

Roulstone, George ^[1]

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by Stanley J. Folmsbee, 1994

8 Oct. 1767–10 Aug. 1804

George Roulstone, first printer and newspaper publisher in the Tennessee country, was born in Boston, Mass., where he received a fair education and learned the printer's trade. He possibly was the son of Mary and George Roulstone, sexton of the First Church of Boston between 1776 and 1780. In March 1786 he established the *Salem Chronicle and Essex Advertiser*, which failed in August. He then became a journeyman printer.

In 1789 he moved to [Fayetteville](#) ^[2], N.C., and worked for a newspaper until March 1791, when he and Robert Ferguson, recently of [Hillsborough](#) ^[3], N.C., were induced by [William Blount](#) ^[4], newly appointed governor of the Southwest Territory (later the state of Tennessee), to found a newspaper for Knoxville, intended to become the territorial capital. Named the *Knoxville Gazette*, the paper was first published on 5 Nov. 1791, in Rogersville, before Knoxville was established. This was two years before the first newspaper appeared in the Northwest Territory, created in 1787. Roulstone also printed the journals and the acts of the Tennessee legislature, a practice that his widow continued after his death. He printed the ordinances of the Southwest Territory in 1793 and a compilation of the acts of the General Assembly of both the territory and the state of Tennessee in 1801. Known as *Roulstone's Laws*, it has been cited by bibliographers as "the first book published" in Tennessee.

Roulstone also was elected clerk of the Council of State when the first legislature of the Southwest Territory was organized. When Blount College (now the [University of Tennessee](#) ^[5]) was established in 1794, he was named a trustee in its charter. He became the state printer in 1796, and in the legislatures of 1797–98 and 1801 he was chief clerk of the senate.

On 1 May 1794 Roulstone married Elizabeth Gilliam of Knox County. Their oldest child, James G., joined his stepfather, William Moore, in publishing the *Carthage Gazette* following his return from the Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans with the rank of colonel. Among the other children were Harriet C., Charlotte M., George, Jr., and Rachel. There may have been others, but if so they were minors at the time of their father's death.

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Additional Resources:

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