”<sup>146</sup> These Raleigh papers flourished despite making no real attempt at reaching that 28 percent. As will be discussed in chapter IV, Lemay had hired an assistant editor in 1836 who would eventually take possession of the *North Carolina Standard*, dismantle the Raleigh editorial triumvirate, and turn the Democratic weekly into the single most influential paper in the state.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Patrick M. Valentine, “School Libraries in 19th Century North Carolina, 1800-1876,” *North Carolina Libraries* 68 (2010): 7.



## CHAPTER IV:

### William Woods Holden, 1828-1860: The “Unpretending Origins” of North Carolina Newspaper Professionalization

William Woods Holden’s transformation from printing apprentice to one-man political powerhouse reflects the growing social and political influence of North Carolina’s newspapers, particularly that of their editors. Holden’s career demonstrated the avenues to success that journalism afforded in nineteenth-century North Carolina. The physical printing process had always required significant backbreaking, artisanal labor. To this, Holden was no stranger from an early age. From humble beginnings in Hillsborough, Holden developed a unique understanding of the political situation in the state.

Holden espoused editorial and publishing policies that both endeared him to a wide audience and spread his paper’s reach across the state. Through his dynamic new strategies, the *North Carolina Standard* became a platform for political influence, transformed from money sink to a thriving business enterprise. Ironically, the lessons Holden learned as a printer’s apprentice allowed him, when an editor himself, to shed the artisanal printing practices as he created in the *North Carolina Standard* a technologically advanced, widely read, and profitable biweekly periodical no longer reliant upon the apprenticeship system. His strong will and working-class roots empowered him to change the printing business in meaningful and enduring ways, creating a model paper with a level of financial independence and political clout never before achieved in the state.

North Carolina was no stranger to politicized editors and hardworking artisan-printers. But it had never seen anything like the combination of hardened journeyman training and self-taught prosaic excellence that was William Woods Holden when he appeared on the scene at the helm of the *North Carolina Standard* in 1843. These qualities elevated Holden from obscurity to prominence, as he aggressively expanded the role of the press in state political contests and leveraged his influence to obtain respect as a politician in his own right. Holden's early life and journalistic career illustrate the surprising potential for journalists in a Southern, semi-literate state. A man with no family connections, little education, and an artisanal upbringing realized the potential of a profession still in its infancy to become the leader of the North Carolina Democratic Party.

Historians have long scrutinized Holden's personal political views. His earliest biographer, W.K. Boyd, was aware of his unassuming upbringing, though not of its more closely guarded details.<sup>147</sup> Holden made many enemies during his political career, and his final, fateful military action against Ku Klux Klan supporters ensured him decades of ignominy among Southern printers and historians alike. Both his champions and opponents have largely focused on his political career and particularly his role as governor. The most vicious of Holden's historiographical critics was J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton, who, in his 1914 study *Reconstruction in North Carolina*, "portrayed Holden as an extremely ambitious and weak leader whose political deviation and unscrupulous conduct could be traced to his rejection for governor by the Democratic Party in 1858."<sup>148</sup> A more extended examination of his early journalistic career as a youth is necessary in order to fully recognize the contributions that Holden made to that

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<sup>147</sup> W.K. Boyd, "William W. Holden," *An Annual Publication of Historical Papers*, Historical Society of Trinity College, Series III, (Durham: 1899).

<sup>148</sup> William C. Harris, *William Woods Holden: Firebrand of North Carolina Politics*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 3.

profession in the state. Holden turned the *North Carolina Standard* into a profitable business endeavor, not just a political appendage. The origins of this accomplishment were rooted in the editor's unusual birth and childhood.

For a man who spent the better portion of his life in the public eye, little knowledge survived of Holden's early life until 1930. Nearly a half-century after Holden's death, younger sister Margaret Holden Murdock revealed in an interview that she was actually his *half*-sister. Holden's birth was illegitimate; his father sired the boy with Priscilla Woods out of wedlock. Woods then raised the young Holden from infancy to age six or seven as a single mother. Thomas Holden later married Sally Nichols. She eventually appears to have taken the stepson into her household, which included ten of her own children.<sup>149</sup> Though these were Holden's half-siblings, "William was brought up as were the other children, and they were taught to regard him as a brother."<sup>150</sup> Holden was afforded very few opportunities for advancement as a child, receiving only the most basic education with no chance of attending university. Murdock recalled that Holden "was a willful boy, and did not like to be bossed. He wanted to have his own way in things, but he feared his father."<sup>151</sup> Holden thus developed an early aversion to his father – it never becomes clear from source material later in his life that this fear ever developed into respect or any kind of meaningful relationship. Paternal resentment steered Holden away from employment at the family grist mill, and provided the boy's first opportunity to witness the printing trade firsthand. He was apprenticed to Dennis Heartt, printer of the *Hillsboro Recorder*, at ten years of age in 1828. Thus Holden spent six years of his youth as part of yet another new

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<sup>149</sup> Margaret Holden Murdock "Recollections of W.W. Holden," 1930, Raleigh, Division of Arch. and Hist., Dept. of Cultural Resources.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

family, now plying the printing trade. He had lived in his father's household for no longer than four years, and during that time he received the entirety of his formal education as a youth.

This man to whom Holden was apprenticed would soon become far more of a father figure to the young boy than Thomas Holden ever was or would be. For whatever reason, this illegitimate son never entered into the employ of his real father, a grist mill operator with some considerable land holdings.<sup>152</sup> Holden's responsibilities were limited to typesetting and delivery duties, with few chances for upward mobility. Like Holden, Heartt had begun his printing career as a child apprentice.<sup>153</sup> But the path from apprentice to editor was extremely difficult, and would become progressively more difficult as the newspaper market became more competitive. Thus, whatever aspirations Holden may have had his first day in Heartt's shop sprang from an exceptional ambition. Rising from this station meant beating the odds.

Heartt founded the *Hillsboro Recorder* and operated it for forty-nine years.<sup>154</sup> In either 1828 or 1829, Holden joined his staff as one of at least two apprentices. Holden remembered well the difficult physical labor: "In Mr. Heartt's day the double pull Ramage press was used, with buckskin balls for inking the form. Printing was executed under many difficulties."<sup>155</sup> Thus Holden, at only nine or ten years of age, was initiated into some of the most physically intensive aspects of the printing process. The main employment in the printing office for the boy was laying type, an educational if tedious endeavor. In later life Holden recalled the "toiling in

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> H. Thomas Kearney, "Dennis Heartt, 6 Nov. 1783-13 May 1870." *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), [http://docsouth.unc.edu/browse/bios/pn0000706\\_bio.html](http://docsouth.unc.edu/browse/bios/pn0000706_bio.html).

<sup>154</sup> William Woods Holden, "Address on the history of journalism in North Carolina, delivered by W.W. Holden, at the ninth annual meeting of the Press Association of North Carolina, held at Winston, June 21, 1881." Raleigh: News and Observer Book and Job Print, 1881, 9.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 8.

obscurity” that characterized his days as an apprentice.<sup>156</sup> When he was not employed at the press, he served as a delivery boy and subscription collector.

Holden’s pathway from press operator to influential editor was fraught with difficulties— as well as one particularly significant detour. He abruptly abandoned his post as printer’s assistant after an incident on July 4, 1834. The celebrations on Independence Day dropped the 16-year old apprentice into hot water:

The oldest boy in his employment, who acted as foreman, flogged us unjustly for taking holiday on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, when Mr. Heartt was absent in the County... [Holden] afterwards left Mr. Heartt with his own consent, and walked to Milton and Danville, carrying our bundle, to seek employment.<sup>157</sup>

Rival newspapers would unearth Holden’s break with Heartt decades later to besmirch the then-editor’s character. From 1834 to 1835, Holden spent time in Milton and Danville, Virginia, until finally returning to Hillsborough and trying his hand as a store clerk. This wanderlust formed the early basis for his impending switch from Whig to Democrat in 1843 and reflected his indecision as he investigated avenues to success. Holden was grounded in a singular principle. He took pride in his origins, but sought to establish himself socially, politically, and economically.

He retained an appreciation of his former master’s abilities for life: “Mr. Heartt was a good scholar and wrote well, but he seldom presented his readers with a column of editorial in any issue. He was a man of refined taste... His integrity in all respects was perfect.”<sup>158</sup> The respect shown for his master later in life fails to reflect that, for one reason or another, a teenaged Holden was somewhat disaffected with the printing business and sought, for a time, to pursue other avenues to prominence and success. This speaks to the nature of the printing business at the time across the state, and its limitations for young apprentices beyond the artisanal and mundane.

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<sup>156</sup> *North Carolina Standard*, February 5, 1862.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> Holden, “Address on the history of journalism in North Carolina,” 9.

During his seven-year apprenticeship, Holden fixated upon improving himself to prepare for future opportunities. This is evident from his success in Raleigh, where he worked for the *Raleigh Star* from 1836 to 1841. It has been established by leading Holden historians that “[he] could not have had more than three years of formal education” during his entire lifetime.<sup>159</sup> The *Star* was an individual proprietorship owned by Thomas J. Lemay, and on the forefront of press development in the state. His new boss had acquired and politicized the *Star* as a Whig paper, which ironically began in 1808 with a pledge to remain nonpartisan. Much had changed since then. The *Star* of 1836 was pulling in enough revenue to allow Lemay to employ an assistant editor *and* hire Holden at \$8 a week, mainly to set type (in which his hands were well practiced by that time) and do some writing.<sup>160</sup> Assistant editors were not unheard of; but at this time they were most likely unique in the state to the *Raleigh Register* and the *Star*, Whig papers ensconced in the state capital and enjoying healthy ad patronage from the business community. Outside the capital, the content decisions and any potential original content were the exclusive privileges and creations of one man per newspaper. The modern collaborative newsroom had not begun to germinate in the toil of the master-apprentice relationships typical of most North Carolina presses. After four years with the *Star*, Holden had been successful enough in educating himself by night that he had obtained a license to practice law and had opened an office in Raleigh.<sup>161</sup> His hiatus from journalism would again be relatively brief – events were afoot that gave Holden the opportunity to own and edit a paper of his own.

Holden’s acquisition of the *North Carolina Standard* in 1843 was largely owed to the shortcomings of its editor, Thomas Loring. As the sole Democratic newspaper in the capital,

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<sup>159</sup> Edgar E. Folk and Bynum Shaw, *W.W. Holden: A Political Biography*. (Winston Salem: John F. Blair Publishing, 1982), 7.

<sup>160</sup> Folk and Shaw, *W.W. Holden: A Political Biography*, 13.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Lemay's *Standard* had disappointed party magnates. His failures were linked to the Whigs' continued dominance in the state following the constitutional changes of 1835. The financial situation for Loring was equally bleak: "In five and a half years, Loring said, he had lost \$6,000 and stood to lose \$4,000 more."<sup>162</sup> Holden earned the opportunity to take over the *Standard* from state Democratic leaders. That the lawyer was a candidate for the position at all suggested that he never identified as Whig within Raleigh's social circles. The sudden switch calls into question the idea that "[Holden] was steeped in strong Whiggish political philosophy, as Lemay and Heartt were both strong Whigs."<sup>163</sup> Both the *Recorder* and *Star* were Whig papers, but the extent to which either man influenced Holden politically remains unknown. Other Holden biographers disagree, and suggest the editor's experience with the Whig establishment in Raleigh left him with a lingering "repugnance" for the party.<sup>164</sup> Of Heartt, Holden once remembered, "no consideration could have induced him to abandon or compromise his principles, or to do wrong knowingly."<sup>165</sup> It seems clear that Holden's respect for Heartt was based on his commitment to personal principles and integrity rather than party prejudices. Holden's adherence to his own principles characterized many of the trials of his later life.

Holden had acquired an improved social status after his marriage to Ann Augusta Young in 1841. Holden's father and one of his half-sisters came to the wedding; this is the last documented meeting between father and son until Thomas Holden's death in 1852.<sup>166</sup> His marriage also afforded a financial boon as William Peace (for whom Peace College in Raleigh is named), was Young's uncle. Peace came to live with the newlyweds and provided some

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>163</sup> Horace W. Raper, *William W. Holden: North Carolina's Political Enigma*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 8.

<sup>164</sup> Folk and Shaw, *W. W. Holden: A Political Biography*, 27.

<sup>165</sup> Holden, "Address on the history of journalism in North Carolina," 9.

<sup>166</sup> Margaret Holden Murdock "Recollections of W.W. Holden."

assistance to Holden as he secured loans to become both publisher and editor of the *Standard* on June 1, 1843.<sup>167</sup>

The challenges facing the twenty-five-year-old editor were daunting from the start: “The Democratic party of the state was at that time in the minority and was depressed.”<sup>168</sup> Whatever new strategies Holden brought to the table, Whig power was entrenched in state government, having controlled state politics since 1836.<sup>169</sup> During the seven-year period from Holden’s takeover at the *Standard* to a Democratic gubernatorial upset in 1850, he employed a variety of new tactics aimed at exploiting Whig weaknesses while bolstering the appeal of the *Standard* as a newspaper worth its annual fee. The week before the first *Standard* with his byline appeared, Holden wrote in a letter to the editor of the personal principles that would govern his politics. In doing so, he helped rebrand the Democratic Party as one based on a wholly patriotic ethos: “The members of the democratic party have always approved themselves the friends and supporters of equal rights; because they have ever been, and are now, the advocates of the *many* against the *few*.”<sup>170</sup> Holden did not shy away from the fact that his early life resembled that of the average white North Carolinian of the period. He had not known the opportunities a respected family name and place in planter society could provide, only the marginalized uncertainty of the poor artisan or the yeoman farmer. Thus Holden created in himself a political figure with whom ordinary voters could identify and cast their lot.

This political message fell perfectly in line with another goal of Holden’s: to create a truly popular newspaper, read not simply by Raleigh aristocrats, but folk who shared experiences

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<sup>167</sup> Secondary publications derive this information from Boyd’s “William W. Holden,” *An Annual Publication of Historical Papers*. The only extant copy this author could obtain was not in a condition to be examined extensively for fear of damage to its pages.

<sup>168</sup> William Woods Holden, *Memoirs of W. W. Holden* (Durham: The Seeman Printery, 1911), 1.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>170</sup> *Standard*, May 31, 1843.



similar to the editor's own early life. With a starting subscription base of less than 1,000, it would be difficult for Holden to reach this audience. Moreover, by 1850, the illiteracy rate among adult whites and free blacks over twenty years old was 31.9 percent.<sup>171</sup> Many of those who passed as literate likely lacked the skills necessary to read the *Standard* or similar newspapers. To create a newspaper with popular appeal in the face of staggering illiteracy, the new editor relied on some practical and shrewd accommodations for poor and illiterate potential readers from the start of his tenure.

At the outset Holden implemented reduced rates for reading clubs, allowing combinations of literate, semiliterate, and illiterate individuals to obtain multiple copies of each issue as a group. The advertised club rates were “for five dollars, two copies; for ten dollars, four copies; for twenty dollars, ten copies.”<sup>172</sup> Thus subscribers could share the burden of subscription costs, creating a readership that colluded and could, potentially, even overcome illiteracy over mealtime discussions of editorials and other *Standard* content.

Holden also provided incentive for subscribers who recruited friends, neighbors, or coworkers as loyal readers: “Any person procuring and forwarding five subscri[b]ers, with the Cash (\$15) will be entitled to the Standard one year free of charge.”<sup>173</sup> Breaking with a common practice of editors throughout the state, Holden required cash payments of subscription fees in advance of service rendered, providing him with ready cash to manage the debt he incurred in his takeover.<sup>174</sup> It appears that the original subscriber list of about 800 was not held to the cash advance policy, because much later Holden refers to having instituted, in 1854, “the cash system in subscriptions to newspapers, which has worked so well, and without which the press of the

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<sup>171</sup> Bureau of the Census. The Seventh Census of the United States, (Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, 1853 <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1850.html>), 1850a-13, 9.

<sup>172</sup> *Standard*, May 31, 1843.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

State could not prosper.”<sup>175</sup> For practical reasons, keeping the subscription list growing was far more important than stringently enforcing a cash-first policy in his early years with the *Standard*.

Having created a business model that could appeal to the majority of the free white population in the state, Holden set about simplifying the Democratic political message in order to appeal to everyday citizens. He identified a clear dichotomy between Whigs and Democrats. Editorials routinely represented Whig policies as favorable to a minority of the population, and therefore unjust to the majority. He would often portray the Whigs as a handful of aristocrats, often lampooned in the *Standard* with humorous nicknames. U.S. Senator George E. Badger’s facial hair, for instance, earned him the title “Whiskerando.”<sup>176</sup> Holden placed the Democratic Party in perfect opposition to these principles: “[It] was not organized to elevate any man; but for the purpose of securing equal rights to all.”<sup>177</sup> Holden followed this principle fastidiously, never endorsing candidates until the Democratic convention had made its final nominations.

Holden’s editorial style did not resemble that of his former masters – he was significantly more aggressive, attacking opponents’ character as well as their politics. Dennis Heartt, his first master, rarely editorialized at all.<sup>178</sup> Holden made this conscious change to attract a more diverse readership, employing controversy to spread the *Standard’s* merits by word of mouth. Holden’s new style was also in keeping with his belief that an individual’s dearest principles informed his politics. Whig editors and politicians naturally resented being depicted as morally bankrupt on a weekly basis, and major rivalries with Whig papers erupted very shortly after Holden’s tenure began.

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<sup>175</sup> Holden, “Address on the history of journalism in North Carolina,” 14.

<sup>176</sup> Folk and Shaw, *W. W. Holden: A Political Biography*, 32.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Holden, “Address on the history of journalism in North Carolina,” 14.

Holden appreciated his rival editors' abilities even as he ravaged them in his columns. He noted (though perhaps partially tongue in cheek) that Whig editor Edward J. Hale was "not a florid writer. His style is plain and clear, the 'pure English undefiled.'"<sup>179</sup> Hale's *Fayetteville Observer* and Weston R. Gales' *Raleigh Register* regularly sparred with Holden in their editorials. Hale once wrote of Holden in 1845: "No man of any party regards or respects him."<sup>180</sup> Disputes often became personal. Holden wrote his account of his flight from Heartt's printing office as a defense against a piece in the *Register* claiming he had broken his apprenticeship without his master's consent. A favorite tactic of Holden's in these editorial conflicts was to assume the role of the everyman and underdog:

This is not the first time our neighbor has boasted of his social position, and affected to look down on us; but we tell him now, as we have told him heretofore, that we are not ashamed of our early poverty, and that if he had been born in obscurity, as we were, he would have been there yet.<sup>181</sup>

To be sure, the Democratic editor created no shortage of enemies, but it was this controversial back-and-forth with Whig papers that allowed himself and the *Standard* to remain relevant, even in non-election years when his audience's interest in politics waned. The rivalries that Holden's aggression helped to create increased interest in both the *Standard* and its opponents. Subscribing to multiple papers ensured the reader of hearing both sides of each week's heated argument. This would have had the added effect of encouraging a political dialogue among the electorate across party lines. Whigs, who had ignored the *Standard* of Loring, were now intrigued, and may well have begun reading Holden's paper to experience both sides of the debate.

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Folk and Shaw, *W. W. Holden: A Political Biography*, 40.

<sup>181</sup> *Standard*, February 5, 1862.

After a six-month lull following his takeover, Holden “perceived a sudden and great quickening in my subscription... Within seven years after I had taken charge of the *Standard* I had paid my debt of \$2,000.”<sup>182</sup> Thus, during the period from 1844 to 1850, when Whigs continued to dominate state politics and Holden was excluded from lucrative state printing contracts, he was still clearing enough to pay his debts and support his family, while his predecessor, Thomas Loring, had lost \$6,000 in a comparable period of time.<sup>183</sup>

Holden’s early editorializing relied heavily upon what are known today as “hot-button issues.” Holden focused on a single defining issue that could polarize opinion in the Democrats’ favor. One letter to the editor that he printed in 1844 created such an issue to unify his own party around the Texas question: “[I will] give up my first choice in favor of any Democrat, who has already shown himself friendly to the annexation of Texas, this being the absorbing question, provided I know he is right upon the other great principles, and measures of the Democratic party.”<sup>184</sup> When Holden finally saw an opportunity for a specific politician to upset Whig hegemony, he fatefully rallied behind another “hot-button issue” with widespread appeal. The man was David S. Reid, the issue: “Free Suffrage.”<sup>185</sup>

Holden’s interaction with Reid in 1848 reflected the extent to which the editor’s influence had grown among North Carolina Democrats in five short years. Holden “had the honor to prepare the platform which was adopted by [The Democratic State Convention]” in 1848.<sup>186</sup> He recalled that in his original platform he had not included the “Free Suffrage” plank, which called for the abolishment of the 50-acre freehold requirement in order to vote for state senators – by then a relic of the 1776 state constitution. The Democrats’ gubernatorial nominee,

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<sup>182</sup> Holden, *Memoirs of W.W. Holden*, 98.

<sup>183</sup> Folk and Shaw, *W.W. Holden: A Political Biography*, 25.

<sup>184</sup> *Standard*, May 22, 1844.

<sup>185</sup> Holden, *Memoirs of W.W. Holden*, 5.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

David S. Reid, surprised Holden and the rest of the Democratic nominating committee by initially refusing the nomination. Holden recalled preparing the notice of Reid's decision in the *Standard*:

I had the letter in type, and was about to go to press. But I looked at the correspondence as it stood in the form in type, and thought of the hopeless condition of the Democratic party if the correspondence with the letter from Colonel Reid Should be published in the organ of the party, and I determined to withhold the publication....<sup>187</sup>

After conferring with fellow Democrats, Holden sent a messenger requesting Reid to reconsider his refusal and come to Raleigh to discuss what could be done to obtain his assent to run. Reid ultimately insisted that the campaign include the abolishment of voting requirements for the state senate. Holden not only agreed, but through the *Standard* endeavored to turn the gubernatorial race into a referendum on the issue. Although it ultimately led to a narrow defeat by 854 votes to Whig Charles M. Manly in the 1848 election, Holden recognized later that "the discussion of the subject... no doubt led to the assumption of a debt of more than two millions for internal improvements" and its ultimate passage "greatly liberalized the views of public men on legislation."<sup>188</sup> The editor had stuck to his principles and trusted his instincts, and the result was near victory, beating the odds he previously had figured at "five to one" in Manly's favor.<sup>189</sup>

While Holden recognized the greater significance of these events years later, at the time, his most urgent objective was establishing Democrats in state government. Until the creation of the Reid ticket in 1848, the Democrats had not seriously challenged the Whigs in the legislative or gubernatorial races during Holden's editorship. Holden had briefly been introduced firsthand to Whig dominance when he won election to the state legislature in 1846. With his party largely outnumbered, Holden did not distinguish himself during his two-year term. It was his first and

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 3.

only term in the state legislature, but it no doubt provided further insight into the machinations of his opponents and informed his strategy in 1848. Historians have only been able to speculate as to the reason that Holden chose to serve this single uneventful term. Historians Folk and Shaw plausibly suggested: “perhaps it was for the experience and the closer view of legislative machinery that membership in the House would give him.”<sup>190</sup> Reid ran successfully in his second attempt in 1850, finally ending the Whig stranglehold on the state’s highest office.

During Reid’s tenure as governor from 1850 to 1854, Holden’s influence in the Democratic Party continued to increase. The two men had kept up a steady correspondence since 1844. Early Holden missives to the politician read like an employee reporting to a superior. He confidently assured Reid that “the democrats hereabouts are wide awake and full of enthusiasm,” and promised to print Reid’s speeches in future editions of the *Standard*.<sup>191</sup> By 1847, a palpable change had occurred in Holden’s relationship with Reid. He argued for delaying the Democratic state convention until later in 1848, and personally justified his reasons: “We always lose by long campaigns. The adversary has full time to rally... to put his presses – two to one to ours – full to work.”<sup>192</sup> Holden understood the political firepower that the numerically superior Whig presses were capable of mustering, but he also reminded Reid of his own potential to influence both the Whig leadership and the electorate. Prior to Reid’s victory in 1850, Holden revealed to the future governor that “I have carefully kept back from the *Standard* all evidences of Manly’s unpopularity, in the hope that he would again be the candidate.”<sup>193</sup> Holden displayed an awareness of his electorate that allowed him to influence not only his own party, but that of his opponents; who, he appeared to have believed, were far less aware of their nominee’s weakness.

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<sup>190</sup> Folk and Shaw, *W. W. Holden: A Political Biography*, 46.

<sup>191</sup> William Woods Holden to David S. Reid, October 30, 1844. In *The Papers of William Woods Holden. Vol. 1: 1841–1868*, ed. Horace Raper, (Raleigh: Division of Arch. and Hist., Dept. of Cultural Resources, 2000), 12.

<sup>192</sup> Holden to Reid, December 8, 1847. In *The Papers of William Woods Holden. Vol. 1: 1841–1868*, ed. Raper, 20.

<sup>193</sup> Holden to Reid, June 1, 1850. In *The Papers of William Woods Holden. Vol. 1: 1841–1868*, ed. Raper, 30-33.

Thus the wily editor set a trap for his adversaries: “I have all these evidences filed away, to be used as soon as he is nominated.”<sup>194</sup> By 1850, Holden could influence politics as much by the material that he did *not* print as by the words that actually filled the *Standard*’s pages every week. The rivalries he developed with Whig papers kept the spotlight on his every move during election season. Holden was well aware of this and continued to take advantage of his paper’s new prominence.

The year 1850 saw the beginning of a decade-long financial coup for the *Standard* as it finally received the state printing patronage from which his opponents had long benefitted. Holden remembered, “I had the public printing, and my office cleared between 1850 and 1860 \$8,000 per annum. I was thus wonderfully prospered and blessed.”<sup>195</sup> Flush with profit, Holden continued to employ “several very able writers who wrote anonymously for the paper.”<sup>196</sup> Elevated to a largely managerial position by the new victory and its spoils, Holden turned increasingly toward the possibility of a gubernatorial bid. There is no evidence that, at any point in his operation of the *Standard*, Holden employed or boarded apprentices, opting instead for wage laborers, assistant editors, typesetters, and compositors. Ironically, the former apprentice had created a newspaper so financially successful that it had outgrown the dated, artisanal practice that had given him his start so many years ago in Hillsborough. Holden was proud of his humble beginnings because he felt that by escaping them he had proved himself exceptional. In his mind (and, to some degree, in truth), his adversaries reached their position through advantage at birth, becoming educated and socially respected with the help of money “never earned.”<sup>197</sup> It does not appear that, after achieving prominence and journalistic success, the editor ever opened

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<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>195</sup> Holden, *Memoirs of W. W. Holden*, 98.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>197</sup> *Standard*, February 5, 1862.

channels in his printing office to allow for the discovery of precocious young apprentices. But politically, Holden did support policies favorable to future generations of less fortunate young people in North Carolina. He credited the presses across the state with having “fostered the University and the Colleges and the Public Schools.”<sup>198</sup> While Holden made good money during the 1850s, he began to feel that he had accomplished all he could from an editorial stage and considered seeking his fortunes as a direct participant in politics. He wanted the governorship.

The relationship between Reid and Holden had developed to the point that, during Reid’s two terms as governor, he was constantly writing his editor for suggestions on committee appointments and the distribution of patronage, relying on Holden’s extensive understanding of the political ramifications of each decision. The men rarely spoke candidly of principles. Holden’s advice to Reid was consistently grounded in the most pragmatic course to continue their party’s growth in the state at the expense of the defeated Whigs. When Reid entered the national political stage as a U.S. Senator in 1854, their collaboration cooled. When Holden at last entered the running as a potential nominee for the Democratic gubernatorial ticket in 1858, he had lost the close connection with the governor’s office that existed during Reid’s tenure. Holden remembered chastising Reid’s successor, Thomas Bragg, over failure to campaign for a railroad through the mountains. Holden convinced Bragg of its importance to the vote in the western counties, and credited the issue as helping Bragg win election in 1854.<sup>199</sup>

But Holden did not have Bragg’s ear in the same way that he once had Reid’s, which may have influenced Holden to seek the Democratic nomination for governor in 1858. Holden’s choice to run, more than his failure to win the nomination, had serious and lasting effects upon his image: “This destroyed the picture that he had helped draw of himself, and that politicians

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<sup>198</sup> Holden, “Address on the history of journalism in North Carolina,” 21.

<sup>199</sup> Holden, *Memoirs of W.W. Holden*, 98.



had come to have of editors, as self-sacrificing party wheelhorses.”<sup>200</sup> Holden’s *Standard* was so renowned for having the public’s ear at this point that other leaders in the party must have feared the potential of a popular editor winning the state’s highest elected office. One Holden biographer discovered that Holden’s rival newspaper, the *Register* argued that their longtime enemy had lost the nomination by alienating the aristocratic party delegates – some of whom were former Whigs who had seen Holden dismantle their erstwhile hegemony.<sup>201</sup>

If the *Register*’s editors had hoped to exploit the division between Holden’s supporters and those of the eventual nominee, John W. Ellis, they were disappointed. Holden swiftly wrote Ellis to congratulate his opponent and offer his services: “I have no disposition to complain. My nature is to look on the bright side. I bow to the decision of the Convention, and shall work for the party with as much ardor as I should have worked for myself.”<sup>202</sup> Holden held true to his word, but his efforts on behalf of Ellis never appeared to be conducted with the same level of enthusiasm as they had with Reid. He referred to Ellis’ requests as “favors” in their correspondence, and usually promised to deliver on them “by the next or succeeding mail.”<sup>203</sup> Certainly Holden must have taken the rebuff from his party grudgingly, and it had to have been hard on his pride to be relegated again to working behind the scenes. The people for whom Holden advocated, in whose interests he had advanced policies of Free Suffrage, public education, and internal improvements, had deserted him at the peak of his influence.

In many ways, 1858 was the Holden-era *Standard*’s apogee, as sectionalism and the collapse of the southern Whig party led to secession and war. Gone were the dynamic Holden editorials of the 1840s; he remained instead focused on the governorship. In 1864 he suffered a

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<sup>200</sup> Folk and Shaw, *W. W. Holden: A Political Biography*, 46.

<sup>201</sup> Harris, *William Woods Holden: Firebrand of North Carolina Politics*, 74.

<sup>202</sup> Holden to John Ellis, April 19, 1858, in *The Papers of William Woods Holden. Vol. 1: 1841–1868*, ed. Raper, 90.

<sup>203</sup> Holden to Ellis, May 4, 1858, in *The Papers of William Woods Holden. Vol. 1: 1841–1868*, ed. Raper, 91.

second defeat, this time to Zebulon Vance, another former ally and collaborator whose career he had helped to launch. The disillusioned editor-turned-politician finally had his opportunity when Andrew Johnson appointed him provisional governor of North Carolina in 1865. Holden's staff became increasingly responsible for the day-to-day operations of the *Standard* and, on June 7, 1865, his son, Joseph W. Holden, succeeded him as editor alongside Joseph S. Cannon.<sup>204</sup>

Holden may have become a victim of his own success. The early inroads he made against the Whigs from 1844 to 1848 created many enemies who were not silenced by Democratic success in 1850. The use of personal attacks on major political figures of the day diminished Holden's respectability in some aristocratic social circles, but it also helped lay the groundwork to the frank, partisan dialogue in the liberal and conservative news media today. Holden's greatest enemies were the kind of men who believed that the educated elite should be trusted by the common man to act in their best interests. Holden's relentless aggression on the editorial page forced greater transparency among government officials.

By satirizing opponents' backgrounds, behavior, and even physical appearance, Holden helped bring politics home to a wider audience of North Carolinians. Modern political satirists and television pundits owe much to the Holden tradition. The *Standard* not only came to influence policy decisions in government, but also reinvented the *presentation* of that policy into mediums more accessible and democratic. His failures in the political arena as a candidate, rather than taking away from his contributions to journalism, demonstrate his opponents' fear of this dangerously influential editor. Moreover, his sense of modesty prevented him from campaigning for himself when he ran for office. Perhaps the greatest weakness of William Woods Holden, the politician, was that he relied only on the reputation of Holden, the journalist. Had he set his

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<sup>204</sup> Folk and Shaw, *W. W. Holden: A Political Biography*, 198.

modesty aside and campaigned for himself as vigorously as he had for Reid in '48 and '50, Holden's political career may have gone quite differently.

Unnoticed in political biographies of Holden is that, whether or not the Democrats won or lost a single seat after 1844, the *Standard* was read in increasingly larger numbers, bringing in substantial advertising revenue, and becoming an unequivocal success as a journalistic establishment, the likes of which the state had not seen. Holden's political savvy earned him the state printing post in 1850; his journalistic prowess meant that the *Standard* was a profitable paper without political patronage. That economic independence led ultimately to a press that, rather than serving political parties, would, as an elderly Holden proclaimed in 1881, "diffuse intelligence among the people, and to acquaint the world with the character of our State and her resources."<sup>205</sup> This noble vision has been clouded by depictions of Holden preoccupied with his ignominious exit from the political arena in 1871, when he was impeached for standing for the same principles he had followed his entire life.

These critiques serve only to distract from his successful creation of a model press that informs, entertains, and enriches the community it serves. Holden brought a modernistic, blue collar approach to printing and *earned* his subscribers through competition with rival papers and an understanding of his readership. Retaining a love for and understanding of the average North Carolinian—long after he had proved himself exceptional—was the most striking feature of his genius.

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<sup>205</sup> Holden, "Address on the history of journalism in North Carolina," 21.

## CONCLUSION

North Carolina's newspaper editors independently developed a system of editorial ethics in the sixty-two year span from 1798 to 1860. The early partisan editors in Raleigh faced the threat of libel prosecution while catering to a small, largely illiterate readership. In response, they resorted to vituperative political commentary to further the causes of their political parties, foregoing the moral high ground for patronage. They carved out a place for themselves in the economy of the state by turning politics into a product for popular consumption, and serving the ruling interests of a state economy dependent upon chattel slavery.

The next phase of newspaper development truly began after the War of 1812, with Thomas Henderson's development of the *Raleigh Star*. His decision to develop a newspaper with no political affiliation opened the door to new possibilities for newspaper content. Literature, marriage and death notices, and prominent, human-interest letters to the editor all became *Star* staples and crucial building blocks to that weekly's continued success. Thomas J. Lemay's acquisition and subsequent politicization of the *Star* during the 1820s marks the beginning of the end of the nonpartisan interlude in the state, as papers ramped up their political advocacy in the wake of the rise of a new rivalry between Jacksonian Democrats and Whigs.

Editors recognized the inherent challenges of North Carolina's unique demography and rose to meet them. Joseph and Winifred Gales were alarmed at the large contingent of slaves and free blacks in Raleigh when they first arrived in 1798. But before long, they had not only become accustomed to the institution, but were direct participants. Evidence from Gales' memoirs demonstrates that the *Register* was the first paper in the state to routinely employ slaves to perform the artisanal labor required in printing operations of this period. As exhibited by the

vitriol that graced his editorial page daily, Gales set moral reservations aside in order to survive in a foreign society.

The use of slaves in printing stymied the development of a white artisan class of printers in the state. The recollections of Joseph Gales' wife explicitly describe the employment of slaves in printing tasks performed by white artisans in New England during the antebellum period. Slave involvement in the Gales family enterprise suggests that such arrangements were widespread, especially considering that Gales editorial colleagues (Hodge, Boylan, and Hall) were all slave owners as well. The arrangement likely allowed editors to acquire apprentices to deliver papers and set type, tasks that masters could not risk allowing slaves to perform lest they learn to read in the process. Apprentices for printers who employed slaves were used to segregate a profession's literate aspects from those whom North Carolina society kept forcibly illiterate. For this reason, apprentices became editors of considerable talent, particularly Henderson, Lemay, and Holden. They emerged from obscurity and elevated their social status by making the transition from printing apprentice to editor: a transition that simply did not occur in New England, where slave labor was lacking and men made careers as artisans performing the physical labor of the printing process without ever taking part in content decisions.

The elevation of an unlikely apprentice in William Woods Holden led to a series of innovations tempered uniquely by the editor's humble origin. The creation and expert use of the hot-button issue; the refining of mudslinging into a humorous, tongue-in-cheek enterprise; and the introduction of group subscription rates all catered to a semiliterate, small-farming white majority in the state. These readers rewarded the attention Holden paid them by delivering the governor's office to the Democrats and giving their editor unprecedented control over a political party.

The challenges of the state stymied many of its editors, perhaps most spectacularly during the failure of the state editorial convention, when lack of reliable transportation ruined chances for a large assembly in Raleigh. Individual editorial successes in the state demonstrate the importance of recognizing the press' unique responsibility to its audience. North Carolina's editors overcame government regulation and, eventually, came to regulate their own morality for the sake of survival. In doing so, they endeared their weeklies to generations of North Carolinians and helped ensure the place of the newspaper on the doorstep of citizens throughout the state. This honored place in North Carolina homes led to significant editorial influence in the political arena, which offered additional rewards, culminating in Holden's ascent to the highest office in the state.

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