
A Portrait of the Gales Family: Nineteenth Century Printers of Government Documents

Margaret J. Boeringer

The Gales family, nineteenth century North Carolina printers, lived lives that read like the script for a miniseries. Their story unfolds in England, Germany, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Raleigh, North Carolina. It involves presidents and pirates. True love, war, and personal ambition all play a part in the story. Throughout these times of excitement and drama, Joseph Gales, his son Joseph, Jr., and his son-in-law William Winston Seaton steadily published newspapers and important state and federal government documents. Each man served as mayor of his city. Joseph Gales, Sr., dedicated his long life to public service and the printed word, making notable contributions in public printing at both the national and state level. The documents they published serve today as valuable historical research tools, and as models for modern documents such as the *Congressional Record*.¹

Born in Eckington, England, in 1761, Joseph Gales was contractually apprenticed to a printer in Manchester at the age of thirteen. Gales was abused by the printer's wife and sued twice before he was released. Gales then became apprenticed successfully in Newark where he stayed on for two extra years working as a journeyman printer. At the end of these two years, he married Winifred Marshall, opened his own printing establishment in Sheffield, and started a family. From 1787 to 1794 Gales published a newspaper titled the *Sheffield Register*.

Gales was politically liberal, as was his newspaper. Joining the constitutional reform movement, he supported the French Revolution, an action which was not popular with the English Crown. The constitutional reform movement called for, among other things, reapportionment of representation in the House of Commons. Gales expressed his support both with articles in his newspaper and by the publication of pamphlets

such as Thomas Paine's "Rights of Man" and "The Spirit of John Locke." These were declared seditious by the Crown.²

In London, a letter was found from Gales' office in Sheffield supporting the proposal that the citizenry of Sheffield arm themselves in defense against the army of the Crown. Coupled with the printer's outspoken newspaper articles and pamphlets, this letter was sufficient to cause the Crown to issue an arrest order for him.³ The Habeas Corpus Act had been suspended by the government and Gales feared that he might be imprisoned indefinitely without trial if he remained in the country. Gales believed that he could no longer safely remain in England, so he fled to Germany. Later his family joined him in Germany, and the next year found the entire family emigrating to the United States. On the way, British pirates harrassed their ship. The family settled in Philadelphia, then the nation's capital.

In Philadelphia, Gales first became a journeyman printer and later a bookkeeper for Dunlap and Claypoole printers of the *Daily Advertiser*, a newspaper. The partnership's other principal product was government printing. In fact, John Dunlap, one of the partners, was the original publisher of both the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. Early in his employment with this firm, Gales disclosed that he had learned shorthand and was immediately assigned to be a reporter of Congressional debates. These debates were then printed in the newspaper, or occasionally in pamphlet form. According to legend, Gales was the first verbatim reporter of Congressional debates.⁴

Due to his successes and the public recognition he enjoyed, he left employment with Dunlap and Claypoole and began printing a newspaper of his own, *Gales's Independent Gazetteer*. A year later he sold his list of subscribers to Samuel Harrison Smith, another printer. Gales also printed early Congressional materials, many of

Margaret J. Boeringer is Reference/Documents Librarian, University of Arkansas at Little Rock/Pulaski County Law Library in Little Rock, Arkansas.

which can be found in Charles Evans's *American Bibliography*.⁵

In 1798 Nathaniel Macon, a North Carolina member of the House of Representatives, encouraged Gales to come to North Carolina to print a newspaper and to compete for the position of state printer.⁶ At this time the state's newspapers were partisan and virtually all supported the Federalist view. Both Macon and Gales were Republicans and opposed the Federalist viewpoint. The Republicans could voice their opinions by establishing a newspaper expressing the Republican views in North Carolina and by controlling the state government printing. In support of these ideas, Gales moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1799 and accepted Macon's plans. His move had a second purpose as well, that of removing himself and his family from the dangers of the yellow fever plagues then affecting Philadelphia.⁷

Now in North Carolina, Gales acted as reporter to the North Carolina legislature and also printed his newspaper, the *Raleigh Register*. He unsuccessfully competed for the position of state printer the first year, but he attained the position the following year. He held the title of state printer for ten years against fierce competition from Federalist newspaper printers. While newspaper printers routinely attacked one another in editorials, Gales and one of his opponents even came to blows with canes on the courthouse steps in 1804.⁸ All this action made for lively reading, and Gales's foreign background and questionable exodus from England became a popular theme in editorial attacks from the opposition. When the legislature, under political pressure from Gales's opponents, lowered his salary in 1810, Gales, offended, withdrew his name from the election.

After leaving the position he had held for a decade, Gales continued reporting for the legislature and printing the *Raleigh Register*. Upon retiring in 1833, he relocated to Washington, D.C. and edited the *Annals of Congress* which his son, Joseph, Jr., and his son-in-law, William Winston Seaton, were printing. In Washington, Gales's beloved wife died. He moved back to Raleigh where he died while serving as the mayor of Raleigh, a position he had held for a total of fourteen years before and after his move to Washington.

Gales had always dreamed of having one of his sons graduate from college. However, his son Joseph, Jr. was expelled from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill after only one year.⁹ Joseph, Jr. did receive a diploma from the Typographical Society of Philadelphia in 1806, certifying him as a finished printer, a trade he had first

learned from his father. Lack of a college education did not prevent Joseph, Jr. from living a successful life.

Recall that some years before, Samuel Harrison Smith had purchased Gales's subscriber list for *Gales's Independent Gazetteer*. Smith went on to establish a newspaper called the *National Intelligencer* in 1800 when the nation's capital was relocated to Washington, D.C. Joseph, Jr. joined Smith in Washington, D.C. in 1807. By 1809, Joseph, Jr. was a full partner and in 1810 he became sole owner, allowing Smith to retire. Joseph, Jr.'s brother-in-law, William Winston Seaton later joined him and formed the partnership of Gales and Seaton.

William Winston Seaton was born into a prominent Virginia family and began working for a newspaper at the age of seventeen. He first came to Raleigh to work for one of Gales's competitors. He met and fell in love with Gales's daughter Sarah, whom he married in 1809. He joined Joseph, Jr. in Washington, D.C. in 1812, and together they edited the *National Intelligencer*. The *National Intelligencer* was a four page newspaper consisting primarily of Congressional proceedings. Other material included editorial columns, letters, clippings from other newspapers, political articles and some advertisements.

The *National Intelligencer* was also the organ or "Court Paper" for the Madison and Monroe administrations. As such, it reflected official opinion and was the first place where treaties and proclamations were published during the years it held the favor of the administration.¹⁰ The editors of the *National Intelligencer* acted as reporters of Congressional debates, one in the House and one in the Senate. Their role was more like that of a stenographer for the *Congressional Record* than that of the modern journalist. The *National Intel-*

Chronological List of Publications

Sheffield Register. June 8, 1787 - July 27, 1794. Sheffield: Gales

Gales's Independent Gazetteer. 1796. Philadelphia: Gales.

Raleigh Register. October 22, 1749-1848. Raleigh: Gales.

National Intelligencer. 1810-1865. Washington: Gales and Seaton.

Register of Debates in Congress. 1825-1837. Washington: Gales and Seaton.

American State Papers. 1832-1861. Washington: Gales and Seaton.

Annals of Congress. 1834-1856. Washington: Gales and Seaton.

liger was able to report the proceedings of Congress in greater detail than any other source until 1833 when coverage began to be provided by the *Congressional Globe*. The reports of debates were often printed verbatim. Articles from the *National Intelligencer* were printed in newspapers throughout the country.

The election of John Quincy Adams as president in 1825 heralded the start of Gales's and Seaton's fall from their position as the principal government printers.¹¹ Their newspaper was no longer the organ of the administration and by the end of Adams's term of office the partnership had lost the Congressional printing contracts they had held since 1819. Because of this loss of a steady source of work, the editors were forced to find a new use for the extensive printing plant built up to support the government contracts. The void was filled by the publication of the *Annals of Congress* (1834-1856) and the *American State Papers* (1832-1861).

The *Annals of Congress* were the forerunner of the modern *Congressional Record*.¹² The *Annals* recorded the debates and proceedings of the first eighteen Congresses and consisted of forty-two volumes, covering the years 1789 to 1824. The first two volumes of the *Annals*, edited by Joseph, Sr., were published in 1834. Congress appropriated money for the completion of the *Annals* in 1849, and the remaining volumes were published between 1849 and 1856.

Money for the *American State Papers* was appropriated by Congress in 1831. The *American State Papers* consist of thirty-eight volumes and reprint executive and legislative documents for the first twenty-five Congresses. These materials had been originally printed inadequately, and most copies of them had been destroyed by the British in 1814. The archives and manuscript records of the Senate and House were used to compile and edit a complete set which was then printed by Gales and Seaton between 1832 and 1861.¹³

Like his father—the longtime mayor of Raleigh—Joseph, Jr. served as mayor of Washington, D.C., from 1827 to 1830, just as his glory years came to a close. His years as mayor were rather unremarkable. Toward the end of his own printing career, from 1840 to 1850, William Winston Seaton also served as mayor. Seaton was treasurer of the Smithsonian Institution and led the movement to erect the Washington Monument.¹⁴

This brief article can provide but a glimpse of the color and excitement of the lives of these early printers of government documents. Much of the story related here was recorded in a memoir

written by Winifred, wife of Joseph, Sr., also the author of the first novel both written and printed in North Carolina. Her memoirs relate many personal anecdotes, including the voyage to America, the pirates who harassed the ship, and the early struggles to become established in the printing business. The original manuscript of the memoir is housed in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and a copy can be found at the State Archives in Raleigh. A financial account book for the firm of Gales and Seaton is housed at the Archives and Manuscripts Department at Duke University. A cashbook and diary kept by Joseph, Sr., during his voyage to America is housed in Raleigh at the State Archives. The diary was examined by William Powell in an excellent article for the *North Carolina Historical Review*.¹⁵

Ph.D. dissertations have been written and published concerning each of the newspapers.¹⁶ Bound copies of the *National Intelligencer* are maintained at the Davis Library in Chapel Hill and the North Carolina Collection there has microfilm of the *Raleigh Register*. William Winston Seaton is the subject of a biography titled *William Winston Seaton of the National Intelligencer* written by his daughter Josephine in 1871.¹⁷ A comprehensive work describing the lives of these men would be an exciting addition to the history of government printing.

References

1. Anne Boyd and Rae Rips, *United States Government Publications* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1949): 64.
2. William Noblett, "From Sheffield to North Carolina: England's loss was the United State's gain when the fiery radical Joseph Gales established a prosperous foothold in the New World," *History Today* 26(January, 1976):23; Robert Elliott, Jr., *The Raleigh Register, 1799-1863*, James Sprunt Studies in History and Political Science (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955): 7, 9; William Ames, *A History of the National Intelligencer*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972): 71; Reminiscences, Gales Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill: 40.
3. Noblett, "From Sheffield to North Carolina," Elliott, *The Raleigh Register*: 9; Ames, *A History of the National Intelligencer*: 71; Reminiscences: 53; W.H.G. Armytage, "The Editorial Experience of Joseph Gales, 1786-1794," *The North Carolina Historical Review*, 28(July, 1951):334, 358.
4. Charles Lanman, "National Intelligencer and its editors," *Atlantic Monthly* (October, 1860):470; Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).
5. Charles Evans, *American Bibliography* (New York: Peter Smith, 1941).
6. William E. Dodd, *The Life of Nathaniel Macon* (1903; reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, 1970); Elliott, *Raleigh Register*: 16; Ames, *A History of the National Intelligencer*: 75.
7. Reminiscences; Ames, *A History of the National Intelligencer*: 75.

8. *Raleigh Register*, December 10, 1804; Ames, *A History of the National Intelligencer*: 78; Elizabeth Waugh, *North Carolina's Capital, Raleigh* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967).

9. Grady Lee Ernest Carroll, *The Gales Family in Raleigh and Washington: Sketches for Portraits* (Raleigh: Carroll, 1978); Ames, *A History of the National Intelligencer*: 80.

10. Ames, *A History of the National Intelligencer*: 113.

11. *Ibid.*: 127.

12. Joe Morehead, *Introduction to United States Public Documents*, 3d ed. (Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1983): 142.

13. Boyd and Rips, *Government Publications*: 80.

14. *Who Was Who in America: Historical volume 1607-1896*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Marquis Who's Who, 1967):543.

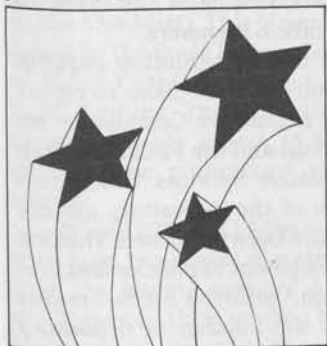
15. William Powell, "The Diary of Joseph Gales, 1794-1875" *North Carolina Historical Review* 26 (1949):335.

16. Ames, *A History of the National Intelligencer*; Elliott, *The Raleigh Register*.

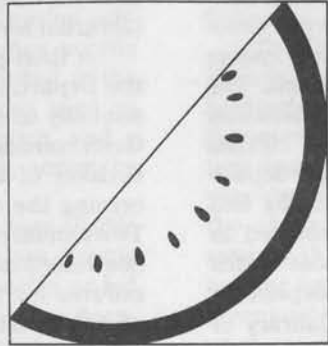
17. [Josephine Seaton], *William Winston Seaton of the National Intelligencer*, (Boston: R. Osgood and Co., 1871, New York: Arno Press, 1970).



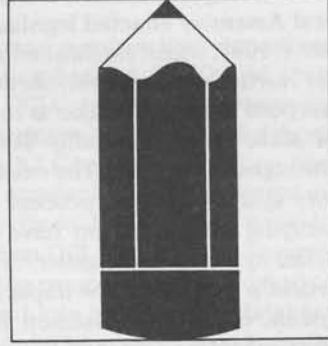
J U L Y



A U G U S T



S E P T E M B E R



WE'RE BIG IN SMALL PRESS

- 700 Presses
- 5,000 Titles
- All in Stock
- Adult Non-Fiction
- Annotations Services
- Preview/Approval Plans

QUALITY BOOKS INC.

JOHN HIGGINS
SALES
REPRESENTATIVE

Toll Free
Call Collect

1-800-323-4241
312-295-2010