

John L. Boswell and "The Columbia Spy"

By ROBERT H. GOODELL

In the early days of newspapers, Marietta was a hearty rival to Columbia, and also had its weekly newspaper. *The Marietta Pilot* was published as early as November, 1813, by John Huss, a soldier of the war of 1812. The earliest copy of the *Pilot* the writer has seen was one of the year 1816 in the files of the Lancaster County Historical Society. In Columbia, at this period *The Susquehanna Waterman* was published by Thomas Armor Wilson, as early as 1812. The only copy which the writer has seen was dated in 1816, and belongs to Mr. J. Jay Wisler, Columbia historian. This copy of the *Waterman* was used to line the inside of an old wooden Chinese tea chest, but is in a fair state of preservation.

The first number of a monthly magazine entitled, "*The Visitor*, a Repository of Miscellaneous and Literary Productions original and selected" was dated Thursday, May 27, 1819; published at Marietta, Pa., by William Pierce on Market street. *The Marietta Pioneer* which followed this magazine, was a small weekly paper of four pages, established in 1825, by John Huss who previously had issued the *Pilot*. A copy of the *Pioneer*, dated June 6, 1828, seen by the writer, shows it to have been published by A. B. and R. K. Grosh, at the southwest corner of Market Square, in Marietta. Later in 1828, John A. Sheaff and Charles H. Heinitsh of Columbia, bought the *Marietta Pioneer* plant, and removed the old hand press and type to Columbia. They set up *The Columbia Courier and Marietta Advertiser*, catering to people of both boroughs. This was in size and makeup, a counter part of the *Pioneer*. Sheaff and Heinitsh ran the *Courier* for about eighteen months. Between June 5, 1830, and June 17, 1830, they sold the *Courier* to a young man named John L. Boswell, who had but lately come from Connecticut to Lancaster County. And he it was who started out of the *Courier*, *The Columbia Spy* and *Literary Register*. The writer examined a copy of the *Courier*, dated June 5, 1830, and has in his possession the first number of the *Spy*, dated June 17, 1830; so that Mr. Boswell purchased the *Courier* sometime within these twelve days. Anti-slavery sentiment was strong in Columbia, which was suspected of being a station on the "underground railroad," hence the word "Spy" in the title.

John L. Boswell was born in Norwich, Connecticut, in 1810, the son of Lemuel and Elizabeth Miner Boswell. He went to Hartford about 1822, and served his apprenticeship to the business in the office of *The Courant*, a weekly newspaper, then owned by Messrs. Goodwin and Company. This firm consisted of George Goodwin and his sons Richard E., George Jr., and Henry. About 1825, George Goodwin and his oldest son withdrew from the firm, and George, Jr., Charles, Henry and Edward Goodwin formed a partnership under the name of Goodwin and Company. Mr. Boswell continued to work for this firm until June, 1830, when he came to Lancaster County, and started the *Spy* in Columbia. At this time he was twenty years old, but had confidence and



JOHN LOVELL BOSWELL

courage. He immediately changed the title of the old paper, from the *Courier* to *The Columbia Spy and Literary Register*, with himself as editor, and Thomas E. Cochran as publisher. In the first issue, Mr. Cochran's name is not mentioned, and Mr. Boswell is listed as editor and publisher. Thomas E. Cochran was the son of Dr. Richard Cochran of Columbia, and died in York, Pa., on May 16, 1882.

The *Spy* was published in an old frame house on Front Street, opposite the Post Office, about where Howard's Green Tree Hotel stood later. Between April 14, 1831, and April 21, 1831, the office was moved from Front Street to Walnut Street, a few doors from Mr. Jeffries' hotel. This location was the home of the *Spy* until 1832, and between April 12 and April 19, it was moved to the old frame school, adjoining Odd Fellows Hall, on Locust Street, between Second and Third streets.

Let us glance at the first copy, which is dated Thursday, June 17, 1830. In the upper left corner of the first page, a notice states that the paper "is published every Thursday morning, at the low price of Two Dollars a year." Ad-

vertisements cost one dollar a square for three weeks, and twenty-five cents for every subsequent insertion—cash must accompany advertisements.

In the first column appear presentations of Jacob Hibschman of Cocalico Township, Henry Brenner, Samuel Ringwalt and Isaiah M'Carthy as candidates for Sheriff. Dick and Milnor, Locust Street, advertise a sale of their stock of dry goods, hardware, groceries, and crockery at cost, as they are going out of business. Notice of an election of nine directors for the Columbia Bridge Company, at a meeting of stockholders to be held July 5, 1830, is signed by John McKissick, cashier.

In the second column of the first page, is a notice to the effect that "the stock of store goods of the late firm of Wright & Boude will be offered at private sale until Thursday the 17th inst., on which day if not sold at private sale they will be offered at public auction." The store was "on Front street near Locust, in the center of the business part of the town." The notice was signed by William Wright and John L. Wright, assignees.

F. B. Cook, just returned from Philadelphia announces the opening of "shop in Front street a few doors from the post office, with a splendid assortment of watches and jewellery." Dominick Eagle, whose store was at the corner of Front and Locust streets, advertises new style calicoes, gingham, Bombazeens, bombazets, Circassians, linens, groceries, liquors, glass and queensware. Francis M'Devit offers a reward for a pocketbook which contained forty-three dollars, and was lost between Columbia and the Fox Tavern, on the old Lancaster and Philadelphia Turnpike.

In the third column, George Moore advertises T. White's Vegetable Tooth Ache Drops; Whitley B. Bloch announces his intention to prosecute a general commission business; Wm. M. Richards, barber, located in Walnut Street, a few doors from J. Gossler's tavern, advertises his trade, Henry Hambright, tailor, informs the public that he has commenced business in the shop of Dr. Dufresne in North Queen Street, Lancaster, opposite John Bachman's tavern.

In the fourth column, William Wright and John L. Wright announce that they were made assignees of Robert B. Wright and George W. Boude, trading as the firm of Wright and Boude; "J. F. Heinitsh, at his Medical & Drug Store, a few doors West of the Farmers Bank, East King St., Lancaster," advertises single- and double-barrel guns, besides drugs, medicines, chemicals, etc.; Robert Richardson of Marietta announces opening an office, as Justice of the Peace; Jacob Wike gives farmers notice that he has purchased the patent right for Lancaster county, of Penoch's improved patent revolving Horse Rake, the same being kept for sale at Mr. Jacob Gossler's tavern. The Maryland State Lottery, drawing to be made June 30, 1830, takes up a large part of the fifth column. Announcement of a three-dollar dividend on Columbia Bridge Company stock, and an advertisement of a "stand for a wagon-maker, situate in Mountjoy," signed by W. L. Atlee, are also on the first page.

On the second page of the first copy of the *Spy* is reprinted from the *United States Gazette*, an interesting article urging the completion of the Columbia and Philadelphia Rail Road, that Philadelphia has thrice the population of Baltimore, whose people are so attracted to the Baltimore and Ohio Rail Road, thirteen miles of which have been completed. Also on this page,

Mr. Boswell announces that "the public are this day presented with the first No. of the *Columbia Spy and Literary Register*; and with it the hopes and fears incident to one in his first attempt for their favors. His aim is for the *Spy* to be independent and non partisan as to politics, and support will be given to general and state administration, so long as their acts appear to be influenced by correct principles and motives, etc." The census of Columbia as taken by Mr. John McMullen is stated as follows: free white males 804, free white females 804, free black males 207, free black females 227. The population of West Chester is stated as 1252 compared to 559 in 1820, a gain of 693 in ten years. A treatise of railroads and internal communications, written by Mr. Thomas Earle, is copied from the *Philadelphia Gazette*. At this time finished railroads in Pennsylvania totaled 28 miles, while the canal total was 1098 miles.

On the third page announcement is made of the appointment of Henry Carpenter as deputy surveyor for a part of Lancaster County. Francis R. Shunk was appointed Secretary of the State Canal Commission. The quotations of Columbia markets are stated as follows: "Flour \$4.50, wheat 85c, whiskey 18½c, rye 40 @ 45c, corn 33 @ 35c, oats 23 @ 25c." Philadelphia and Baltimore markets are also quoted. In the marriage notices appear the following: Mr. David Ferree, of Marietta to Miss Charlotte Stump, married by Rev. Mr. Boyer in Columbia. At Marietta, by the Rev. Henry B. Shaffner, Mr. E. D. Smith, of Philadelphia, to Miss Leah Fundersmith of Lancaster. In the obituaries, is a notice on the 14th of June, 1830, of the death of Sarah M., daughter of Robert Barber, age twelve.

Notice that proposals will be received at the office of Edward F. Gay, Harrisburg, for the construction of a timber dam near the site of the present dam at Duncan's Island. John Barber was Superintendent of Canal Commissioners at this time. The "Encyclopedia Americana" has just been published by Carey and Lea. On the third page appears an ordinance passed by the managers of the Columbia Bridge Company, forbidding the galloping, running or trotting of horses, etc., on the bridge. The *Spy* office was opposite the post office, and pencils, school books, wafers, pocket maps of Pennsylvania, ink powder, black sand, quills, slate pencils and writing paper were also sold here. Dr. G. Moore has opened a drug store on Front Street, four doors above Locust, lately occupied by Owen Bruner as a store. J. A. Sheaff and C. H. Heinitsh notify the public to send in any bills, and for persons indebted to them for job printing and advertising, to make immediate payment. These men were the former proprietors of the *Courier*.

Mr. Boswell states that "the principles of the *Spy*, will be Republican in the strictest sense of the word—such as were laid down and practised by Washington, the Father of his country—and in the adherence to which, our nation has thus far so happily prospered." "The great cause of Internal Improvement will receive a most hearty and cordial support. And early attention will be paid to everything calculated to increase the crops and comforts of the Farmer—and to elevate the views of the industrious mechanic. Private character will not be assailed by the anonymous slanderer."

Mr. Boswell completes his proposals with the following paragraph: "The intended editor is induced to issue these proposals, from a confident belief, that the wealthy county of Lancaster, with a population of more than seventy thousand souls, and in productiveness equal to any county in the State, will, with that generous liberality which distinguishes so many of its citizens, sustain him in what he considers a laudable effort for their advantage; and if sustained, his object will be to establish and identify himself with the citizens of the state of his choice; and contribute his best exertions to promote the interests of the County and the Commonwealth." From the above, it will be readily seen that Mr. Boswell at the age of twenty had remarkable diction, and was well suited for newspaper work, which he followed all his life.

The last page of this first copy of the *Spy*, was devoted to articles of a literary, scientific, moral, and amusing nature. A poem, "A Domestic Scene," by Mrs. Hemans is printed. A lengthy synopsis of "A History of Scotland," by Sir Walter Scott, "just issued from the press of Carey and Lea" of Philadelphia, is excellently given. Several anecdotes complete the page.

On June 23, 1831, Mr. Boswell changed the name of the paper, to *The Columbia Spy and Lancaster and York County Record*, so that it appealed more to the people of two counties. The paper was increased in size to 15 x 19 inches, and one column per page added. With this copy, Mr. Boswell came out strongly for Henry Clay for president.

In a copy dated July 5, 1831, six verses of "Lines on hearing of the death of Miss Mary McKissick; by a friend," appear. The first verse reads—

"Mary, when parting last from thee I little deemed,
Again on earth thy form I ne'er should see,
That o'er thy grave, Spring's earliest flowers should bloom,
Too soon to wither, emblems true of thee."

It is possible, that the "friend" who wrote the above was Preston B. Elder, who in 1836 became editor of the *Spy*, and who at this time was a clerk in the office of the Columbia Bridge Company. Miss Mary was a daughter of John McKissick, cashier of the Bridge Company, and she died on April 4, 1831. Mr. Elder was a poet, and the verses to Miss McKissick, are his style of composition.

On July 6, 1833, the size of the paper was increased to 20 x 30 inches. In 1834, Mr. Boswell began the publication of the *Lancaster Union*, in Lancaster, being assisted therein by Carpenter McCleery, who managed it, while Boswell edited it from Columbia. Thus having two papers on his hands until May 24, 1834, when Thomas E. Cochran took the editorial chair in the *Spy* office. McCleery published the *Union* until November 28, 1834, when Mr. Boswell took him into partnership. In 1834, Mr. Boswell was secretary of the Franklin Library of Columbia, which library however did not last long, and was sold out for debts.

In March, 1836, Preston B. Elder, while cashier of the Columbia Bridge Company, bought the *Spy* from Mr. Boswell, who had sold the Lancaster paper a few months earlier; thus ending his connection with Pennsylvania. Preston

Billings Elder was born in Columbia on February 6, 1810, son of Michael Elder and Ann Elder. Preston was intended for a mercantile profession, and for this purpose was placed in the counting room of his relative Christian Halde- man, from which he soon withdrew, and was sent to the Academy of Rev. Dr. Magraw, in Cecil County, Maryland. After a few years of study he returned to his home, and was appointed a clerk in the Columbia Bridge Company. Within a few years he rose to be cashier, until ill health compelled him to re- sign, only a few months previous to his death, which occurred on January 6, 1840. During his short life he was a regular contributor to many literary periodicals in the country. The *Spy*, under Mr. Elder, changed its appearance, and the columns were slightly widened, and the typography wider spaced. Erkuries Beatty, son of William P. Beatty, published the *Spy* for Mr. Elder. He had learned the trade under Mr. Boswell, and in 1837 was made a partner by Mr. Elder. In 1839, Mr. Elder became ill, and Theodore D. Cochran under- took the editorial department. Cochran had great talent, was a fine editor, and in 1840, took charge of the paper published at Lancaster, called *The Old Guard*. Meanwhile Mr. Elder died, and Evan Green, administrator of his estate, sold the paper to James Patton, Collector of the Port, at Columbia.

Major Patton changed the title of the paper to *The Columbia Spy, and Lancaster and York County Democrat*. The publication office was on the second floor of the old York, Hanover, etc., depot, below the railroad, at the foot of Walnut Street. Edman W. Stahle was one of the editors, Daniel Zahm was a typo, and Samuel F. Eberlein was devil. Mrs. Patton was in ill health, and it was advised she should leave Columbia; so Major Patton sold the *Spy* in April 1843, to Eli Bowen and Jacob L. Gossler, brother of Philip Gossler. In the meanwhile the *Spy* was published on the second floor of the frame build- ing, opposite the Washington House, southwest corner of Front and Locust Streets, the covered stairway being outside, on the Walnut Street side.

Edman W. Stahle was born in York in 1819, and learned the printing trade in the office of the *York Republican*. In 1843, when the *Spy* was sold by Major Patton, Mr. Stahle moved to Gettysburg, and became editor of the *Gettysburg Compiler*. In the same year, he was appointed Deputy Sheriff. And in 1850, he went to Washington, and in company with A. Boyd Hamilton, took a con- tract for government printing. Two years later he assumed the superin- tendency of the State printing at Harrisburg. In 1854 Mr. Stahle retired from public life, and lived on a farm in Franklin Township, Adams County, Pa. He died in 1902 in Mummasburg, at the age of 83 years.

Another Columbian, who entered the *Spy* office under Major Patton, to learn the trade, was Charles J. Gonter, son of John Gonter, Jr., and his wife Susan Gossler. He was born in 1828, and educated in the Columbia schools. He was fifteen years old when he entered the *Spy* office, and was at times the local carrier. Mr. Gonter left the *Spy* in the early forties, and was later apprenticed to R. W. Middleton, proprietor of the *Lancaster Union*, until the demise of that paper. When Middleton was in jail, following the shooting of James Cameron, for which he was held, he wrote his editorials, young Gonter carrying all mail and papers to and from the prison. Later Gonter worked on

the *Lancaster Intelligencer*, and set type side by side with Col. John W. Forney. While in Lancaster Gonter was quite a favorite with Thaddeus Stevens, and for quite a time they roomed together, although Gonter was a Democrat, and Stevens a Whig. Stevens proposed to equip a newspaper in Lancaster for Gonter; to pay a year's expense, and to deed the plant to him, if Gonter would run a Whig paper, but instead of accepting Stevens' friendly offer, he accepted the position of State Agent on the Pennsylvania Railroad, from Columbia to Philadelphia. This position he obtained through James Buchanan. Gonter left Lancaster in 1846, and later was one of a group, who established a daily paper in St. Louis, called *The Morning Signal*, and later *The Globe-Democrat*.

Bowen and Gossler conducted the *Spy* for a short time only, for in 1843 they sold out to Charles J. Barnitz of York. Mr. Barnitz issued the paper until 1848, when in June Charrick Westbrook bought it, he having been publishing the *Columbian*. Mr. Westbrook stopped that paper, and merged it into his new purchase, the *Spy*.

In December, 1847, William H. Spangler of York, bought a share in the *Spy*. They did not publish it long, for in August, 1848, George W. Shroyer was publishing it, and Spangler went to Philadelphia. Mr. Shroyer in 1849 sold the *Spy* to Eshleman, Kamerer and Gochenauer, who managed to put in another year, when in 1850, J. G. L. Brown bought it, and under him the title was *The Columbia Spy*, and the caption type was of one inch rustic style of letters.

In 1853, Stephen Greene was admitted to a partnership. Mr. Greene learned the business in the *Intelligencer* office at Harrisburg. In 1855, Mr. Brown sold his interest to Coleman Bull and his partner, Mr. Greene, who published the paper at the northwest corner of Front and Walnut streets, and who issued it through the cholera period.

In 1856, Mr. Greene became sole proprietor, Emanuel Bostick, being at this time foreman of the press room. Mr. Greene had worked in the *Spy* office since 1838.

In 1857, the *Spy* again changed hands, and Samuel Wright, became the owner on March 28, 1857. Under Mr. Wright, the following were handling type in the *Spy* office: D. Peart Erwin, Charles P. Shreiner, Robert J. Fry, Thomas J. Wright, and William Rambo. Emanuel P. Bostick became foreman and continued through the years, being part of the personnel when the *Spy* was bought by A. M. Rambo. Mr. Stephen Greene remained with Mr. Wright for a short time and preceded Bostick as foreman. At this time the office was on the second floor of the old Baltimore and Susquehanna Railroad depot. Here the *Spy* was published under Mr. Wright's editorship until June, 1863, when he entered the army.

Samuel Truscott issued for Mr. Wright, the last number which was dated August 15, 1863, when the *Spy* was sold to A. M. Rambo. The office remained at the same location until April, 1869, when it was removed to the second floor of old Carpet Hall, northwest corner of Front and Locust streets. The *Spy* under Mr. Wright was not political; he had no taste or fancy for partisan work. Mr. Samuel Wright was born December 13, 1828, in Columbia. He

studied civil engineering under Samuel W. Mifflin, entered the army in 1863, and rose to brevet Lieutenant Colonel April 2, 1865. He served on the staff of the Ninth Army Corps with Generals Parke and Potter.

Mr. Rambo moved the office of the *Spy* into what was called Shreiner's Hall, built by Philip Shreiner, on Locust Street, southeast corner of Bank Alley. In 1864, it was the only paper in Columbia, and was printed on an old Washington hand press. On September 4, 1869, Rambo sold the *Spy* to Joseph W. Yocum. Under date of June 22, 1868, A. M. Rambo published the first number of the *Spy* as a daily, just thirty-eight years after John L. Boswell founded the paper as a weekly.

In May, 1905, Mr. Yocum got new presses, and changed the daily *Spy* to a six-page paper. Mr. Yocum was born near Trappe in Montgomery County in 1843. He served in the 116th Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers, and had a total of three years' service in the Civil War. He went to Franklin and Marshall College after the war, and was graduated in 1868. During this time he studied law with John B. Livingston, and was admitted to the Bar in 1869. Mr. Yocum issued the *Spy* until a short time before his death in April, 1918. Captain C. E. Lenig, still living in Columbia, and Harry Clepper carried on, until in 1920, the *Spy* was bought and merged into the *Columbia News*, which has its office on the south side of Locust Street, between Third and Fourth streets.

The *Lancaster Union* started by Mr. Boswell in 1834, was bought by a stock company, headed by Hon. Thaddeus Stevens, and its name changed to the *Independent Whig*. Later it appeared as the *Inland Daily*, reverted then to a weekly, and on January 1, 1863, it was merged with the *Lancaster Examiner*.

In 1835, Mr. Boswell married Sarah Strickler McCorkle, daughter of Dr. Hugh McCorkle of Columbia.

After leaving Columbia in 1836, Mr. Boswell became the publisher of *The Courant*, of Hartford, Connecticut, where he had learned the newspaper business before starting the *Spy*. His first issue of *The Courant* is dated September 19, 1836. It was only a weekly paper then, but on September 12, 1837, he commenced the first successful issue of a daily paper in Hartford. This paper is still flourishing, and may well give credit to Mr. Boswell, who put the paper on a paying basis over one hundred years ago.

In his business relations John Lovell Boswell was remarkable for his promptness, his uprightness, and his liberality. In the public duties of life, he never flinched from the share which belonged to him, but was always ready for every good work. His private charities numbered many, and he was a man who shrank from praise and notoriety, being remarkably unostentatious in all he did. He was a member of the Presbyterian Church while in Columbia, and later was connected with the Congregational Church in Hartford.

He died on July 31, 1854, while yet in the prime of life. He left one son, who died on July 8, 1904, and two daughters.