
A History of Printing in Colonial Maryland

It is probable that of the several Thomas Sparrows who figure in Maryland records, that one with whom this narrative is concerned was born about the year 1746,¹ the son of Thomas Sparrow, Gent., of Annapolis, the codicil of whose will,² probated in 1753, appointed Walter and Daniel Dulany, Jr., and Jonas Green as his executors, and more specifically named Daniel Dulany as the sole guardian of his son. The Dulanys declined to act as executors, a refusal which probably, on the part of Daniel, included also the declination of the post of guardian to the young Thomas. Green seems to have acted alone as executor of the will,³ and from the fact that the bonds between Sparrow and the Greens remained close ever afterwards, one concludes that he assumed as well the guardianship of the orphan. One loses sight of the boy, however, during his adolescence, so that it may not be said with certainty where or how he was engaged, but he reappears on December 13, 1764, when in a land sale advertisement in the *Maryland Gazette* for that day, he informs those whom the fact concerns that he is to be found "at Mr. Green's in Annapolis." It was about this time, too, that he began the work in engraving, always in conjunction with the Green press, which is associated with his name.

There is reason to believe that Sparrow had spent the intervening years learning the art of gold and silver-smithing in the city of Philadelphia, for on March 21, 1765, an advertisement in the *Maryland Gazette* asserted that "Thomas Sparrow Goldsmith and Jeweller From Philadelphia Has Just open'd Shop near St. Ann's Church in South-East Street Annapolis Maryland," and that in this shop were to be made "all Sorts of Gold and Silver Work," a claim which was fully justified by the long list of specific articles which followed. The advertisement was headed by a woodcut of a coffee urn, which as the familiar signature attests, had been engraved by the smith himself, "T. Sparrow." Curiously enough, only one example of Sparrow's craftsmanship in the precious metals remains, although he continued to practise his trade certainly as late as August of the year 1767.⁴ He is remembered chiefly because of a few specimens which have been preserved of his goldsmith's subsidiary art of engraving.

¹In *Chancery Record, 1774-1784*, v. 13, folio 480, Thomas Sparrow in February 1782 deposes that he is 36 years old or thereabouts. Ms. in Land Office, Annapolis.

²*Maryland Wills*, v. 28, Liber D. D. 7, p. 435, 1751-54. Ms. in Land Office, Annapolis.

³On March 8, 1753, Jonas Green advertised in the *Maryland Gazette* that all claims against the estate of Thomas Sparrow, late of Annapolis, should be brought to him for settlement. No other executors were mentioned.

⁴The author's attention was called to Sparrow's establishment in Annapolis as a gold and silversmith by Mr. Howard Sill of Baltimore, the result of whose studies of the lives and work of the Maryland silversmiths is to be published in a notably beautiful and interesting book. Mr. Sill has in his collection of book-plates the Richard Sprigg and Gabriel Duvall plates, those very rare examples of Sparrow's work in this department of the engraver's art. Sparrow's last advertisement as a goldsmith appears in the *Maryland Gazette* for August 13, 1767.