

Mitchell-Fleming Printing, Incorporated

Founded: [1861]

Location: East wing of Hancock County Courthouse, Greenfield (1861); second floor, Banks's block, 15 West Main Street; 30 South State Street; 108–112 South State Street; 13–17 North State Street; 20 West South Street

Born in Montgomery County, Kentucky, in 1823, William Mitchell learned the printing trade in Maysville, Kentucky, under Col. Dick Stanton, an editor and politician. Mitchell became a follower of Henry Clay's Whig party and began a career as a journeyman printer. He became foreman of the *Cincinnati Dollar Times* and later managed the New York office of *Dye's American Bank Note Detector*, a widely read financial journal. Mitchell moved to Indiana in 1855, first settling in Lafayette. In 1856 he relocated to Greenfield and became editor of the *Greenfield Sentinel*. The *Sentinel* ceased publication in 1859 or 1860. In 1859 Mitchell became local editor of the *Hancock Democrat*, which was owned by Noble Warrum, Judge David S. Gooding, William R. West, and George Y. Atkison and edited by Gooding. Mitchell acquired control of the paper in 1861.

After the dissolution of the Whig party in the 1850s, Mitchell became a strongly pro-Union Democrat. The *Hancock Democrat* reflected Mitchell's views. Southern sympathizers made several attempts to burn the newspaper; Mitchell's son remembered standing guard outside the printing shop with his father, who was armed with a musket. The newspaper's first office was in the east wing of the county courthouse, but Mitchell moved to the second floor of the Banks's block at 15 West Main Street. Mitchell established a job printing office, taking orders from as far as Chicago, and eventually his publishing enterprise became known as the William Mitchell Printing Company.

Mitchell allowed Greenfield native James Whitcomb Riley, a classmate of his son, use of a corner of his office to write verse, and the *Democrat* published many of Riley's early poems. The Mitchell family later took advantage of this association by publishing books under the imprint of "The Old Swimmin' Hole Press," and at one point maintained offices in Chicago and New York.

Due to William Mitchell's failing eyesight (he eventually went blind), his son John F. took over management of the printing company in 1886 and proceeded to eliminate its debt. The *Democrat* was initially published on a Washington handpress brought overland to Indiana, but the William Mitchell Printing Company gradually built a state-of-the-art printing and book manufacturing plant. By the early decades of the twentieth century the company used Mergenthaler type-casting machines, using natural gas to generate its own power. The company was producing books for large publishers, including the Bobbs-Merrill Company of Indianapolis. After his father's death in 1899, John F. bought out the interests of the other Mitchell heirs and assumed full ownership of the paper. By 1902 the firm was employing up to twenty people.

Longtime employee Darold T. Fleming, in partnership with James Souder, James Ricks, and Samuel J. Grant, purchased the *Democrat* and the William Mitchell Printing Company from John F. Mitchell, Jr., the grandson of William Mitchell, in 1954; John Jr. continued to operate a stationery business out of the plant. Fleming rechristened the company the Mitchell-Fleming Printing Company and in 1956 combined the *Democrat* with the *Hancock Journal*. In 1959 Darold Fleming's son Rodney became editor of the papers. Darold was killed in an automobile accident in 1962. His widow sold the

combined newspapers in 1962, but the Fleming family retained control of the printing company.