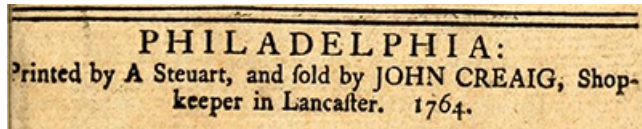


Steuart, Andrew ^[1]

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by Thomas A. Bowers, 1994; Revised by Jared Dease, Government and Heritage Library, January 2023

fl. 1764–69



From the title page of *The conduct of the Paxton-men*, 1764. Image from [Archive.org](#).

^[2]Andrew Steuart, [Wilmington](#) ^[3]printer and journalist, was born in Belfast, Ireland, where he learned the [printing trade](#) ^[4] from James MacGee. In 1758 he went to Philadelphia and established a printing shop and bookstore at Laetitia Court. Later he moved to the Bible-in-Heart in Second Street between Market and Arch streets. After accumulating land and other property in Philadelphia, Steuart opened a second shop in Lancaster, Pa., in 1761. He achieved some notoriety in 1762 when he printed Francis Hopkinson's "Science, A Poem" without his permission. Steuart said he did it to promote good poetry and not for his own gain, and Hopkinson did not complain or seek redress. When Steuart immigrated to North Carolina, he took only part of his printing equipment, and he maintained ownership of his shops in Philadelphia and Lancaster.

Arriving in Wilmington on 24 June 1764, he soon became the center of a controversy between Governor [Arthur Dobbs](#) ^[5] and the Assembly over the division of power. There had been some dissatisfaction with [James Davis](#) ^[6]'s performance as public printer, and on 5 Mar. 1764 Dobbs recommended that the Assembly find a new printer—one who would be more concerned with serving the state than with making a profit. On 8 March the Assembly named a committee to seek a printer willing to work for £200 per year. Dobbs apparently lured Steuart to Wilmington with the promise of being named public printer.

At the time the Governor's Council was sitting as the upper house of the Assembly, and in mid-November 1764 the Council defeated a bill to reappoint James Davis. Almost immediately the Council, as the advisory body to the governor, approved Dobbs's nomination of Steuart as the public printer. On 21 November Dobbs notified the Assembly that he had appointed Andrew Steuart "printer to his Majesty . . . from the 24th day of June." Furthermore, he told the Assembly that it was honor-bound to pay Steuart an adequate salary.

The Assembly reacted angrily on 24 November. Believing that it should have taken action on the defeated Council bill—the one reappointing Davis—the Assembly charged that Dobbs had acted in a "most extraordinary and unparliamentary manner" and that he had rendered the upper house "useless or a mere property of his Excellency." Furthermore, the appointment was "of an unusual nature truly unknown either to our Laws or Constitution" and "a most extensive stretch of power" that would call for new offices and new fees to support it. After venting its anger, the Assembly refused to create the position of "His Majesty's Printer." (Some accounts have suggested that the Assembly rejected Steuart's appointment because of his title as "His Majesty's Printer," but the Assembly's journal indicates that the major reason for the rejection of Steuart was Dobbs's misuse of the Council.)

Dobbs responded two days later, saying that the Assembly did have the power to appoint someone to print its votes and resolutions, but it was "his Majesty's undoubted prerogative to nominate and appoint a printer to Publish his Proclamations." Dobbs reaffirmed his appointment of Steuart and asked the Assembly to raise the money to pay him. He told the assemblymen that he was going back to England for a year for health reasons; while there, he wanted to present the colonial legislators in the most favorable light, so he hoped that they would comply with his request.

On the same day, 26 November, the Assembly responded by sending a resolution to the Council reaffirming the Davis appointment. The members agreed that Dobbs could appoint his own printer but made it clear that he had to pay him as well. Then, in a spirit of magnanimity, the Assembly granted Steuart £100 for his travels expenses to North Carolina. Nevertheless, Steuart remained and apparently did some government printing, although Davis continued as the official public printer. As early as 27 Oct. 1764, a motion was made in the Assembly to deliver a record of the proceedings to Steuart to be printed and delivered to each member, but the journal does not report the fate of the motion. On 11 Jan. 1765 Steuart placed a notice in James Davis's [North Carolina Magazine](#) ^[7] to advertise the sale of the laws of the Assembly. On 1 Dec. 1766, in response to the Council's request to pay Steuart for some printing, the Assembly claimed that the commission he acted under was "unknown to the Laws and Constitution of Our Country" and his salary was not definite. It does not appear that the Assembly refused to pay him but only wanted proof of his work and submission of a legal claim.

Meanwhile, Steuart had established the *North Carolina Gazette and Weekly Post Boy* in Wilmington in September or October 1764. The colony's second [newspaper](#) ^[8], it would keep Steuart in the center of a public controversy for the next

two years. The 20 Nov. 1765 issue described the angry reactions of Wilmington citizens to the Stamp Act ^[9]. An evening of parades and bonfires was climaxed with the forced resignation of the town's appointed stamp distributor, who was then paraded around the town on an uplifted chair. The mob went to Steuart's house and demanded to know whether he planned to continue to print his newspaper. Steuart, who had suspended publication for several weeks because of illness, told the crowd he could not publish because he did not have any stamped paper. The crowd told Steuart that if he did not print his newspaper without the stamps, he would receive the same treatment as the stamp distributors. Steuart capitulated: "That rather run the Hazard of Life, being maimed, or having his Printing-Office destroyed, he would comply with their request." For his own protection, however, he had witnesses affirm that he was doing so under threat. The margin of that issue bore a skull-and-crossbones imprint with the words: "This is the place to affix the STAMP."

The Stamp Act caused Steuart further problems. When the citizens of Wilmington maintained their steadfast defiance, Governor William Tryon ^[10]'s forces seized ships coming into the port and would not allow vessels to leave unless their cargo had stamps. In retaliation, the people refused to provide supplies for the king's ships. In the middle of this standoff Steuart published a letter in his 12 Feb. 1766 issue ^[11], signed by a "Philanthropos" from Cross Creek, that urged the people to seize the ships and to open the port for shipping again. In a preface to the letter, Steuart described his "very disagreeable situation" over printing the letter. "At the earnest desire, or rather stern command of the people, he [the printer] has endeavored with great difficulty, to carry on a Newspaper, well knowing, that that Province that is deprived of the liberty of the Press, is deprived of one of the darling Privileges, which they, as Englishmen, boast of. What part is he now to act?—Continue to keep his Press open and free, and be in danger of corporal punishment, or bloque it up and run the risk of having his brains knocked out? Sad alternative.—One thing he has long ago resolved on, viz: That as he looks upon himself to be a free-born subject, no man shall ever horse whip him, if it is in his power to prevent it; and whenever any such threats are made towards him, he'll take care to be on his guard." On 26 February Tryon presented the Council with a copy of Steuart's 12 February issue, which contained "such inflammatory Expressions That His Excellency declared his intentions of suspending him, And accordingly delivered His letter for that purpose to the Secretary." It is not known whether this was a suspension from publishing the newspaper or from the printing Steuart was doing for the governor.

Steuart also had other problems with the citizens of Wilmington that eventually caused his demise as newspaper publisher. When he began his newspaper, he was apparently encouraged by town leaders, perhaps because of their desire for an advertising medium ^[12] in that port. He soon lost their confidence, however, beginning with his alleged opening and publishing of the letters of a prominent citizen. At any rate, the newspaper ceased publication in 1767 for lack of support.

Isaiah Thomas ^[13] might very well have settled in North Carolina had it not been for Steuart's high demands for the purchase of his printing equipment. Thomas was working in Charleston, S.C., and heard that Steuart wanted to sell his equipment and move back to Philadelphia. Realizing that the supply of printing equipment and type was extremely limited, Steuart originally asked Thomas three times the cost of a new press. He lowered his demand to twice the original cost, but when he saw that Thomas could raise that much money, he included an enslaved woman and her child in addition to the equipment. Thomas agreed to that, but Steuart countered with the inclusion of his household furniture. Thomas finally refused, and by the time Steuart reduced his demands to the earlier terms, Thomas had departed. (Thomas made one more attempt to locate in Wilmington. After Adam Boyd ^[14] acquired Steuart's equipment, Thomas tried unsuccessfully to get Boyd to take him on as a partner. In 1770 Thomas returned to Boston to a distinguished career as journalist and newspaper historian.)

Sometime in 1769 Steuart was drowned while bathing in the Cape Fear River ^[15] near his home in Wilmington. It was probably before October, since Adam Boyd purchased his equipment and began to publish his *Cape Fear Mercury* on 13 Oct. 1769.

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Additional Resources:

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"Miscellaneous: 1769." The Colonial Records Project. Historical Publications Section. North Carolina Office of Archives & History. <http://www.ncpublications.com/colonial/Newspapers/subjects/Misc.htm#1769> ^[17] (accessed August 7, 2013).

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[Title page]. Barton, Thomas. *The conduct of the Paxton-men, impartially represented; the distresses of the frontiers, and the complaints and sufferings of the people fully stated ... With some remarks upon the Narrative, of the Indian-massacre,*

lately publish'd. Interspers'd with several interesting anecdotes, relating to the military genius, and warlike principles of the people call'd Quakers: together-with proper reflection and advice upon the whole. In a letter from a gentleman in one of the back counties, to a friend in Philadelphia. .. Philadelphia: Printed by A. Steuart, and sold by John Creaig, shopkeeper in Lancaster. 1764. <https://archive.org/details/conductofpaxtonm00bart> [2] (accessed August 7, 2013).

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