

Independent Gazetteer

The *Independent Gazetteer* was published daily in Philadelphia by Eleazer Oswald (1755–1795), an Englishman who had come to America in 1770. Oswald became apprenticed to John Holt, the publisher of the *New-York Journal*, and in 1772 he married Holt's daughter. From 1775 to 1779 he served in the Continental Army and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel under the command of Colonel John Lamb, who later became one of New York's leading Antifederalists. After leaving the army, Oswald published the Baltimore *Maryland Journal* with William Goddard from 1779 to 1781. Oswald then moved to Philadelphia and established the *Independent Gazetteer* in 1782. In February 1783 he reopened the London Coffee House, which became the meeting place of merchants and the leaders of the state Republican Party. From 1782 to 1784 he also helped John Holt operate *The Independent Gazette; or the New-York Journal Revived*. After Holt's death in 1784, Oswald assisted Holt's widow with the publication until January 1787, when the newspaper was sold to Thomas Greenleaf. Possessed of a violent temper and a keen sense of honor, Oswald was repeatedly involved in fracas, a few of which ended in duels.

From its inception, the *Independent Gazetteer* consistently favored the state Republican Party, so much so that Mathew Carey, in his autobiography, described Oswald as the "mouth-piece" of that party. Bitter enemies, the two men fought a duel in 1786 in which Carey was severely wounded. Francis Bailey of the *Freeman's Journal*, the organ of the Constitutionalist Party, was also challenged by Oswald, but he never accepted.

During the summer of 1787 Oswald printed numerous articles praising the Constitutional Convention, advocating a powerful central government, and attacking opponents of such a government. After the Convention adjourned, Oswald printed both Federalist and, despite Federalist pressure, Antifederalist essays. It appears that for the first two months of the debate on the Constitution Oswald was trying to steer a neutral course. By early November, however, Oswald deserted his fellow-Republicans and became an ardent Antifederalist. His conversion was, in part, a reaction to Federalist attempts to intimidate him and his wife, who ran the *Gazetteer* whenever he was out of town. In 1788 Oswald, acting for John Lamb, was a courier between New York and Virginia.

The *Gazetteer* contained more original Antifederalist pieces than any other newspaper. Many of the essays were scurrilous and

vituperative. Others were calm and well reasoned. Oswald also printed three major Antifederalist series of essays—"Centinel," "An Old Whig," and "Philadelphiensis." Some of these newspaper essays were also published by Oswald as broadsides. Oswald's partisanship aroused the ire of Federalists throughout the United States. They described him as "a mad political demoniack," "The Ishmaelish Printer," and "a seditious turbulent man." In late June 1788 Andrew Brown, formerly the printer of the Philadelphia *Federal Gazette*, sued Oswald for libel. While the suit was pending, Oswald published an article about it, and, as a result, he was fined and imprisoned a month for contempt of court. While he was in prison, his wife solicited the intervention of Pennsylvania President Benjamin Franklin. In response, Franklin advised her to try to convince her husband "to change that Conduct of his Paper by which he has made and provok'd so many Enemies" (post 3 August 1788, Franklin Papers, PPAmp).

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