

[Abstracted from Carrol H. Quenzel, *Preliminary checklist for Fredericksburg, 1778-1876*. Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1947. Virginia imprint series ; no. 4. Pp. 99-153.]

*The News* was established as the *Daily Whig News* on July 1, 1847, changed to a semi-weekly on July 8, 1847, and had “*Daily Whig*” deleted from its name on February 4, 1848. Robert Baylor Semple, the son of a Baptist minister of the same name, edited the *News* from its establishment until his death on February 8, 1853. A staunch Whig, Semple was mayor of Fredericksburg from March 1844 until he died in office almost nine years later.<sup>106</sup>

Like numerous citizens since, Semple was on a committee to suggest plans for enlarging and remodeling the courthouse. Convinced that many tax-payers considered the proposed building too extravagant, Semple voted in favor of a motion rescinding the order authorizing its construction.<sup>107</sup> A fellow editor described Semple as one noted for his benevolence.<sup>108</sup>

Although Cappon apparently did not deem it sufficiently important to mention, there was an interregnum between Semple’s death in February and Little’s purchase of *The News* in July.<sup>109</sup> While a sound Whig buyer was being sought, the paper was published by the founder’s nephew, William M. Semple.<sup>110</sup>

#### ARCHIBALD A. LITTLE

On July 4, 1853, the control of *The News* passed to Archibald Alexander (“Sandy”) Little who retained it for twenty-four years until his death on July 15, 1877. Little, whose name became synonymous with *The News*, was born in Fredericksburg circa 1824, his parents having moved to Virginia from New Jersey. He attended local private schools, was graduated from Princeton, studied law and-practiced in Richmond and afterwards in Fredericksburg.<sup>111</sup>

If one accepts the Reverend James W. Hunnicutt’s statement, *The News*, along with the *Virginia Herald*, the *Democratic Recorder* and the *Weekly Advertiser*, did an “excellent business” from May 9, 1861, to April 18, 1862.<sup>112</sup> However, they were all forced to suspend publication before the battle of Fredericksburg.

Little resumed publication on May 23, 1865, with the Democratic paper *The New Era*. In July 1866 its title was changed to *The Fredericksburg News* and in the 1870’s it was shortened to *The News*.<sup>113</sup>

The following appeal not only clearly reveals the effort that was required to resume business, but also presents a picture of the plight of a Southern community at war’s end:

"Owing to the scarcity of cash and currency, we shall be remitted to the now antiquated method of barter. ‘Truck for truck’ said the old woman, when she gave the preacher vegetables in pay for his sermon. Therefore, for the literature of the “New Era,” we can receive those possible potatoes, contingent turnips, coming corn, butter, eggs and other ‘vegetables,’ too numerous to mention, including fire-wood. Come up my countrymen to the demands and necessities of the “New Era.”<sup>114</sup>

Ten months later Little displayed some originality in attempting to collect his honest debts and to protect his readers by inserting the following advertisement:

“Gift Enterprises. -- We promised Messrs. Parkinson & Co., and Messrs. Hutchinson & Co., of New York, a gratuitous notice if they failed to pay their advertising bills. Nether have paid us and they have received an unwilling “gift” from us. We have seen some specimens of the “\$20” prizes -- for \$1.40 -- which a jeweler assures us costs \$8 a dozen, and said he could furnish at \$1 each. We advise our readers against investing in

the brass spoons and pickbeak jewelry of such establishments as Parkinson and Hutchinson.”<sup>115</sup>

Little was secretary of the White Man’s Democratic county convention at Spotsylvania Court House on October 10, 1867. Five days later, he served as secretary pro temp of the meeting in the mayor’s office of an organization promoting home industry, The Manufacturing and Mechanical Association of Fredericksburg.<sup>116</sup>

Pre-eminently an editor, Little was characterized by a Richmond contemporary as “the wit of the Virginia press.”<sup>117</sup> According to a Norfolk journalist he wielded an unusually “graceful and facile pen.”<sup>118</sup> To a Fredericksburg competitor, Little’s editorials were sharp, short, and decisive; replete with terse, pregnant, and distinct statement, enlivened by apt illustration and frequently enforced by pungent wit.<sup>119</sup> As for his personality the *Richmond State* asserted that “Sandy Little, though of firm convictions and stern in principle, was so gentle and winning in manner that it was as impossible for him to make an enemy as to do an unworthy act.”<sup>120</sup>

Something of a traveler, there is a definite record of Little visiting Ireland, and for his health he spent many summers at White Sulphur Springs.<sup>121</sup> It was at this resort that he died at 3:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, July 15, 1877, in his fifty-third year.<sup>122</sup> *The News* was continued until 1886: by his sister Bella Little, 1877-1880?; by A. J. Little, 1880-1885; and by James T. Powell, 1885-1886.<sup>123</sup>

Notes:

106. Lester J. Cappon. *Virginia newspapers 1821-1935*. New York: D. Appleton-Century for the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, University of Virginia, 1936. p. 91; Silvanus J. Quinn, *The History of the City of Fredericksburg, Virginia*. Richmond, 1908, p. 337; *Weekly Advertiser*, Feb. 12, 1853.

107. Quinn, p. 138-140.

108. *Weekly Advertiser*, Feb. 12, 1853.

109. Cappon, p. 91.

110. *The News*, July 4, 1853.

111. *The Virginia Star*, July 18, 1877.

112. *The Conspiracy Unveiled, The South Sacrificed; Or The Horrors of Secession*. Philadelphia, 1863, p. 298.

113. Cappon, p. 91; *The New Era*, May 23, 1865, May 22, 1866; *The News*, Sept. Dec. 1873.

114. *The New Era*, May 26, 1865.

115. *The New Era*, Mar. 23, 1866.

116. *Virginia Herald*, Oct. 10, 15, 1867.

117. *Richmond Whig* as quoted in the *Fredericksburg News*, July 19, 1877.
118. *Norfolk Virginian* as quoted in the *Fredericksburg News*, July 19, 1877.
119. *Virginia Star*, July 18, 1877.
120. As quoted in the *Fredericksburg News*, July 19, 1877.
121. *Virginia Herald*, Oct. 3, 1867; *Virginia Herald*, Sept. 16, 1867; Aug. 31, 1874.
122. *The Fredericksburg News*, July 16, 1877.
123. Cappon, p. 91.