

Thomas Henderson Jr.

Thomas Henderson Jr. (1787-1835) left an important mark on North Carolina's early journalism before he pulled up stakes in 1823 to move to the state of Tennessee.

After working a short apprenticeship on the North Carolina Journal in Halifax, in 1809, the former printer became co-owner of the new Raleigh Star with Dr. Calvin Jones. In 1815, Henderson became the sole proprietor and changed the name to the Star and North Carolina State Gazette. The newspaper was published each Thursday from its shop “at the upper end of Fayetteville Street near Casso's Corner.”

For an early 19th-century editor, Henderson set high standards for the content of his paper. He announced there would be no rumors or “stud horse advertisements” in its columns. Competing with the powerful Raleigh Register, the Star hewed to a middle-of-the-road political line, although Henderson personally professed Federalist principles.

Eschewing long articles, Henderson ran summaries of congressional and other national news and local intelligence. He was popular enough with legislators to become the state printer for several years.

Henderson's own strong interests in agricultural matters, literature and cultural affairs were reflected in his newspaper's columns. His print shop was also a bookstore. He encouraged the compilation of a statistical and informational almanac covering all the state's counties, a project he hoped would encourage better communication between the eastern and western reaches of North Carolina. The project floundered during the War of 1812, but the sketches he received from a dozen counties were later published by historians.

During the war, Henderson briefly commanded a unit of Raleigh militia that accompanied a military tour of the coastal defenses. From then on, he was referred to as “Colonel Henderson.”

Henderson's move to Tennessee was made possible when he was hired by the University of North Carolina to negotiate for Revolutionary War land claims that the university wanted as escheats. Henderson's successful negotiations made him wealthy; he was

awarded land equal to half the university's claim, tens of thousands of acres.

Henderson sold the Star and moved to a plantation in Madison County, Tennessee. There, he continued as a leading citizen and political activist, often a visitor to the governor's mansion. He served as patron of a local academy that he founded.

By Roy Parker Jr.
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