

1980

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### Recommended Citation

Gould, Christopher (1980) "Scottish Printers and Booksellers in Colonial Charleston, S. C.," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 15: Iss. 1.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol15/iss1/15>

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*Christopher Gould*

## Scottish Printers and Booksellers in Colonial Charleston, S.C.



Scottish merchants played an important role in the emergence of the publishing and bookselling trades in colonial South Carolina not only because, in a sense, they dominated both activities (a majority of Charleston's five printing houses in operation between 1734 and 1782 were owned by Scots, and one of these men, Robert Wells, held preeminence in the book trade), but also because each of the Scottish-owned firms--those of the Wells family, David Bruce, and James Robertson--introduced innovative, professional approaches to the two trades, which had stagnated in South Carolina during twenty-five years of control by the Timothy family.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, these three merchants brought to Charleston the advantages of consolidation, European sources of materials, liberal terms of credit for the customer, and the development of markets in other parts of the South. All of these improvements helped to make a far wider variety of reading material available to a larger clientele at a lower price.

Robert Wells, whom Isaiah Thomas has called the principal bookseller in the colonial Carolinas, has been credited with revolutionizing the book trade in the southern American colonies.<sup>2</sup> When he arrived from Dumfries in 1754, there were six or seven merchants involved to varying degrees in Charleston's book trade. Peter Timothy, who held a monopoly on printing in

South Carolina, was the chief participant. Timothy's father had been sent to Charleston in 1734 by Benjamin Franklin to operate the printing shop of his former protege, Thomas Whitmarsh, who had died two years after establishing himself as South Carolina's official printer. Though within a few years the Timothys managed to buy out Franklin's interest, they continued to rely on him for shipments of books, even though some titles (almanacs in particular) were perpetually in demand and conceivably could have been printed locally at a profit.<sup>3</sup> Timothy himself, therefore, undertook relatively little publishing other than acts of the colonial assembly, a few works concerned with local religious controversy, and the kinds of works which today might be assigned to a job printer. Consequently, the variety of books for sale in South Carolina during the 1740's must have been quite paltry. In 1748, Hugh Anderson, headmaster of the Charleston free-school, complained in a letter appearing in Timothy's *South-Carolina Gazette*: "there is no bookseller in this province who can supply a necessary variety of books, or take in for sale such books as the owner may incline to sell." Anderson also objected to "the present method of disposing of libraries of deceased persons...in lots or parcels not sorted or entered in a catalogue."<sup>4</sup> In other words, there was essentially no organized method of selling used books, and those which were sold were marketed in a most haphazard manner.

Within a few years of his arrival in South Carolina, Robert Wells had remedied each of Anderson's complaints and had also made other substantial contributions to Charleston's book trade. Advertisements for Wells's Great Stationery and Book Shop, originally located at the corner of Elliott Street and Bedon's Alley, began appearing in the *South-Carolina Gazette* in 1754. The first of them listed only a modest number of titles, but among these were popular novels imported from Britain. An advertisement in the 8 July 1754 *Gazette* announced "proposals for printing by subscription The Travels and Adventures of the Famous Tom Bell." Here Wells was carrying out a practice common among colonial printers and booksellers: soliciting a small advance from a given number of patrons in order to insure the profitability of a particular publishing venture. What is significant, though, about Wells's announcement is that the printing was to be done by a London firm. Apparently Wells had begun to recognize a demand for books in South Carolina which could not be fully exploited by conventional sales techniques. Apparently the printing of a new edition of a popular novel, even if undertaken abroad, could make copies available to Wells's customers at a reduced price, and not yet having his own press, he was still able to use his British contacts advantageously.

Plausibly, the success of this and similar ventures persuaded Wells that the time was right for introducing a second press to South Carolina. In 1755, Wells was able to offer his customers "any of the magazines or other periodical works published in Great Britain," and announced the arrival of copies of Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary*, which had first appeared in London that same year.<sup>5</sup> By 1756, Wells's advertisements typically were listing nearly a hundred titles, and he had begun to be involved extensively in the sale of used books. In November, 1756, Wells auctioned "the library of the Rev. Mr. Alex. Garden, deceased, late rector of St. Philip's...a choice assortment of modern books."<sup>6</sup> Thereafter, he was continually active as an auctioneer, securing in 1759 the title of vendue-master through the influence of Lord Westcote.<sup>7</sup> Eliminating the chaos decried by Hugh Anderson, Wells regularly made catalogues of titles available in advance of his auctions.

Wells's contacts in the royal branch of the colonial government also helped him to secure in 1758 a commission as marshal of the Vice-Admiralty Court, a position which he retained until his departure from America in 1775. In 1758 Wells imported a printing press and initiated the *South-Carolina Weekly Gazette*, the first newspaper to compete with Timothy's. Since Wells had been trained as a bookbinder and not a printer, he apparently summoned David Bruce from Scotland, and Bruce became the manager of the new print shop, which adjoined Wells's bookstore.<sup>8</sup> Wells's contributions to printing and bookselling in Charleston have been detailed elsewhere; so it should suffice here to say that by the time political tensions had necessitated his exile, Wells had built an empire.<sup>9</sup> His advertisements for books regularly occupied three entire columns of his newspaper (renamed in 1764 the *South-Carolina and American General Gazette*) and contained literally hundreds of titles. He extended liberal terms of credit to his customers, allowing "a handsome profit" to those "who buy to sell again" (presumably a network of booksellers in the South Carolina back country, in Georgia, and in North Carolina who bought wholesale).<sup>10</sup> His press is known to have produced at least 130 imprints, verified by surviving copies or newspaper advertisements. Wells was also engaged in bookbinding, and he maintained contacts in his native country which allowed him to import quantities of leather, often in short supply in the colonies.<sup>11</sup> Wells, then, was the first tradesman in South Carolina to consolidate bookselling, binding, and printing in a single operation; savings to his patrons were inevitable.

Wells's political difficulties were partly the inevitable result of circumstances outside his control and partly the effect of his displays of British loyalty. In an autobiographi-

cal sketch, Wells's younger son reports: "I was always my father's favourite, and he, fearing that I should become tainted with the disloyal principles which began immediately after the peace of 1763 to prevail throughout America, obliged me to wear a tartan coat, and a blue Scotch bonnet; hoping, by these means, to make me consider myself a Scotchman."<sup>12</sup> While such gestures surely must have aggravated Whig sympathizers (in whose minds Tory politics, Scottishness, Catholicism, and the anachronistic Jacobite cause were all of a piece), the disastrous political position to which Wells found himself committed in 1775 was more the result of forces to which he did not contribute directly. First, there was the long-standing conflict between the Commons House of the Assembly, on the one hand, and the royally-appointed Council, the governor, and the military, on the other. Although Peter Timothy was not politically outspoken until after the Stamp Act controversy, he had served in the Commons from 1752 to 1754 and was a close friend of Christopher Gadsden, a militant Whig and a power in the lower chamber. Consequently, Timothy could depend on retaining his near monopoly on official printing, and, indeed, until 1770 he exclusively published the acts of the Assembly at the Commons's request. What official printing was assigned to Wells (and it amounted to very little) had to come directly from the governor or the military. Therefore, not only did Wells lack an incentive for appeasing the Whig-leaning Commons; he also had to avoid alienating the royal appointees from whom he had secured lucrative bureaucratic employments.<sup>13</sup> Finally, there was a protracted journalistic feud between Wells and Timothy which dated back to disputes in 1761 over the conduct of the Cherokee Wars. Gadsden's *Philopatrics Essays* appeared in the *South-Carolina Gazette*, occasioning a debate between their author, critical of military policy, and the Tory William Simpson, whose letters appeared in Wells's *Weekly Gazette*.<sup>14</sup> Also involved in the dispute was Governor Thomas Boone's arbitrary invalidation of the election of the Commons House membership. By 1763, Henry Laurens had been drawn into the controversy by a letter from Gadsden to Timothy which brushed aside Simpson as an antagonist in order to attack directly the conservative Laurens.<sup>15</sup> Even by the early 1760's, therefore, a trend had developed, and Wells's paper had been established as the mouth-piece of conservative ideology.

The relations between Wells and Timothy were not improved by the satirical attacks on Wells which appeared occasionally in the *South-Carolina Gazette*. One such piece, printed in the 3 October 1761 issue, quotes Wells:

You may the simple truth proclaim,  
Aloud with pen and press;

Such silly practices I disclaim,  
'Twould make my pennyless.

A perpetual irritation to Timothy, which accounts for his gibes, was Wells's use of Scottish connections to obtain news concerning Indian affairs before it could reach Timothy. The editor of the *South-Carolina Gazette* had in fact long been at odds with the Indian superintendent of the Southern district, a Scot and a Tory named John Stuart; in 1755, for example, Timothy complained to Benjamin Franklin: "the wretched management of Indian affairs by that government has occasioned the imposing silence on my press."<sup>16</sup> So when Wells established a paper in competition with the *South-Carolina Gazette*, Stuart further exasperated Timothy by brazenly showing favoritism in relaying news to his friend and countryman.<sup>17</sup> Wells, on the other hand, was piqued by Timothy's outspoken admiration of John Wilkes, whose mockingly anti-Tory, anti-Scottish *North Briton* essays were reprinted in the *South-Carolina Gazette*. The response of Charleston's Scottish population to these essays was articulated by one A. L. E. in a letter appearing in the 30 July 1763 issue of Timothy's newspaper; the writer complained of the "excessive rancour" with which "Mr. Wilkes, as well as others of his countrymen, has vilified and persecuted the impartial motives of Scotland." Wells, for his part, took every occasion to denounce and ridicule Wilkes, who eventually lost favor even with South Carolina's Whigs.<sup>18</sup> By the time that the really explosive issues like the Stamp Act, non-importation, and the Boston Massacre emerged, Wells's position had solidified and he was committed to a highly unpopular cause.

During the winter of 1775, the management of the Wells firm was assumed by the family's elder son, John, after his father was compelled to depart for London, where he remained in greatly reduced circumstances until his death in 1794.<sup>19</sup> Though politically more flexible than his father, John Wells faced some serious handicaps as a businessman. First, there was widespread suspicion of Charleston's Scottish community, whom Gadsden labeled "a number of cunning, jacobitical, Butean rascals...that leave nothing untried to counterwork the firmness and loyalty of the true sons of liberty among us."<sup>20</sup> And indeed it seems that loyal sentiments probably were more prevalent among Scots than among other national groups--it has been estimated that nearly a third of the membership of Charleston's Saint Andrew's Society refused, in the face of direst retribution, to declare their allegiances to the rebellion.<sup>21</sup> Though the younger Wells acquiesced in signing the "Association," an American oath of loyalty, and urged his brother to follow his example, Wells's shop was closed briefly in the summer of 1775

by a mob of angry patriots.<sup>22</sup> Apparently the connection between Scottishness and monarchy (created by resentment of George III's favorite, Lord Bute) had been firmly established by Whig propaganda.

Still, John Wells profited from certain fortuitous circumstances. First, Charles Crouch, the militant patriot printer, died in 1775, and his newspaper ceased publication. His death left Wells with only two competitors, one of whom, David Bruce, was also a Scot and therefore subject to the suspicions of the rebels. Charleston's only other printer, Peter Timothy, was preoccupied with political affairs, including membership in the Continental Congress, and had allowed his press to fall into disrepair. He too discontinued his newspaper in 1775. For two years, therefore, Wells's *General Gazette* was South Carolina's only newspaper. (Timothy's newspaper was revived briefly under a different name in 1777.) Second, Wells benefited from his friendship with the politically conservative Henry Laurens, President of the Council of Safety, who, though vastly more trusted than Wells, had also been late to embrace the cause of independence. Laurens used his influence to assign at least one piece of official printing to Wells's press.<sup>23</sup> And even though Gadsden may have detested the Wellses, he was forced to concede that the urgency of publishing certain documents dictated the need to send them to a press in better repair than his friend Timothy's.<sup>24</sup> Finally, John Wells not only complied with the expectations of the patriots by printing pro-rebel literature, but, according to Isaiah Thomas, he also served in the Continental Army, assisting in the abortive efforts to defend Savannah against the British.<sup>25</sup> In 1780, though, Wells again shifted his loyalties during the British siege of Charleston. He must have been engaged, furthermore, in some fifth-column activities during the siege, for he was later accused by several petitioners to the State Legislature, attempting in 1783 to have their banishment rescinded, of having coerced some of Charleston's citizens into signing an address to Admiral Arbuthnot, the British victor, abjuring their allegiances to the Revolution.<sup>26</sup> Because of his tactics, which guaranteed the survival of the family business in 1780, John Wells's remaining in South Carolina after 1782 was unthinkable; he waited nine years before appealing his banishment.<sup>27</sup> After a brief hiatus, probably occasioned by a shortage of paper during the siege, the *South-Carolina and American General Gazette* resumed publication, as a Tory newspaper, immediately after the British victory. Curiously, though, the 27 September issue carried an advertisement for *The Candid Retrospect: Or, the American War Examined by Whig Principles* (Evans 16278). Wells, it appears, did not wish to surrender his options.

John Wells's political temporizing, no doubt, can be credited with rescuing the family business from the vengeance of the patriots in 1775 and from that of the British in 1780. (His continuing in the publishing trade during the British occupation was not a matter of course, since the army had brought to Charleston its own printer, James Robertson.) Still, the firm did not thrive under John Wells's management. Problems in collecting debts, resulting from the Wellses' liberal credit policies, were aggravated by shortages of reliable currency during the Revolution. Sometime between 1776 and 1780 Wells made a real estate investment (probably to curtail losses from fluctuations in the value of currency) which was subsequently confiscated by the State after the British evacuation.<sup>28</sup> Also, a disastrous fire in January, 1778, damaged Wells's shop. Residing in London with the other members of his family, who had all fled South Carolina by 1778, Robert Wells dispatched his younger son, William, to Charleston after word of the British victory reached Britain. The father was dissatisfied with his older son's handling of business affairs and angered by his lack of political convictions; he therefore gave William Wells the authority to assume control of the family business.

Shortly after William Wells's arrival in Charleston, the 21 February 1781 *General Gazette* announced that "Robert Wells and Son" (since 1778 John Wells had been using his own imprint) had been appointed by His Majesty "Printers in South Carolina." Thereafter, publications of the firm bore this ambiguous imprint, though it appears that the brothers cooperated in issuing a *Royal Gazette* (so the *General Gazette* was renamed in February, 1781) until John Wells departed for Falmouth, on 4 May 1782, to be reconciled with his father; William Wells continued to publish the paper himself until August.<sup>29</sup> Having been proscribed by the State government, William departed for Saint Augustine in 1782 and reassembled the press there, on a site now designated number 27 Cuna Street. John Wells returned to America in 1784 and managed the business in Florida briefly before relocating it again in the Bahamas. There he remained until his death, which occurred a few months after he had made an appeal to the South Carolina Senate in 1791 to have his banishment rescinded.<sup>30</sup> William Wells, who later gained renown as a physician in London (his biography appears in the DNB), returned to Charleston in 1783 to attempt to recover some debts. A mob stormed the house at which he had planned to visit, and he was imprisoned until he agreed to pay a fine assessed for some ill-defined misdemeanor.<sup>31</sup> After 1783, no member of the Wells family ever returned to South Carolina.

Upon his arrival from Scotland, David Bruce became the manager of Robert Wells's new printing shop. Under his super-



vision, the press was immediately successful. An advertisement in the 31 October 1759 *South-Carolina Weekly Gazette* testifies to the efficiency of Bruce's management; it announces the publication of *The Mother's Catechism* (Morgan 171), calling it "the cheapest book ever published in this province." Regrettably, there are only three issues extant from the six-year run of the *Weekly Gazette*, and naturally Wells had ceased advertising in Timothy's paper in 1758. So it is difficult to trace the development of Wells and Bruce's enterprise between 1758 and 1766, the year that Bruce severed his connections with Wells and, coincidentally, the year also that the run of Wells's newspaper (renamed in 1764) becomes fairly regular on the Library of Congress microfilms. Fifteen publications from this period, however, can be identified as products of the press, and all but one, along with the issues of the newspaper, bear only the name of Robert Wells. But the one exception, the 1765 edition of John Tobler's *South-Carolina and Georgia Almanack* (Evans 10187), is a noteworthy one, since the annual editions of that publication, compiled by Wells after 1765 (the year that its originator, a Swiss immigrant who settled in New Windsor, South Carolina, died), were probably the most popular items that the firm produced. Tobler's death occasioned a battle over publishing rights, and Wells complained of the existence of three "pirated editions" of the 1766 almanac.<sup>32</sup> It has been assumed heretofore that Wells had only two competitors, Timothy and Crouch, in 1766 and that Bruce did not set himself up independently until the following year. But if one assumes the veracity of Wells's claim, there must have been a fourth printer in Charleston in 1766. The appearance of David Bruce's name alongside that of Wells on the title page of the 1765 almanac, furthermore, suggests that Bruce had begun to assume the role of a partner, and Robert Wells was never comfortable with less than complete control of his firm, as his strained relationship with his older son and the dissolution of an earlier, short-lived partnership with his in-laws suggest.<sup>33</sup> A reasonable surmise is that Wells and Bruce parted company over the publication of Tobler's *Almanack*, a work which the late author, probably impressed by the more efficient operation of Bruce's print shop, reassigned to Wells's press in 1764 at the expense of Peter Timothy. Gaining the publishing rights from Tobler was a coup on Wells's part, and perhaps Bruce did not feel he was receiving adequate recompense for the inroads of the Wells firm on Timothy's stronghold. Finally, it is known that Wells hired another famous printer, Isaiah Thomas, as a journeyman in 1766.<sup>34</sup> It seems likely then that Thomas, who remained with Wells until 1770, took Bruce's place, with, of course, reduced status and responsibility. Wells, apparently, had learned the fundamentals of the printing trade

from Bruce, for Thomas reports that Wells supervised slave labor in operating his press during the period that Thomas was associated with him.

Bruce's activities between 1766 and 1769 are a matter of considerable uncertainty. Printing was certainly not his primary occupation, as an advertisement in the 7 December 1767 *South-Carolina Gazette* shows. In it, Bruce, alluding to the death of his wife Eleanor, who had been engaged as a milliner, and to his intention to leave South Carolina in the spring, listed a variety of items, chiefly fabrics, for sale; but the advertisement gave no indication that Bruce was then employed as a printer. Still in Charleston two years later, Bruce ran another advertisement in the 30 March 1769 *South-Carolina Gazette*, to which he appended: "N.B. He likewise undertakes all manner of printing work, and will be obliged to those who chuse to employ him in this way." Like his mentor, Wells, Bruce offered to sell his wares "at a very reasonable advance." This second advertisement also provides a clue to the location of Bruce's shop: "on Church Street." Presumably it occupied the same site that it did in 1782--number 85 Church Street--probably in the building which Bruce purchased from his landlord, Thomas Roche, in 1776.<sup>35</sup> Since Bruce advertised very infrequently in Timothy's and Crouch's newspapers, the products of his press must be identified primarily by the location of extant copies. The earliest verifiable Bruce imprint was produced in 1769, the year that Bruce's firm must have begun to flourish. The success of this first known publishing venture is signaled by an advertisement which was carried by two Charleston newspapers:

The demands in this province, and from some of the neighboring colonies for 'The Extracts from the Proceedings of the High Court of Vice-Admiralty, in Charles-Town, South-Carolina, &c.' having far exceeded the number of books printed, a second impression, by desire of many respectable persons, with some additional remarks, &c. and a 'proper' appendix to the whole, will soon be made and published.<sup>36</sup>

Also, the printing of *Acts of the General Assembly of South-Carolina* (Evans 42173) in 1770 represented an encroachment upon Timothy's stronghold on official printing--an area in which Wells never managed to make much headway. A curious fact is that the publications of the *Extracts*, engineered by Henry Laurens in defiance of the royally-appointed court of which Robert Wells was a member, was assigned to Bruce rather than to Peter Timothy or Charles Crouch, both outspoken Whigs in 1769. Laurens might be termed relatively conservative, but it

is likewise significant that Bruce, unlike Wells, had not so alienated the more defiantly anti-Royalist Commons House that it would resist assigning work to him. Bruce, it appears, was more palatable to both Loyalists and patriots than were their respective adversaries. He profited from ostensible neutrality, it seems, whenever demand exceeded supply in the printing market.

Though as a Scottish merchant he was evidently subject to the same suspicions as was John Wells, Bruce cooperated fully with the American cause after 1775. Like Wells, Bruce benefited from the disrepair of Timothy's press, as he was, according to later testimony, "the printer of a pamphlet called *Common Sense* and sundry other publications in favor of America," though he maintained that "many of them did not defray the expense of printing." Bruce also claimed to have printed "the Acts of the Assembly and many other necessary matters for the State" during the tenure of Governor Rutledge (26 March 1776 to 5 March 1778), "which was almost constant labour for two years...for which he never received the least emolument."<sup>38</sup> Bruce's account here is a bit misleading in that Timothy, though doubtless hindered by the condition of his press, is known to have published at least some of South Carolina's statutes enacted during this period. Unfortunately, however, the greatest number of such documents lack the imprint of any firm. Logically, though, one must conclude that Bruce received the bulk of what official printing Timothy was unable to handle expeditiously, and very little of such work, by comparison, went to John Wells. Bruce's prosperity during this period is signaled by his acquisition of a dwelling, situated about a block west of Wells's Store on Tradd Street, in 1778.<sup>39</sup>

After the fall of Charleston, Bruce was persecuted for his support of the rebel cause and was never employed as a printer by the British, though he had signed the petition to Admiral Arbuthnot, "prevailed upon," a committee of the State Legislature later concluded, "by his fears and the insinuations of artful persons."<sup>40</sup> Distressed in circumstances after 1780, Bruce was offered "a handsome salary" by the Florida Assembly if he would agree to establish himself as a printer in Saint Augustine. Bruce demurred, though, having received, he later asserted:

two or three letters from a Mr. Dunlap and Mr. Childs printers, then at Ashley Ferry [apparently a mistaken reference to Parker's Ferry, near the temporary state capital of Jacksonboro], acquainting him that if he would remain with his types in Charlestown and choose either to be concerned or dispose of them, that they

had his Excellency Governor Matthews's promise that no advantage should be taken and a generous price given if he should dispose of them.<sup>41</sup>

The promise, however, proved unreliable, as the State Legislature, meeting in Jacksonboro, voted to banish all signatories of the address to Arbuthnot and to confiscate their property. In the meantime, the Wellses, recognizing that withdrawal of British forces from South Carolina had become inevitable, had accepted the offer of the Florida Assembly; so Bruce's only recourse was to risk remaining in Charleston and to appeal to the Legislature for relief. This he was granted in 1783, though his estate was amerced twelve percent of its value.<sup>42</sup> Apparently Bruce was unable to raise the funds, and it has been assumed heretofore that Bruce was forced to return to Great Britain.<sup>43</sup> However, a petition by Robert Bruce, the printer's brother, reports that Bruce "was put upon the List of Confiscation, and Five Negroes which was all he had, were Sold by the Commissioners and himself sent to Gaol where he Died."<sup>44</sup> The petition is followed by an obituary showing that Bruce died on "Thursday Morning 13th March...The next Evening his remains were interr'd in St. Michael's Church Yard followed by a number of respectable Inhabitants." Bruce, whose death at the age of fifty-two was described as sudden, was clearly the victim of a ruined reputation. (Peter Timothy, by contrast, having been imprisoned by the British with Christopher Gadsden in Saint Augustine, was a popular hero in South Carolina after the evacuation of British troops.<sup>45</sup>) Following Bruce's death his brother became a partner of Nathan Childs, a former associate of Robert Wells and the printer from Parker's Ferry, and together they issued a *South Carolina Weekly Gazette* from Bruce's old print shop at 85 Church Street.<sup>46</sup>

Bruce's contributions to the printing trade in South Carolina are more difficult to appraise than Wells's to bookselling. Yet the fact that Wells's press, under Bruce's supervision, was able immediately to produce South Carolina's cheapest book-length publication and to print at a profit almanacs of local interest is surely a tribute to Bruce's skills and to the quality of the equipment he brought from Scotland. By the time he had severed his connections with Wells, his employer's firm was a serious competitor to Timothy's. Bruce therefore must have felt justified in desiring a role of greater importance in Wells's enterprise--one of near parity with its founder. Bruce's political difficulties resemble those of John Wells in that both men were fence-straddlers during a turbulent period. But while Bruce may have been less of a hypocrite than Wells, he continually suffered the consequences of luke-

warm commitments--according to his own testimony, his acquiescence to British authority in 1780 was a passive gesture inspired by fear. Thus he was neglected by the British in favor of John Wells and was offered only the dubious reward (dubious because British fortunes were never more promising than in 1781, and Florida was a desolate frontier) of a position in Saint Augustine; when it was clear that Charleston would be evacuated, the offer was extended to the Wellses. Probably the most auspicious moment for Bruce's political ambivalence occurred between 1775 and 1779, when he was profiting from the dilapidated condition of Timothy's press and the unpopularity of John Wells. This was the period most prolific in Bruce imprints. With the British siege and subsequent victory, Bruce's trade came to an abrupt halt, at the moment when its future had appeared most promising.

The third Scottish printing firm to be established in South Carolina was owned by three men who were outsiders to the province. Their shop, located at number 20 Broad Street, was in effect a branch of a well-established New York printing and bookselling operation: that of James and Alexander Robertson. It operated in conjunction with a bookstore, located next door at number 12, owned by Nathaniel Mills and John Hicks, associates of the Robertsons who managed the New York office in their absence. (The Robertsons accompanied the British Army, establishing royalist newspapers in each major city which was captured.) During the first year of its operation in Charleston, the firm issued the *Royal South-Carolina Gazette* and a few other publications under the imprint of James Robertson, Daniel MacDonald, and Alexander Cameron. Cameron was the replacement for Robert Wells's friend, John Stuart, who had surrendered his post as supervisor of Indian affairs and fled to Britain in 1775. There is no evidence that Cameron was involved other than financially in the printing firm, since he was residing in Savannah at the time of his death in 1781. Thereafter, imprints carry only the name of James Robertson. Daniel MacDonald is a mysterious figure who was not, evidently, living in Charleston during the siege (his name does not appear on the address to Arbuthnot), and who was not a resident of the city in 1782.<sup>47</sup> Robertson, it seems, was the only active partner in the enterprise.

Born in Scotland, James Robertson emigrated to Boston in 1764 and was employed there as a journeyman printer. In 1768 he moved to New York with his younger brother and established the firm of James Robertson & Company. Before the Revolution, the Robertsons published at various times newspapers in New York, Albany, and Norwich, Connecticut; during the war, they established the *Royal American Gazette* in New York and the

*Royal Pennsylvania Gazette* in Philadelphia.<sup>48</sup> Though newspapers in other cities continued after 1780 to bear his imprint, it appears that James Robertson was a resident of Charleston during the British occupation.<sup>49</sup> The first issue of his *Royal South-Carolina Gazette* appeared on 8 June 1780, a few days after Charleston's surrender, and carried a letter from "Scotus Americanus" which attempted to play upon regional prejudice in rallying support for the British cause: "The New England colonies have long borne an inveterate enmity to Great-Britain....But this spirit reaches not this country, where liberality of sentiment in politics and toleration in religion, mark the character of the inhabitants." There was a precedent, apparently, for drawing associations between Scottishness and loyalties to the Crown, on the one hand, and Southernness, on the other, for Gadsden in his complaints about Charleston's "jacobitical rascals" observed that the northern colonies were relatively free of the undermining influences of a Loyalist Scottish community.<sup>50</sup>

By the end of July, the paper was appearing four times weekly--on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. Like the Wellses' *Royal Gazette*, Robertson's newspaper carried news items discouraging to the American cause and purported to reprint "captured rebel correspondence." Until July, 1782, book sales were confined to Mills and Hicks' store, though Robertson sold a variety of other goods at the print shop; the 19 December 1780 *Royal South-Carolina Gazette* carried the following announcement: "Just imported and now opening for sale on the lowest terms at the Printing-Office...a compleat assortment of stationery and a variety of other articles." The advertisement takes up an entire column and lists an assortment of merchandise. Starting in July, 1782, Robertson advertised jointly with Mills and Hicks. The 9 July issue of Robertson's paper announced the arrival of a collection of books and listed more than fifty titles, including works by Shakespeare, Pope, Fielding, and Sterne. But books continued to be in short supply in Charleston, for the Wellses no longer enumerated titles in their advertisements. (The last such list appeared in February.) Charles Morgan, a stationer and book-binder, felt compelled to require the patrons of his lending library to put down a deposit equaling the value of each book they wished to borrow; Morgan explained: "could books be procured with that facility as formerly, contingencies of the above nature might easily be substituted."<sup>51</sup> Loyalist merchants, faced with the imminent prospect of exile and confiscation, were eager to liquidate their stocks, and, indeed, one likely possibility is that the stock of books acquired by Robertson in July came from the Wells firm, which discontinued

its *Royal Gazette* the following month. Clearly, the extensive supplies of books made available by two professionally organized operations--those of Wells and Mills and Hicks--were a thing of the past, not soon to be revived in South Carolina.

Upon the demise of the Wellses' paper in August, 1782, Robertson declared his determination to continue the *Royal South-Carolina Gazette* for as long as he could "find it expedient," being "convinced that many articles of news of the first importance may arrive before the eventual withdrawing of the troops."<sup>52</sup> However, the following month the last issue--that of 12 September--appeared. In it Robertson expressed the hope that "a ray of light" would penetrate the rebellious colonies and that the wishes of American Loyalists might "yet be happily terminated." Robertson departed for New York that fall and continued to publish his *Royal American Gazette* in that city until 1783, when he returned to Scotland and established himself as a bookseller.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The history of printing in South Carolina began in 1731, when three men--Thomas Whitmarsh, Eleazar Phillips, and George Webb--came to Charleston attracted by a £ 1000 bonus offered by the provincial Assembly. Whitmarsh, the Timothys' predecessor, emerged as South Carolina's official printer. In 1732, Phillips died, and Webb disappeared. Until 1758, South Carolina had only one printing firm. See Douglas C. McMurtrie, "The First Decade of Printing in the Royal Province of South Carolina," *The Library*, 4th Series, XIII (1933), 425-52.

<sup>2</sup> See Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America* (Albany, 1874), I, 343; also Calhoun Winton, "The Colonial South Carolina Book Trade," *Proof*, II (1972), 79.

<sup>3</sup> See Hennig Cohen, *The "South-Carolina Gazette," 1732-1775* (Columbia, S. C., 1953), p. 236.

<sup>4</sup> *South-Carolina Gazette* (hereafter *SCG*), 30 August 1748.

<sup>5</sup> *SCG*, 19 June 1755.

<sup>6</sup> *SCG*, 28 October 1756.

<sup>7</sup> See Philip Hamer and others, eds., *The Papers of Henry Laurens* (Columbia, S. C., 1968- ), V, 274n.

<sup>8</sup> Wells's son reports, in an autobiographical preface, that his father "was bred a bookbinder." See William Charles Wells, *Two Essays: One Upon Single Vision with Two Eyes; the Other on Dew* (London, 1818), p. vii. Bruce's petition to the South Carolina Legislature in 1783 dates his arrival in Charleston. See *Journal of the House of Representatives, 1783-1784*, ed. Rosa S. Lumpkin (Columbia, S. C., 1977), pp. 25-26.

<sup>9</sup> See Christopher Gould, "Robert Wells: Colonial Charleston Printer," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, 79 (1978), 23-49; also author's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "The Printing Firm of Robert Wells with a Descriptive Bibliography of its Imprints" (University of South Carolina, 1977). The article in SCHGM is followed by a checklist of Wells's publications.

<sup>10</sup> From an advertisement on the verso of the title page of John Tobler's *South-Carolina and Georgia Almanack, for...1771* (Evans 11894). Publications of the three firms here discussed will be identified by their listings in Charles Evans, *American Bibliography*, 13 vols. (New York, 1941-1942; Worcester, Mass., 1955). Titles not included in Evans will be identified by their listings in Joseph Sabin, *Bibliotheca Americana*, 29 vols. (New York, 1868-1936), or Richard Parker Morgan, *A Preliminary Bibliography of South Carolina Imprints, 1731-1800* (Clemson, S. C., n.d.).

<sup>11</sup> In a letter among the Murray of Murraythwaite MSS (GD 219/292), Register House, Edinburgh, Wells requested John Murray to remit a sum "to Mr. Alexander Donaldson Bookseller in Edinburgh and desire him to lay it out in purchasing for me Calf Leather for Bookbinding and send it to me immediately by the way of London if no opportunity offers at the time from the Firth of Forth."

<sup>12</sup> William Charles Wells, pp. viii-ix.

<sup>13</sup> In 1769, Governor Montagu appointed Wells marshal of the new Vice-Admiralty Court, which had extended jurisdiction. See *Miscellaneous Records* in the South Carolina Archives, 00, part 1 (1767-1771), 126.

<sup>14</sup> For an account of the controversy, see *The Writings of Christopher Gadsden, 1746-1805*, ed. Richard Walsh (Columbia,



S.C., 1966), pp. 14-15. Gadsden's essays and letters to Timothy's paper are reprinted by Walsh; since only three issues of Wells's *Weekly Gazette* survive, Simpson's replies to Gadsden have not been discovered.

<sup>15</sup> See *The Writings of Christopher Gadsden*, p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> In *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree and others (New Haven, 1964), VI, 69.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of the conflict between Wells and Timothy occasioned by Stuart's actions, see John Alden, *John Stuart and the Southern Colonial Frontier* (Ann Arbor, 1944), pp. 169-171; also John Alden, "John Stuart Accuses William Bull," *William and Mary Quarterly*, II (1945), 315-316.

<sup>18</sup> See *South-Carolina and American General Gazette* (hereafter *SCAGG*), 16 December 1771, 20 April 1772. For a discussion of the Wilkes controversy in South Carolina, see Jack P. Greene, ed., *The Nature of Colony Constitutions: Two Pamphlets on the Wilkes Fund Controversy in South Carolina by Sir Egerton Leigh and Arthur Lee* (Columbia, S.C., 1970), pp. 1-55.

<sup>19</sup> See Louisa Wells, *The Journal of a Voyage from Charleston, S.C., to London Undertaken During the American Revolution by the Daughter of an Eminent American Loyalist* (New York, 1906), pp. 79-80. The book was reprinted in 1966 by the Arno Press.

<sup>20</sup> In *The Writings of Christopher Gadsden*, p. 40. Robert Woody, in "Christopher Gadsden and the Stamp Act," *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*, 1939, p. 8, identifies the target of Gadsden's wrath as Charleston's Scottish merchants.

<sup>21</sup> See J. H. Easterby, *History of the St. Andrew's Society of Charleston, South Carolina, 1729-1929* (Charleston, S.C., 1929), p. 50.

<sup>22</sup> Timothy alluded to the incident in a letter to William Henry Drayton, dated 13 August 1775, which is reprinted in Robert Wilson Gibbes, *Documentary History of the American Revolution* (New York, 1853-1857), I, 139.

<sup>23</sup> It was *The Manual Exercise, . . . as Practiced by the Charleston Artillery Company* (Morgan 404). Its publication is mentioned in a letter from John Wells to Laurens, dated 6 September

1778. Not yet included in *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, the letter is in the Kendall Collection of the South Caroliniana Library in Columbia.

<sup>24</sup> See *The Writings of Christopher Gadsden*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>25</sup> See Thomas, I, 351.

<sup>26</sup> See *Journal of the House of Representatives, 1783-1784*, pp. 16, 46. One of the petitioners claimed to have been "severely threatened by John Wells, whose invidious disposition he well knew, and whose threats he had reason to fear would be carried into execution."

<sup>27</sup> The petition of John Wells, recorded in the House Journal for 1783, is that of a Dr. John Wells, not the printer.

<sup>28</sup> The property included a house situated at number 90 King Street. See *Accounts of Sales of Confiscated Property, Negroes, and Land, 1782*--MS records kept in the South Carolina Archives. The property was purchased in 1782 by the celebrated Charles C. Pinckney, Governor and United States Senator from South Carolina.

<sup>29</sup> John Wells's departure was announced in the *Royal South-Carolina Gazette* (hereafter *RSCG*), 7 May 1782.

<sup>30</sup> His appeal to the State Senate, dated 12 November 1791, is in the unpublished journals of the General Assembly, kept in the South Carolina Archives.

<sup>31</sup> See William Wells, p. xxiii.

<sup>32</sup> See *SCAGG*, 28 November 1766.

<sup>33</sup> Wells's firm originally was a partnership with Archibald Rowand, his wife's kinsman; they severed their connections in 1756. See *SCG*, 22 May 1756.

<sup>34</sup> See Thomas, I, 162.

<sup>35</sup> See the Charleston Library Society's recent reprint of *The Charleston Directory for 1782 and the Charleston Directory for 1785* (n.d.); also *Charleston County Deeds*, A-5, 426. The transaction between Bruce and Roche does not specify a street number.

<sup>36</sup> SCG, 25 May 1769; *South-Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, 4 April 1769.

<sup>37</sup> See *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, VI, passim.

<sup>38</sup> From Bruce's appeal to the South Carolina House (see note 8, above).

<sup>39</sup> On March 1778, Bruce acquired, through renunciation of dower, the house of Mrs. Susannah Hill, at number 92 Tradd Street. (After 1764, Wells's store was located at number 72.) See *Probate Court Records* at the South Carolina Archives, BIAE 017 1775 00145 00.

<sup>40</sup> See *Journal of the House of Representatives*, 1783-1784, pp. 219-220.

<sup>41</sup> From Bruce's appeal to the South Carolina House (see note 8, above).

<sup>42</sup> See *Journal of the House of Representatives*, 1783-1784, pp. 219-220.

<sup>43</sup> See Lorenzo Sabine, *The American Loyalists: Or Biographical Sketches of Adherents to the British Crown in the War of the Revolution* (Boston, 1847), p. 181.

<sup>44</sup> Loose Papers, pre-1800, South Carolina Archives, Confiscated Estates, Petitioner, 1783-1784, Case of Mr. David Bruce deceased by Robert Bruce, Feb. 18, 1784.

<sup>45</sup> Timothy was released by the British in 1783 but perished the same year in a shipwreck off the coast of Delaware. His widow, Ann Timothy, however, continued to operate the printing shop profitably. See Cohen, p. 246.

<sup>46</sup> The partnership was announced in the *South Carolina Weekly Gazette*, 29 March 1783; the location of the business is verified by the 1785 *Charleston Directory*.

<sup>47</sup> His name does not appear in the 1782 *Charlestown Directory*.

<sup>48</sup> See Sidney Kobre, *The Development of the Colonial Newspaper* (Gloucester, Mass., 1960), p. 145.

<sup>49</sup> See 1782 *Charlestown Directory*.

<sup>50</sup> See *The Writings of Christopher Gadsden*, p. 40.

<sup>51</sup> *RSCG*, 11 July 1782.

<sup>52</sup> *RSCG*, 13 August 1782.