American Book Distribution

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A COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY of book distribution must be based on the recognition that the book is both an economic product of a press and a conveyer of culture and ideas. Each theme poses its own problems and promises its own rewards. Both concepts are difficult to keep in focus simultaneously, but when fused they can produce striking contributions to the history of the book.

Viewing the book as a commodity, with special attention to distribution, creates new dimensions for the history of American publishing, reorienting its current preoccupations with author-publisher relations and printing technologies towards a number of new concerns: retailing strategies, the diversity of markets, the effects of landscape and transportation, the influences of capitalization and industrialization, and the transformation of the industry from one built on family businesses to one based on corporate structures. Historians of the book are not alone in neglecting such subjects; business historians also have been more interested in production than distribution. Commenting on the historiography of the American department store, economic historian Peter Samson observes in the *Business History Review* that business historians have given little attention to the development of retailing operations and that chroniclers of retail institutions have not successfully set these organizations in the context of society as a whole. Samson writes: 'Of all facets of business, retailing is the most sensitive to its social surroundings. . . . We must begin by asking where, and in what manner, goods reached the ultimate consumer. The best histories of retailing would not be institu-

tional history, but social and economic history broadly conceived' (p. 31).

As important as it is for historians to explore the social and economic milieus of the book trade, they must not forget that books are more than manufactured paste, paper, and leather goods. The gatherings of stitched signatures pressed between bindings contain ideas, a fact that sets the history of book distribution apart from that of other products. To fully appreciate the impact of the book on American culture, the study of book dispersal must be part of our intellectual and cultural history. There are significant difficulties in any such endeavor. Robert Skotheim's *American Intellectual Histories and Historians* and Gene Wise's *American Historical Explanations* describe talented historians who have been snared by the methodological traps awaiting those intrepid enough to place ideas in social environments. Historians of the book must be prepared to acknowledge that the culture of a country or even a small geographic area cannot be summarized by its book culture. To use one example, Brooke Hindle's *The Pursuit of Science in Revolutionary America, 1735–1789* convincingly illustrates that individuals receive information from a variety of sources such as newspapers, magazines, letters, spoken communications, and books. Benjamin Franklin first learned about electricity from the itinerant lecturer Adam Spencer long before he read about it in the pages of *The American Magazine*. The history of book distribution also may offer little to intellectual historians like Perry Miller who, to use Skotheim's terms, are concerned only with the internal structure of ideas removed from any social context. As a genus of the historical human species, literate man, like economic, political, and theological man, has limitations representing the diversity and richness of human experience. But it is the extent to which the field of study that has come to be known as the history of books—with its interests in the making, distribution, and readership of books and printed documents—sheds light on the character and influence of lit-

erate man in society that such study will produce insights valuable to all historical studies.

The history of book distribution can serve as a vehicle, as imperfect as any other, for discovering clues about the diffusion of ideas, attitudes, and values through specific geographic areas, periods of time, and segments of society. In 'Common Houses, Cultural Spoor,' Peirce F. Lewis traces the migration of patterns of house styles from the eastern seaboard into other parts of the country. For instance, he finds what he describes as the colonial 'I' house spreading in time from the Middle Atlantic states to the upper South and the lower Midwest. At the same time he plots the movement of the New England 'upright-and-wing' architectural design into the upper Midwest. It may be that similar rough formulas could be devised for certain books or the output of some publishers. On some happy occasions it may be possible actually to watch ideas being shaped in and by society through observing book distribution. The range of distribution activities can affect all states of the life of a book. Any clear picture of the history of the flow of books in American society can offer a contribution to what Merle Curti proposes as the central theme of his research in *The Growth of American Thought*: 'a social history of American thought, and to some extent a socioeconomic history of American thought' (p. xi).

American historians seldom make book distribution the sole focus of their research. It is usually subsumed as a minor facet of another subject such as printing or publishing, although recently this situation has begun to change. Histories of the book in America vary in the space they devote to distribution, roughly according to when the study was produced and the period of American history under consideration. The oldest secondary works pay little attention to distribution, but some modern studies make it centrally important. The seventeenth century is the dominant topic for historians of the American book in books and journals published before 1930; but unlike

the study of general intellectual histories, this early period has almost ceased to hold any interest for historians of the book today. John Tebbel's summary of the secondary works on the seventeenth century, in part two of the first volume of *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, cites only two works published after World War II, both of which were general studies not specifically related to the book trade. After the demise of seventeenth-century studies, the eighteenth century caught the interest of book historians between 1930 and 1950. And, of late, researchers are turning their attention to the period between the Revolutionary War and the third decade of the nineteenth century. With the exception of a small number of histories of nineteenth-century publishing houses, and surveys of fine printing—such as Joseph Blumenthal's *The Printed Book in America*—that emphasize the twentieth century, relatively few attempts have been made to assess the history of the book in America after 1800, a period when the country's geographic boundaries, population, and publishing activities rapidly expanded. Despite their limited numbers, writers taking the nineteenth century as their subject are the most imaginative and encompassing in their appreciation of the significance of the book and book distribution in America.

Scholarship about book distribution in seventeenth-century America divides into two traditions that are not antithetical but deal with different facets of the trade. The first tradition is exemplified by George Littlefield's *Early Boston Booksellers, 1642–1711*, published in 1900, and the second by Thomas Goddard Wright's *Literary Culture in Early New England, 1620–1730*, issued in 1920. Littlefield's and Wright's works are radically different, despite the fact that the subject of the first is books sold in seventeenth-century New England and that of the second is books read in the same place and time. Each author bases his conclusions on different primary sources and discusses different books, which leaves the reader with the perplexing impression that what was being sold in seventeenth-

century New England bookstores was not the same as what was being read in New England homes of the day.

The divergence between the two books comes about because the two authors define their topics in ways that exclude different parts of the book trade during the seventeenth century. Notwithstanding that the title of his book states that it is a history of bookselling, Littlefield is not interested in what booksellers sold but rather in what printers produced. Littlefield equates the book in America with the book printed in America and the history of bookselling with biographies of printers strung together in genealogical fashion. Wright, on the other hand, ignores New England's printers and the product of their presses and analyzes probate records that mention books, catalogues of libraries, and letters exchanged between colonists that included book titles. Since he deals only with booksellers who were printers, Littlefield omits the enormous number of books imported from England and France by the colonies that were, if Wright's research is any guide, read by many New Englanders. Wright's description of seventeenth-century New England culture emphasizes the books of educated settlers in contrast to Littlefield's highlighting of New England's native popular literature of sermons, manuals, almanacs, and broadsides. Wright makes New England seem like a small English university town in which there was no place for John Eliot's books for the instruction and conversion of the Indians. Referring to American imprints in *The Literary Culture of Early New England, 1620–1730,* Wright apologizes for their inferiority and quickly moves on in the text to those books that the colonists published in Great Britain. In contrast to Wright's attitude, Littlefield seeks to give the literature produced in New England a more important place in history and closes his book with the observation that 'whatever was the burning question which occupied the public mind, the bookseller was able to supply the literature relating to it by publishing the latest opinions of the prominent critics and wisest commentators' (p. 231).

For the purposes of this essay I stress contrasts between *Early Boston Booksellers, 1642–1711* and *Literary Culture in Early New England, 1620–1730* and how each deals with only a portion of the history of the book in America. I should add that Littlefield helps to begin the twentieth-century discussion of the book as an economic product as does Wright for the book as a participant in the socioeconomic history of ideas. Littlefield's interest in printers and the practice of printing is essential to any understanding of the economics of the book trade because the number of copies printed and the manner in which books are put to press are partly business decisions. Thomas Wright's research into private and institutional book collections in seventeenth-century New England forms a foundation for studying the relationship between book distribution and the diffusion of ideas and culture. However, implicit in both Littlefield's and Wright's endeavors is the assumption that the presence of even a single example of a title stood for the presumed distribution throughout the entire society. Their New England is a seamless web of readers in which books appeared magically and circulated without regard to class, region, profession, or any other variable. Books were a perfect reflection of literary taste and interest, without their availability ever becoming a problem. Littlefield freezes the book in time on the printer's platen, and Wright isolates it on the library shelf of one class of readers. They both ignore the evidence that a study of distribution points such as bookstores could have provided, evidence that could alert them to the variety of readers and books circulating in seventeenth-century New England.

Regrettably, there have been few methodological advances in studies dealing with book distribution in seventeenth-century America since the publication of Littlefield's and Wright's books. Henry Boynton's *Annals of American Bookselling, 1638–1850*, published in 1932, follows Littlefield's lead by including only booksellers who also were printers. That bookseller-

printers constituted a majority of the colonial book trade is disputed by John Winterich's findings in *Early American Books and Printing*, which reveal that only a few of the thirty booksellers in Boston during the seventeenth century also printed books. The significance of the transatlantic book trade in the distribution of books in the colonies is largely missed by historians writing before 1930. Worthington Chauncey Ford in *The Boston Book Market, 1679–1700* uses invoices of books sent from England in his research; but he still organizes his study on themes related to production technology such as bookbinding rather than on terms more appropriate to the import-export trade. Without a balanced view of the available evidence, a historian runs the risk of presenting a skewed picture of society. On the one hand the reader is offered a country that is almost cut off from its transatlantic roots, while on the other he is shown a community that is in close and constant contact with England. Such a theme is not an isolated problem of a specialist historian of the book trade but directly involves one of the central questions of all seventeenth-century American studies: how did Americans begin to form a unique national identity that eventually led them to fight a war to separate from Great Britain? Tracing the problems represented by the contrasts in the work of Thomas Wright and George Littlefield helps illuminate the curiously segmented nature of American studies of the role of books in culture.

Wright's use of books available in personal and institutional collections to measure regional cultural maturity foreshadowed the post–World War II methodological approach among southern cultural historians. If pre–World War II historians like Wright marshaled evidence to counter the view that seventeenth-century New England was culturally interior to Great Britain, so have many southern historians since World War II argued that southern colonial culture was not inferior to New England's. Louis Wright's *The First Gentlemen of Virginia* and *The Cultural Life of the American Colonies, 1607–*

1736 and Richard Beale Davis's massive *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585–1763* are foremost proponents of this school of thought. Although Louis Wright's and Davis's books are significant contributions to American cultural studies, both writers think of books as being uniformly distributed throughout southern culture without regard to social class or geography. Neither Louis Wright nor Davis provides us with a clear view of how books arrived in the colonies and who purchased or read them. In a revealing passage, Davis concludes his essay 'Books, Libraries, Reading, and Printing,' in *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1585–1763*, by weaving together all classes of readers into a southern seamless web. He states, 'Out-of-doors men these southern colonials were indeed, but they also spent many hours in the chimney corner of paneled Georgian library or of rough log-walled greatroom taking delight in their books' (p. *626*). It will never be possible to be quantitatively precise in discussing the distribution of books in seventeenth-century America, but it is necessary to acknowledge that varied readers acquired different books in numerous ways. Students of the American book could benefit from some methodological handwringing about distribution and readership similar to that found among general cultural historians during the 1970s about the possibility of profiling a national character.

The narrow views of the book trade in the works of Littlefield, Thomas Wright, and their colleagues, and the subsequent lack of research, leave us knowing relatively little about American book distribution during the seventeenth century. The many bibliographies of imprints, library catalogues, reading lists, and related documents that appeared during the first three decades of this century in journals such as the *William and Mary Quarterly* and the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* need to be reexamined and related to general historical trends. Charles Laugher's *Thomas Bray's Grand Design* describes a bold scheme to ship entire libraries from

England to the colonies for the benefit of the Anglican clergy, but Bray's effort cannot be considered a typical commercial venture of the time.

Who were the booksellers, book importers, and exporters during the seventeenth century, and how did they go about their business? Jack Sosin in *Agents and Merchants* points out that most businesses in the colonies were Anglo-American family concerns with brothers or other relations trading with one another across the waters of the North Atlantic. Were booksellers more independent than other merchants plying a trade that was dependent on shiping, and, if so, how was this freedom translated into their selection of reading material to be brought into the colonies? It is not clear if those who brought books to New England to sell were moved more by commercial than theological motives. Book importers might have served as important secularizing forces that unintentionally eroded the influence of the ministerial oligarchy, casting new light on booksellers' activities during this period, and enlarging their significance in the history of the political and cultural life of the colonies.

Regional and class developments and differences are other frameworks within which to place inquiries about this subject. In *The American Revolution Within*, Merrill Jensen quotes John Adams as writing that 'the principles of the American Revolution may be said to have been as various as the thirteen states that went through it, and in some sense almost as diversified as the individuals who acted in it. In some few principles, or perhaps in one single principle, they all united.' Although it may be difficult to sustain an argument that there were thirteen separate book cultures in the colonies, book historians' inter-colony distinctions have been uncommonly crude, too often nothing more than pious glorifications of the Massachusetts reader or parochial attempts to skewer the southern mind on the barb of British Governor Berkeley's witticism that he was thankful that there was no press in Virginia to interfere with

English imperial policy. More sophisticated questions need to be posed in this area.

Book historians interested in such questions could find no better starting point than examining the model of pre-telegraphic communication advanced by Allan R. Pred, who uses newspapers, lines of commerce, and interurban travel as the basis for his conclusions in *Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information: The United States System of Cities, 1790–1840.* One of Pred's findings is that the country was divided among various spatial subsystems, each of which depended upon a dominant city within the region. In turn, these dominant cities were to one degree or another dependent upon New York, with the South being more reliant than the North. Equally interesting is his view that information traveled more quickly between the major cities of New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Boston than it did between these metropolitan centers and outlying areas. Most importantly, Pred's evidence indicates that information circuits and economic dependence were aligned during this early period but that this interdependence broke down as the country moved into a period of increased manufacturing activity and electronic communication.

Increase Mather once boasted that little of significance was published that escaped his attention, yet there has been no comprehensive analysis since 1910 of the building of the formidable Mather family library. If one were undertaken it might reveal that the Mather correspondence is a guide to how the New England elite received information and formed opinions. In exploring the sociology of knowledge in early America through book distribution, historians need not restrict their investigations to the theological community. Theorists such as Jackson Turner Main and James Henretta construct models of social stratification based on wealth as measured by tax receipts. Since some towns may have as many book lists extant as tax rolls, social scientists may be able to compare the two types

of records to begin to test Bernard Barber's proposition that knowledge, like wealth, is differentially distributed throughout any society and that 'this dimension of stratification produces effects independently of other dimensions [i.e. wealth, power, or religion]' (p. 293).

During the 1930s and 1940s a new cast of historians led by Lawrence Wroth begin to shift the emphasis in writing about the history of the American book from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, particularly the period between 1700 and 1776. Wroth's *The Colonial Printer*, first issued by the Grolier Club in 1931 and then by the Southworth-Anthoensen Press in 1938 in a revised edition, was a revolutionary advance that moved the study of the book away from biographies of printers and towards a careful examination of books and how they were produced. Wroth's approach to colonial printing struck a responsive chord among various readers. The information Wroth provided bibliographers about American printing methods helped them to understand more fully the significance of some books and to establish the bibliographical details of others. Wroth's explanation of American colonial book production gave the many undistinguished-looking colonial books heightened significance to librarians and collectors who had been interested only in the literature about the early discovery and exploration of America. After Wroth's *The Colonial Printer*, scholars like Thomas Wright no longer needed to apologize for the unassuming Massachusetts almanacs and broadsides. As a guide to the literary taste of the common man, American imprints became a help to students in understanding how printing techniques shaped and sometimes transformed important texts. Wroth's *The Colonial Printer* contributed substance and detail to Littlefield's view of the American book as the product of a native press.

In his 1939 essay 'The Booktrade Organization in the Colonial Period,' published in Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt's *The Book in America*, Wroth extends the scope of his thinking

about the colonial book from the history of production processes to that of distribution methods. In this ground-breaking piece, Wroth argues that the colonial trade was primitively organized, with one person serving the multiple roles of printer, publisher, and bookseller. Only the Boston trade, in Wroth's view, was sufficiently mature to allow specialization not only for production (between printer and binder) but also between the producer (printer) and the distributor (publisher). Wroth gives four outlets available to colonial printers and publishers for distributing books: bookstores, subscription publishing, traveling agents, and auctions. Together, these have served as the established definition of the colonial book distribution network since Wroth proposed this view in 1939. But several recent specialized studies modify and, in some instances, contradict Wroth's model. The role Wroth gives the bookstore in the book trade is directly challenged, and the accuracy of his description of the importance of subscription publishing and auctions in the colonial period is no longer certain. Some writers conclude that, in addition to Wroth's four outlets for distribution, private collectors and institutional libraries also played significant parts in the circulation of books in eighteenth-century American society.

Of Wroth's four distribution networks, the bookstore has been most thoroughly examined since *The Book in America.* Wroth's understanding of the function of the colonial bookstore is most clearly revealed in his *An American Bookshelf, 1755,* issued in 1934 between the publication of *The Colonial Printer* and 'The Booktrade Organization in the Colonial Period.' To convey in vivid terms the reading interests of urban Americans in *1755,* Wroth created in *An American Bookshelf, 1755* a fictitious but, in his view, a typical Philadelphia reader, Mr. Loveday. Loveday is a successful, well-traveled, and educated merchant who owns his own home and is interested in books. His business travels throughout the colonies allowed Loveday to buy books in bookstores in many cities.

Wroth writes, 'Wherever he [Loveday] went in the course of his journeys, he was notable even among well-informed associates for a persistent patronage of booksellers.' Considering Wroth's intensive research about printing practices for *The Colonial Printer*, it is not surprising that he concludes in *An American Bookshelf, 1755* that Loveday's reading consisted totally of American imprints such as Indian treaties, narratives of captivities, and sermons predicting that human corruption would result in earthquakes as a form of divine retribution. Wroth's description of Loveday's reading never reveals the American participation in British middle-class culture, a perspective found in Michael Kraus's *The Atlantic Civilization* and 'Literary Relations Between Europe and America in the Eighteenth Century,' in George S. Gordon's *Anglo-American Literary Relations*, and in the works of Louis Wright and Thomas Wertenbaker. If Wroth is right, Loveday settled into the library of his Rittenhouse Square townhouse with well-thumbed copies of books such as *Essays Upon Field Husbandry* and the *Faithful Narrative of the Many Dangers and Sufferings of Robert Eastburn*. It is more likely that Loveday's shelves were stocked with London and Dublin edition of Alexander Pope's poems, or the essays of Addison and Steele.

There has been no full-length study of the American colonial bookstore since 'The Booktrade Organization in the Colonial Period,' nor have there been any descriptions of bookstores in America before 1750; but several fine articles have focused on retail bookstores for the period between 1750 and 1776. The number of studies is small, yet these essays cover stores in the major colonial urban areas, with the exception of New York City. Elizabeth Carroll Reilly's 'The Wages of Piety: The Boston Book Trade of Jeremy Condy' and Worthington Chauncey Ford's 'Henry Knox and the London Book-Store, 1771–1774' give information about the activities of northern stores at the end of the colonial period. The shops of the middle colonies are represented in Robert Harlan's 'David Hall's

Bookshop and its British Sources of Supply' and 'A Colonial Printer as Bookseller in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia.' Cynthia and Gregory Stiverson's 'The Colonial Retail Book Trade: Avalability and Affordability of Reading Material in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Virginia' and Calhoun Winton's 'The Colonial South Carolina Book Trade' present the activities of two southern establishments. Elizabeth Cometti's 'Some Early Bestsellers in Piedmont, North Carolina' is a fascinating account of a small, country bookstore in the South which, for its size and location, stocked an ambitious selection of books. Cometti's description of William Johnston's Little River Store stands alone to complement what scholars have learned about the urban stores located in Boston, Philadelphia, Williamsburg, and Charleston, South Carolina. Finally, the list of titles Henrick Onderock made available in his general store in Hempstead Harbor, New York, a list that is published in Herman Krooss and Charles Gilbert's *American Business History* (pp. 29–31), serves as a useful example of the types of books sold in stores that did not specialize in stocking books or book-related items such as stationery and ink.

In opposition to Wroth's view in 'The Booktrade Organization in the Colonial Period' and *An American Bookshelf, 1755* that the sale of American imprints formed the most important part of the colonial bookstore's business, the research by Reilly, Harlan, the Stiversons, and Winton shows that an American urban store's principal function was distributing English and not American books. Colonial readers expected their city stores to supply them with the latest popular books from London. The importance of English publications is highlighted by Benjamin Franklin's comment on colonial reading in his *Autobiography* that 'those who lov'd reading were oblig'd to send for their books from England.' Some booksellers even made occasional trips to England to renew their stock, as Jeremy Condy did.

The usual method for American booksellers to keep in con-

tact with the British publishing scene was to establish a reliable relationship with a London factor who not only filled the bookseller's orders but also chose those British books that he thought would be salable in the colonies. Urban colonial bookstores succeeded to the extent that their owners maintained a channel to British publishing through an agent who was sensitive to American reading taste, possessed good contacts with British publishers, and was patient and sufficiently capitalized to extend the long credit and endure the many inconveniences that conducting business across the Atlantic Ocean necessarily entailed. Here is how the Stiversons described the bookseller-agent relationship: 'Every colonial bookseller was dependent on an English agent, and if that agent was not honest and informed the results might be disastrous' (p. 153). Harlan's description of James Rivington's attempt from London to capture a wider share of the colonial market illustrates some of the difficulties of conducting business at such great distances. The unscrupulous Rivington would offer to colonial booksellers a few popular titles at sharp discounts, causing many to break from their usual business associates in London. However, when filling the Americans' orders, Rivington sometimes supplied incomplete sets and completed shipments with books that the booksellers had not ordered and would find difficult to sell. The Americans experienced insurmountable problems trying to untangle their affairs with Rivington when communication between the colonies and Great Britain was only as timely as the ships crossing the Atlantic between major ports.

The number of studies is too small for one to be overly confident in sweeping summaries; but, with the thought that nothing so stimulates historians' enquiries as the opportunity to amend another historian's generalizations, it should be useful to draw an outline of colonial retail bookstore activity based on the research of Reilly, Harlan, the Stiversons, and Winton. Most importantly, the bond forged by Lawrence Wroth between the colonial printer and bookseller should be broken.

Although printers often sold books, most were sustained by selling copies of their newspapers. Many booksellers printed few or no books. In discussing the book trade in Charleston, South Carolina, Calhoun Winton writes, 'All students are familiar with Wroth's model of the typical colonial printing establishment as the center of village news . . . but the evidence suggests that with two or three important exceptions the various aspects of the book trade continued to go their separate ways in South Carolina until the end of the colonial era' (p. 75).

Bookstores depended on the sale of nonbook items for a substantial portion of their income. In urban areas the nonbook goods were stationery materials; in rural areas such goods were general store stock such as shovels, seeds, and dry goods. Urban bookstores, among them David Hall's in Philadelphia and Jeremy Condy's in Boston, stocked fewer American than British titles. Harlan observes that in David Hall's business 'the only American publications which added appreciably and consistently to the bookstore's stock were the very popular pamphlets entitled *A Pocket Almanack*, *A Primer*, *A Catechism*, and *Poor Richard's Almanack*' (p. 4). Harlan's conclusion is a reminder to investigators interested in early American literature that they should pay more attention to almanacs rather than limiting their study to early poetry and novels as guides to prevailing American literary taste and expression. Country stores offered a limited number of imported books and relied almost exclusively on a few popular native titles. Elizabeth Cometti's study of William Johnston's store in North Carolina indicates that in 1774 when Johnston offered the inhabitants of rural North Carolina a more urban selection —characterized by copies of books by Laurence Sterne, Oliver Goldsmith, and Henry Fielding—none sold even though his customers continued to buy Bibles, hornbooks, short religious tracts, and *The Pilgrim's Progress* in quantity. To some extent American urban stores served as secondary distribution points for the British trade by supplying some books to those outlets

in smaller towns. The scanty records available for Williamsburg and Boston suggest that the clientele of urban stores in different geographic locations consisted of a similar mix of professional classes, although Massachusetts bookstores enjoyed more support from ministers. This finding supports Jackson Turner Main's undocumented thesis in *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* that ownership of a significant number of books in the colonies correlated with a professional occupation, location near a city, and a high income level. However, Main's definition of the typical colonial book owner is more appropriate for the North than the South, because many southerners with significant collections of books did not live near densely populated areas.

In spite of the importance of British publishing to American readers, only two articles provide a general overview of the business of the Anglo-American book trade during this period, Giles Barber's 'Books from the Old World and for the New: the British International Trade in Books in the Eighteenth Century' and Stephen Botein's 'The Anglo-American Book Trade before 1776.' Barber's quantitative study of the ledgers recording British imports and exports kept in the Public Records Office in London demonstrates that the colonies were the most important overseas market for British publishers, commanding almost fifty percent of total British book exports and outstripping even Ireland as an importer. One of the most interesting statistical comparisons derived from Barber's work is that the southern colonies of Florida, Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, and Maryland easily outdistanced the New England colonies in the number of books imported from Great Britain. Botein's well-argued study affords students of the eighteenth-century book trade a glimpse at the dynamics between British suppliers and American consumers from the viewpoint of the English publishers. A few British publishers dominated the colonial market, according to Botein, and they had little interest in understanding or cultivating colonial readers; instead,

they relegated North America as a convenient dumping ground for books whose sales had slowed in London, thus making them too expensive to keep in inventory. Botein's publishers had a nearby audience in London for popular British books, and there was little economic incentive to offer the long credit and endure the uncertainty of the transportation system to the colonies for these titles.

Views of the British publishing scene that differ from Botein's in some respects are Lyman Butterfield's 'The American Interests of the Firm of E. and C. Dilly, with the Letters to Benjamin Rush' and, to a lesser degree, Robert Harlan's 'William Strahan's American Book Trade, 1744–1776.' The involvements of the Dillys and Strahan in the Anglo-American book trade were rooted more in their many friendships with Americans like Benjamin Franklin than in any desire to manipulate the American market for disposing of unwanted stock.

The research by Botein, Butterfield, Harlan, and Barber makes the student of the American book eager for more information about transatlantic relationships in the book trade. Questions confront us on all sides. What part did the Irish and French pirate printers play? How did English writers view the American market? How did British export duties affect the trade? To what extent was English middle-class culture unavailable in America because some books were not imported to this country? What more can we learn about the agents in England who supplied Americans with books? It is astonishing that we have no full-length study of William Strahan or John Almon, who were both influential in the Anglo-American book trade. Contrasting American importers of books with those handling other commodities may offer new insights. Much of the colonial trade with Great Britain before the Revolutionary War relied on a bartering system using exports such as southern tobacco and New England timber. Colonial booksellers, on the other hand, may have depended on specie for buying British books since Great Britain had little interest in books printed in

the colonies. Did the scarcity of specie affect what Americans could import or the British were willing to export? William Baxter's *The House of Hancock: Business in Boston, 1724–1775* has valuable information about domestic trading of credits used for payments by printers, data that certainly holds clues for international arrangements.

The lack of specialized research on the Anglo-American trade has disoriented cultural historians when using the book trade as evidence of general characteristics of American and British cultural relations before the Revolution. This is clearly shown in the disagreement between Merle Curti and Louis Wright about the speed of transmission of ideas between Great Britain and her North American dependencies. In *The Cultural Life of the American Colonies 1607–1763*, Louis Wright argues that the important aspects of English culture were immediately accessible to Americans. He writes, 'The advertisements of eighteenth-century colonial papers indicate a steady market for contemporary English publications and do not suggest that the cultural lag was longer than the time for books to reach the colonies after publication in England' (p. 53). In *The Growth of American Thought*, Merle Curti proposes that the colonies were insulated from current developments in English thinking. He points out that 'new ideas and new books reached America from England only at irregular and often long-delayed intervals; apparently one of the first copies of Newton's *Principia*, published in England in 1687, to arrive in the colonies was that which James Logan obtained in 1708. English intellectuals had sometimes qualified or even abandoned ideas before the colonists had received and assimilated them.' The speed of cultural transmission from England to the colonies may have varied from place to place, from time to time, and from idea to idea; further research is necessary to clarify the process.

Since the publication of 'The Organization of the American Booktrade,' the progress made in reformulating the role of the

colonial bookstore in the distribution system has not been matched for Wroth's second distributor of books, the peddler. Victor Neuburg's *The Penny Histories*, R. K. Webb's *The British Working Class Reader, 1790–1848*, and Leslie Shepard's *The Broadside Ballad* are examples of studies of British imprints for which there are no counterparts in the United States. The fact that there are few extant records directly relating to American colonial book peddlers makes it difficult to recreate the lost world of these transient figures. The two best books about hawkers in America are Richardson Wright's *Hawkers and Walkers in Early America* and J. R. Dolan's *The Yankee Peddlers of Early America*, but neither contains much about those who sold books. Both Wright and Dolan find that peddlers specialized and associated with specific trades such as blacksmithing, clockmaking, or cordwaining; but it would be surprising if many could have lived solely by selling books on the road before the Revolution. Book peddlers sold books as one of many jobs to earn money and constituted what amounted to a temporary labor force for booksellers. Gerald McDonald describes one such relationship in 'William Bradford's Book Trade and John Browne, Long Island Quaker, as His Book Agent, 1686–1691.' The transient booksellers may differ from craft peddlers in other significant ways. The primary function of the peddlers, as described by Wright and Dolan, was to bring urban specialized services to rural areas that were unable to afford them on a continuing basis. In one sense, book hawkers brought books printed in urban areas to outlying regions, yet this method of bookselling was not limited to the countryside. In *The History of Printing in America*, Isaiah Thomas describes the means by which books were sold by peddlers in Boston. According to Thomas, 'It was the custom of the day to hawk about the streets every new publication.'

During the last generation, the chapbooks and broadside ballads of early America have become a lost literature. Victor Neuburg's *Chapbooks: A Guide to Reference Material on English*,

Scottish, and American Chapbook Literature of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries list no historical work done on American versions of this genre since Harry B. Weiss's articles during the late 1940s. I am not well-acquainted with a great number of these pamphlets and broadsheets, but those that I have seen are sensational, follow established formulas, and are regional in the sense that they almost always deal with local events such as the hanging of a town criminal. Although there were best sellers like *The Wonderful Hermit* that were often reprinted, the local nature of many stories suggests that individual chapbooks and broadsides had a geographically restricted distribution. The time is long past for someone to tackle this form of literature in a substantive way, as Marion Barber Stowell has done for almanacs in her fascinating *Early American Almanacs: The Colonial Weekday Bible.*

Lawrence Wroth's third and fourth networks of distribution, auctions and subscription publishing, are reserved for the section of this paper surveying the post-Revolutionary period. In the place of these two networks, researchers have elevated private and institutional collectors as significant factors in the circulation of books in colonial society. Two summaries of early collectors are Edwin Wolf 2nd's 'Great American Book Collectors to 1800' and Carl Cannon's sturdy *American Book Collectors and Collecting*. Often-cited analyses of individual libraries include the Library Company of Philadelphia's *The Library of James Logan of Philadelphia, 1674–1751*, William Peden's 'Thomas Jefferson: Book Collector,' Millicent Sowerby's *Catalogue of the Library of Thomas Jefferson*, and Julius Tuttle's 'The Libraries of the Mathers.' Some collectors' libraries have been the subject of much research. My 'Sowerby Revirescent and Revised' lists the many articles and parts of books about Jefferson's use of his library that have appeared since Millicent Sowerby completed her annotated catalogue of Jefferson's collecting in 1959.

Unlike those who habitually frequented American book-

stores, the owners of large private libraries during the colonial period did not limit themselves to books currently fashionable in London but imported the most useful parts of Old World scholarship and tradition to serve as a base for learning in the New World. James Logan was overjoyed when after a long search he acquired a 1518 edition of Ptolemy's *The Almagest* and, as described in Howard Rice's *Thomas Jefferson's Paris*, Jefferson pressed his search throughout Europe for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century editions of Palladio's *Four Orders of Architecture*, among other titles. The major private collectors became large-scale importers of books and operated like bookstore owners by taking frequent book-buying trips abroad, staying in contact with those in Europe who could provide them with books, and by keeping close watch on foreign publishing through reviews in periodicals, as is shown in Norman Fiering's 'The Transatlantic Republic of Letters: A Note on the Circulation of Learned Periodicals.'

What makes these collectors important in colonial society is not only their political, social, or economic prominence but also the fact that the number of books they imported had a greater than normal impact on the reading public because of the scarcity of books in early America. Most had an international network of friends with whom they often exchanged books and ideas. Although occurring after the start of the Revolutionary War, there is no more dramatic example of how books imported by a private collector had an immediate effect on important events than the story of Thomas Jefferson's book buying in Europe for James Madison, a story told in Irving Brant's *James Madison the Nationalist, 1780–1787*. During Jefferson's stay in France as America's representative, he spent much time looking for books for himself and his friends. Brant wrote about one shipment Jefferson sent to Madison:

> By the time a shipping opportunity arrived the purchases were multipled—not only the books Madison asked for, but works of Burlamaqui, Wolfius, d'Albion, Mably, Voltaire, Mirabeau,

> Diderot, a dozen histories—the whole running to almost 200 volumes. . . . This literary cargo, as Madison called it, made an immediate impact upon his constitutional studies. Home from legislative duties in the late winter of 1785–86, he plunged at once into a study of ancient and modern confederacies. What were their elements of strength? Of weakness? Why did the old ones fall, why were the modern feeble? He took them up one at a time—the Lycian Confederacy, the Amphictyonic, the Achaean; the Helvetic, the Belgic, the Germanic. . . . Out of Madison's free hours in New York, while he was attending Congress in 1787, came his notable 'Vices of the Political System of the United States.' Finished in April, on the very eve of the meeting to revise the structure of American government, this brief article not only probed the weaknesses of the state and federal structures, but put into words the thoughts on government which its author had distilled out of the world's past and his own mind (pp. 410–11).

Institutional libraries, like personal libraries, have stimulated much research since Wroth's essay, but the role they played in circulating books is uncertain. The standard source for the early American college library is Louis Shores's *Origins of the American College Library, 1638–1800* and, for the nonacademic library, Jesse Shera's *Foundations of the Public Library*. Bibliographies listing books and articles about early library history that have been published since Shera's and Shores's studies are Michael Harris and Donald Davis's *American Library History* and David Zubatsky's *The History of American Colleges and Their Libraries in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: A Bibliographical Essay*. Of particular note is Joe Kraus's 'The Book Collections of Early American College Libraries,' which has the virtue of being the first study that systematically tries to examine the intellectual contents of early American college libraries; but it compromises its usefulness, in my view, by sorting the books into such broad categories of knowledge that only a superficial understanding of the collections is possible.

The exciting possibilities lying beneath the surface of such

amorphous classifications as history, religion, and literature—employed by many writers about early libraries—can be seen in H. Trevor Colbourn's revealing study of Jefferson's history books in 'Thomas Jefferson's Use of the Past.' In this fine article, Colbourn draws upon his extensive research for *The Lamp of Experience* to show that Jefferson's selection of books for his library was not governed by an idle, pious reverence for history but was guided by his desire to systematically search the writings of Whig historians in order to find arguments about such things as individual rights that could prove useful to late eighteenth-century revolutionary America. It was this reading that informed Jefferson's attitude about the nature of individual rights and influenced his actions throughout his life.

The literature about early American institutional libraries with which I am acquainted offers little about the use of patrons of these collections. In speaking about the writing on college libraries in colonial America in *Education in the Forming of American Society* (1960), Bernard Bailyn observed that 'books and libraries are in themselves mute and unyielding sources for cultural history; for though it is obviously important to know what was available and desired in print, the critical question is what the reading material meant to its possessors and readers (p. 85).' David Robson's 'The Early American College and the Wider Culture: Scholarship in the 1970s' finds that this situation is changing for general histories of colleges, but he does not indicate if the college library participates in the evolution. Many eighteenth-century public and academic libraries were built by the donation of estates rather than by an aggressive book-purchasing program that sought to measure its clients' reading interests. In Samuel Eliot Morison's richly detailed view of early campus life, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century*, the school's library seems to be most noteworthy for its absence of involvement in academic life. Unless further research produces new evidence or insights, it may be that the irresistible conclusion in this matter is that colonial

institutional libraries were unused warehouses of the discarded books of previous generations, rather than active agents in the promotion and circulation of ideas, at best reliquaries in those generations' reverence for the memory of their ancestors.

The exceptions to the passive role of institutional libraries are the many subscription and circulating libraries that were formed in the eighteenth century and continued to be an integral part of the American social and intellectual scene through the middle of the nineteenth century. David Kaser's *A Book for a Sixpence* is a survey of the subscription library. A description of a bookseller who developed a circulating library in his store can be found in George Raddin's *An Early New York Library of Fiction* and in LeRoy Kimball's 'An Account of Hocquet Caritat.' The Library Company of Philadelphia has received much deserved attention as a lightning rod for the intellectual activity in eighteenth-century Philadelphia. Margaret Korty's 'Benjamin Franklin and Eighteenth-Century American Libraries' and Edwin Wolf 2nd's two essays 'Franklin and Their Friends Choose their Books' and 'The Early Buying Policy of the Library Company of Philadelphia' show that this private Philadelphia library was a frequent importer of books and comprised an active group of influential subscribers who played prominent roles in national cultural life.

The fact that many of these circulating libraries, most prominently Caritat's, consisted of a high percentage of works of fiction suggests that Americans were interested in imaginative literature but did not think that it had enough permanent value to justify the purchase of these books for personal collections. Americans conceived of literature as a decorative commodity that periodically could be leased for a brief period and then returned to a vendor, much as one might rent a potted fern to ornament a room for a special occasion. The idea that the attitude of the national reading audience would be rooted in such a belief played no small role in the struggles of the American writer in the next century and perhaps it helps to illumi-

nate the enormous success of American book clubs in the twentieth century that serve up a monthly menu of reading fare. In a revealing passage in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, Colonel Lapham approvingly assesses his family's reading habits: '"Well, we do buy a good many books, first and last," said the Colonel, who probably has in mind the costly volumes which they presented to one another on birthdays and holidays. "But I get about all the reading I want in the newspapers. And when the girls want a novel, I tell 'em to get it out of the library. That's what the library's for"' (pp. 88–89).

The American book distribution system on the eve of the Revolution consisted of informal networks of friends, temporary laborers, independent agents, peddlers, bookstore owners whose income came only partially from books, and a few institutions and private individuals who imported European books that they thought would be most useful in the colonies. The system serving American printers was particularly rigid and unable to respond to demands for distribution beyond a small area. The most rapid method for circulating American books during the colonial period may have been reprinting. Richard Gimbel's *Thomas Paine: A Bibliographical Check List of Common Sense* depicts Thomas Paine's pamphlet as immediately creating both controversy and demand when it was issued in Philadelphia in 1776 by Robert Bell. One Philadelphia bookstore owner, Robert Aitken, immediately ordered several dozen copies. However, Bell could not quickly supply the demand outside of Philadelphia, and many printers, one as close as Lancaster, Pennsylvania, printed their own copies for local distribution. The roads, transportation system, labor conditions, and slow communications all conspired to hinder Bell's taking advantage of the popularity of *Common Sense* and served to limit the horizons of printers, readers, and booksellers alike. A full-scale analysis of the circulation of Paine's work would be beneficial because information on the pressure that such a rapidly selling book put on the distribution system would

throw light on parts of the network that normally were dormant. Presumably such a study would catch printers at their most resourceful in getting books into the hands of an eager public in short order. A look at the distribution of a book like Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* could potentially perform a similarly useful function for the nineteenth-century trade.

Not only would a thorough study of the distribution of individual books prove useful but also new attention to the lives of key publishing figures would markedly improve our understanding. It is unfortunate that American scholarship has produced no biography of Benjamin Franklin since John Clyde Oswald's in 1917, which takes as its theme Franklin's close identification with the colonial book trade both as a printer and a bookseller. Franklin's enormous number of friends throughout the colonies and in Europe, his interest in developing a national postal service, and his sponsorship of printers throughout the colonies are among the crucial elements in a career that might help to demonstrate America's early struggles to break the tyranny of a distribution system that encouraged only local marketing of books.

An overview of the scattered secondary sources about the history of book distribution during the pre-Revolutionary War period shows that a rough consensus emerges about patterns of distribution and readership, but the agreement quickly dissolves when the question of the effects on society is brought up. These studies outline three groups of readers. The first rank consisted of an educated male elite of varying political and philosophical dispositions. These readers were aggressive buyers of books, receiving them from numerous international sources and aided by a network of correspondents and friends. They acquired books printed in many countries and second-hand volumes sometimes centuries old were among those most actively sought. This elite had a well-defined sense of America's place in history and definite views about their relationship

with other Englishmen. In this catholic collecting activity, which knew no chronological or geographical restraints, this small, wealthy group was at times joined in some cities by middle-class artisans and professionals banding together, such as those who composed Benjamin Franklin's Library Company of Philadelphia, readers who held useful learning in high regard and who envisioned a society based on merit rather than class.

The second group was primarily urban, with more women than the first group. These readers patronized bookstores or subscription libraries in populous areas in search of the current fashionable productions of London publishers. They ignored out-of-print books and seldom enlisted the aid of agents in foreign countries; they seemed content to select passively what booksellers had available. They were also more interested in fiction than the first class of readers.

Rural inhabitants and literate working-class urban residents comprised a third group of readers. Small towns and even isolated farms did boast medium-size book collections, consisting principally of professional literature such as law or medical books and the works of a few classical or religious writers. But by and large these collections were not common. Rural readers relied heavily on traveling booksellers and occasional visits to cities to stock their shelves, and their interests were generally restricted to ephemeral productions such as chapbooks and broadsides. In contrast to the first group's enlarged sense of history, the third segment of American readers were those most isolated from European culture and removed from a sense of participating in a shared British heritage. Uniting all three groups were newspapers, practical works like almanacs, a very few popular religious texts such as *Pilgrim's Progress*, and the exceptional best seller like *Common Sense*.

The role assigned to books in influencing or shaping events depends to a large degree on one's opinion about the size and importance of the literate population, questions far from settled. Those interested in the history of books also will even-

tually confront the doubts and objections of historians who value the written word as nothing more than a subterfuge used to conceal decidedly nonintellectual motivations. To cite a noteworthy example, Charles Beard in *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* deals with the written expressions of his principal characters as an elaborate series of masks and blinds meant to shield their authors' venal aspirations and self-interests from the outside world. Such interpretations are at least in part influenced by an individual historian's view of human nature and as such are less the result of objective historical evidence and more a matter of personal interpretation. But such an argument should serve to remind those whose main interest is the history of books that they should not presume that all will uncritically accept any assertion of the importance of studying the use of books as an avenue for understanding society. Book historians will undoubtedly find much more congenial company among those interpreters of the past who believe that ideas play a verifiable role in culture. Three of these scholars are Bernard Bailyn, who argues in *Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* that the colonists' historical reading produced their sense of identity as a wronged minority in British society, Arthur Schlesinger, whose *Prelude to Independence* depicts diverse groups as being motivated by what is printed in newspapers, and Rhys Isaac, whose study *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* shows an educated elite manipulating the channels of communications in society in order to work the levers of social, political, and economic power.

If the history of book distribution during the pre-Revolutionary period has been clouded by scholars' inability to deal simultaneously with imported books and American imprints, the picture is even murkier for the period immediately after the Revolution. The relationship between American booksellers and the English trade is unclear. Logic tells us that the book trade between the two countries during the Revolution was almost severed, but, to my knowledge, no research has

verified this supposition. Indeed, it can be seen in Thomas Adams's *The American Controversy* and *American Independence* that there were exchanges of political books between America and England, because many pamphlets countered charges contained in a pamphlet printed in the other country. It is not difficult to imagine that some American exports to England increased during the war years because of the intense political discussions about the hostilities.

After the Treaty of Paris, some Englishmen continued to see their country's former colonies as an important book market. Lord John Sheffield anticipated this position during the Revolution in *Observations on the Commerce of the American States* and noted, 'This [a book] is a considerable article of exportation to America from Britain, and must continue so as long as the price of labour is high there, and the language the same. All school and common books can be sent cheaper from Britain than they can be printed in America, or sent from Ireland' (pp. 35–36). In his *Present State of Printing and Bookselling in America, 1796*, Lehman Thomas Rede described the situation in terms similar to Sheffield's: 'The people of North America manufacture their own paper, and in sufficient quantities for home consumption, but the price of labour is still so extremely high, that it seldom answers to print any work there: at least, they have hitherto seldom ventured beyond their own laws, temporary pamphlets, and newspapers, which every State now prints in abundance. . . . Of late, in the Northern States they print a few school-books, and occasionally, in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, print any tract not remarkably large; translations from the French, and a few re-prints from English publication, are all that have hitherto been done there' (pp. 14–15). For the pre-Revolutionary period, the literature about the Stamp Act gives us some idea of how British regulatory actions affected American printers. Robert Harlan's 'David Hall and the Stamp Act' and 'David Hall and the Townsend Acts' discuss the effect of British legislation on one printer, but

there are no counterparts for this work for booksellers after 1789. How did English publishers attempt to resume pre-war normal relations with America? Did they lobby their government for assistance?

After the Revolution, the new United States Congress acted immediately to protect native printers from English books, and Rollo Silver's exploratory essay 'The Book Trade and the Protective Tariff: 1800–1804' surveys some of the measures taken. Printers supported the increases in the tariff on books from five percent in 1792 to ten percent in 1794, and an increase to twelve and one-half percent in 1800. Silver's pioneer work has not been carried forward with the exception of Donald Marquant Dozer's 'The Tariff on Books.' Dozer's essay describes the American publishers' and authors' efforts to extend the high Civil War tax on books to the post–Civil War period as a brace to the republishing trade and as an attempt to diminish direct competition from British writers. It was one of the few areas of common ground that publishers and authors discovered. The history of the effect of tariffs on book importation is a subject long overdue for examination. Books were not singled out as an enumerated article before 1842, and there must have been some debate about keeping them part of the general schedule.

There was a persistent conflict between those who made the finished product—printers and publishers—and those who supplied the material and machines for producing the books—papermakers and type manufacturers. As early as 1793, Philadelphia printers and booksellers petitioned to lower the duty on imported paper so that the bookmakers could reduce their overhead and increase their margin of profit. In 1801 there was a massive lobbying effort on the part of mechanics and printers from Alexandria, Virginia, to Providence, Rhode Island, to increase the protective tariff on imported articles. At first Congress was adamant in turning down requests for cheaper paper and type on the grounds that such an action would adversely

affect fledgling efforts at domestic manufacturing of paper and type. This protectionist sentiment was the central tenet of the country's trade legislation policy. By 1816 the *ad valorem* tax on imported paper was a prohibitive thirty percent, and on type, twenty-five percent. Some printers and publishers must have echoed the thinking of the trustees of Transylvania University, who pointed out to the Senate Committee on Finance in 1822 that the high duty on these items was not just a protection to native industries but was also a tax on domestic printers and readers. Such reasoning failed to impress the legislators who retreated from their hard-line position only to the extent that they allowed rags for making paper into the country without the onerous fees. Congress used the fact that the rags were duty-free to turn back a request from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware papermakers for an even higher duty on paper.

During the first decades of the Republic, Congress repeatedly denied petitions that sought to exempt books from the import tax. In 1803 William McAuley and John McJimsey asked that the $2,365 worth of books held at the New York customs house be released without payment because they were meant for the study at the Associated Reformed Church of North America's new seminary, a worthy cause that would benefit society more than the revenues. The representatives turned a deaf ear to McAuley and McJimsey's pleas, charging the two petitioners to 'make an exertion to raise a little more money for this purpose.' In 1804, New Jersey College sought to avoid the duty on imported books as it endeavored to rebuild its library, which had been recently destroyed by fire. But the New Jersey school had no more success in this quest than did the representatives of the ministers and elders of the Reformed Church of North America. The Library Company of Philadelphia was also stymied in the same year in its effort to get books into the country from a donor in Kent County, England, who had bequeathed them to the institution.

To an extent, the revision of the tax schedule in 1816 did relieve the pressure on the situation by allowing books to be brought free into the United States if they were destined to be used by any society that was incorporated for literary or philosophical purposes. In spite of this change, there were some who felt that the arrangement still worked against the public good. In a letter to James Madison on September 16, 1821, Thomas Jefferson reported a plan by northern and western colleges to join forces with southern colleges to repeal the recently imposed duty on all imports including books. Arguing for Madison's support for the scheme, Jefferson wrote, 'Books constitute capital, a library lasts as long as a house, for hundreds of years. It [a book] is not then an article of consumption.' By 1822 the coalition was firm enough for Jefferson to approach Congress on the behalf of the University of Virginia. The American Philosophical Society and Transylvania University made simultaneous appeals. In his memorial to Congress, Jefferson protested that American printers were able to produce books only in English and cheap editions, leaving works in foreign, living languages, '(to serve) as vehicles of the important discoveries and improvements in science and the arts,' unpublished and not known in any copies throughout the entire United States. To the Congress's argument that it had already excepted literary and philosophical societies from the tax, Jefferson replied that books 'locked up in libraries can be of no avail to the practical man when he wishes a recurrence to them for the uses of life.' But the members of the Committee on Finance remained unpersuaded by Jefferson's logic and called these books 'extravagant expenditures' and 'foreign luxuries,' terms that recalled the debate a few years before about Congress's purchase of Jefferson's library to replace the one burnt by the British during their occupation of Washington in the War of 1812. In a remarkable summation of their resolve to indulge nationalism even at the expense of civilization, the legislators concluded that 'none, then, but the professional

gentleman, who can afford to extend his library beyond the resources of American publishers, or the scholar of wealth and leisure, who could indulge his taste in selecting the most elegant and expensive editions of foreign authors' would benefit from a reduction in the tax. This opinion was so ingrained in the congressional attitude that when the revisions of the tax schedule were passed during the 1840s, the highest fees were always levied on foreign, living languages, even when increased competition between British and American schoolbook publishers was allowed.

The spectrum of opinion on this issue among the several segments of the book trade and the American public yet remains unclear. In his article on the protective tariff, Silver quotes Ebenezer Andrews as claiming that lower tariffs on books were necessary because American printers could not yet satisfy the needs of American readers. Andrews's position is diametrically opposed to that of most other printers at the time. Is it the case that opinion in the trade was sharply divided on the question of tariffs between its distribution segment (those who made a living primarily from selling English books to American readers) and its production segment (printers)? What roles did publishers, bookbinders, printers, papermakers, readers, and learned institutions play in the tax schedules during the Tyler administration? All parts of the book business were brought together at what they must have considered the dire prospect of Congress's accepting an international copyright agreement in 1842, which would have meant that English authors would be paid royalties on their works sold in America whether the book had been printed here or abroad. One of the arguments put forth most strenuously against such an agreement was that its enactment would mean that the country would be flooded by the works of English writers whose unacceptable attitudes towards the United States had not been weeded out by the diligent and patriotic American printer and publisher.

Turning from book imports to the distribution of American imprints, G. Thomas Tanselle's 'Some Statistics on American Printing, 1764–1783' shows that the number of books printed between 1794 and 1800 was four times that produced between 1764 and 1773. American printers increasingly produced editions of popular English books as well as printing works by Americans. There were a number of original American imprints that appeared: the first American mathematical work in 1788, the first book on milling in 1795, the first native anthology of fiction in 1797, the first book on dyeing in 1799, the first book on distilling in 1804, and the first book on engineering in 1805. The audiences for these books were probably small in comparison with those for British imports. The prefaces of numerous early America novels contain their authors' protests about the popularity of English fiction in America and its detrimental effect on American creativity. And indeed, the period after the Revolution was characterized by the hectic experimentations of American printers, publishers, and booksellers to discover ways to bypass the unresponsive distribution network of the colonial period and to appeal directly to readers to purchase books. These experiments included a new method of subscription publishing, and a marked increase in the use of auctions, newspaper advertisements, and catalogues.

The descriptions of colonial subscription publishing in F. E. Compton's *Subscription Books* and in Lawrence Wroth's 'The Colonial Booktrade Organization' portray it as a method for producing large, expensive books that otherwise would tie up printers' resources for a substantial amount of time. Those few books printed by subscription before 1776 used this publishing strategy primarily as a way to finance the printing of an expensive book, rather than as a way to distribute it. William Powell in 'Patrons of the Press: Subscription Book Purchasers in North Carolina, 1733–1850' writes about colonial subscription publishing, 'Subscribers to books undoubtedly considered themselves patrons of the press and were fully aware of the fact

that only through their common support could the books be issued. . . . In some instances the announcement [of publication of the book] stated simply that the work would get underway as soon as the number of subscribers justified it financially' (p. 425). Richard J. Wolfe's *Jacob Bigelow's American Medical Botany, 1817–1821* and Waldemar Fries's *The Double Elephant Folio* demonstrate that prepayment through subscription sales continued to finance expensive books well into the nineteenth century. Madeleine Stern's 'A Salem Author and a Boston Publisher: James Tyler and Joseph Nancrede' presents an example of a subscription scheme for an ambitious geographical atlas that failed to gain enough support for the atlas to be published.

After the Revolution, a modified form of subscription publishing emerged that differed from that of the colonial period. Agents for publishers took subscription papers from town to town to secure orders for books, making the purpose of this part of the subscription trade more useful for distributing books than for financing their printing. The titles that Donald Farren finds published by subscription in 'Subscription: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century American Book Trade' and that Roger Stoddard compiles in 'Poet and Printer in Colonial Federal America: Some Bibliographical Perspectives' are inexpensive pamphlets rather than deluxe editions. In 'Mason Weems, Mathew Carey, and the Southern Book Trade, 1794–1810,' I try to show that the books that Mason Weems sold by subscription were already published and available in Carey's Philadelphia warehouse, and that it was therefore not necessary to underwrite them.

The explosion of catalogues and newspaper advertisements offering books for sale during the Federal period is additional evidence of the escalating efforts by booksellers, printers, and publishers to reach beyond the rigid structure of distribution offered by bookstores and to conquer the geographical obstacles confronting them. Robert Winans's *A Descriptive Checklist*

of Book Catalogues Separately Printed in America, 1693–1800 is the first installment of an extensive bibliographical treatment of American catalogues that offers a bright promise for valuable historical contributions in this area. Winans includes auction lists in his work, but the balance between bookseller auction catalogues and bookseller retail catalogues is far from even. Thus far, the figures in the published portion of Winans's work include only five separately published book auction catalogues for the pre-1776 period, a number that can scarcely be considered to represent a significant portion of the trade. Even from 1776 to 1800, there were few auctions and most of these were estate sales, an example of which Edwin Wolf 2nd describes in 'The Dispersal of the Library of William Byrd of Westover.' Robert Bell in Philadelphia was the sole bookseller who regularly included new books in his auctions. With the possible exception of the Boston market, the auction did not become a significant part of the commercial trade until the nineteenth century.

In contrast to the situation for auctions, many booksellers turned to catalogues as a way of selling books after the war, and there were almost as many catalogues issued from 1789 to 1800 as there were for the entire period before 1789. These catalogues consisted primarily of imported books, although the largest publishers like Isaiah Thomas and Mathew Carey also included a great number of their own imprints. The many imported books in the catalogues listed by Winans serve as companions to those that Charles Evans gave as guides to eighteenth-century American book culture in his *American Bibliography*. Sarah Pattee Stetson's 'American Garden Books Transplanted and Native, before 1807' and Helen Park's *A List of Architectural Books Available in America before the Revolution* suggest the possibilities that imported books open for researchers. Similarly, newspaper advertisements offering books for sale can also serve as a measure of American cultural activity. I know of no bibliographical description for newspaper

advertisements that can compare to Winans's for catalogues, but John Edgar Molnar's 'Publication and Retail Book Advertisements in the "Virginia Gazette," 1736–1780' spots booksellers' increasing reliance on newspapers during the pre-1776 period. Molnar finds only one advertisement for books during the 1750s, five during the 1760s, but thirty-seven from 1770 through 1776. Howard Mumford Jones has made good use of newspaper advertising of books in two articles that attempt to gauge the influence of French culture in the United States, 'The Importation of French Books in Philadelphia, 1750–1800' and 'The Importation of French Literature in New York City, 1750–1800.' Those interested in Jones's approach should consult William Reitzel's 'The Purchasing of English Books in Philadelphia, 1790–1800,' which contains a caution about Jones's use of newspapers.

There is no greater obstacle to a fuller understanding of the history of American book distribution after the Revolution than the lack of adequate biographies of the two giant publishers of the period, Mathew Carey and Isaiah Thomas. Earl Bradsher's *Mathew Carey, Editor, Author, Publisher* and Clifford Shipton's *Isaiah Thomas, Printer, Patriot and Philanthropist, 1749–1831* are short books that offer yeoman service, but both are in desperate need of revision and expansion. Neither biographer is interested in his subject's distribution activities. The intent of Bradsher's work is to sketch the impetus Carey gave to early American literature. Shipton is primarily interested in Thomas's publishing during the War of Independence. The enormous number of books published by Thomas and by Carey, recently listed in William Clarkin's *Mathew Carey: A Bibliography of His Publications, 1785–1824* (1984), leads me to suspect that their careers hold much information about early efforts to expand the distribution networks of the American book trade from local to regional and national levels. Hints of Carey's activities can be gathered from Emily Ellsworth Skeel's *Mason Locke Weems, His Works*

and Ways, which reprints so many of Carey's letters that it is one of the best published sources for primary documents relating to publishing history for the pre-1900 period.

Tantalizing clues contained in articles about Carey and Thomas show some of the diversity and extent of their efforts. Bradsher observes that Carey 'built up a trade that extended to all parts of the United States' but ventures no farther than this general observation. James Napier's 'Some Book Sales in Dumfries, Virginia' points out that Carey employed a postmaster in a rural area to sell books. In the countryside, local residents were forced to visit post offices, so the shipping of books to a postmaster was not only comparatively easy for Carey but also guaranteed that the books would be seen by prospective purchasers. Chester Hallenbeck's 'Book-Trade Publicity Before 1800' tells of Carey's use of newspapers and magazines throughout the United States as a means of selling books. My 'Mason Weems, Mathew Carey, and the Southern Book Trade, 1794–1810' tries to illustrate Carey's attempts to break into the southern market and Mason Weems's ambitious plan to establish a chain of bookstores with Carey from Virginia through South Carolina. They failed both because of the impracticability of the scheme in the face of a poor transportation system and slow communications and because of Carey's misunderstanding of southern literary taste.

Carey led the way in encouraging cooperation among publishers and booksellers throughout the northern and Middle Atlantic states. As did many in the trade at this time, he compiled book lists that were circulated to facilitate exchanging stock. The exchange partners chose from Carey's list the books that they thought appropriate for their area and returned to Philadelphia books from their own stock that were of equal value. This practice allowed Carey to increase the variety and amount of his stock in the Philadelphia store as well as to place his own publications before a wider and more diverse audience. The success of this informal system of book exchange prompted

Carey to establish a more elaborate network. Charles L. Nichols's 'The Literary Fair in the United States,' in George Parker Winship's *Bibliographical Essays: A Tribute to Wilberforce Eames*, takes a brief look at Carey's arrangement of an annual book fair modeled on the Frankfurt Book Fair in Germany. Its purpose was to gather together in one place publishers, booksellers, and printers in order to circulate information about the trade, to consolidate the industry's energies for promoting its general welfare, and to exchange books. The annual fairs lasted for only a few years and then succumbed, in Nichols's judgement, to poor economic conditions. Efforts other than the one that Nichols describes must have taken place. Shipton mentions that Isaiah Thomas attended a convention of the trade in 1788, but the purpose and the details of the event are not given.

In 1789 Isaiah Thomas's Boston plant alone was able to produce a 30,000-volume edition of a speller and still have reserve capacity for other titles. Such production capabilities must have made Thomas acutely aware of the need for efficient distribution methods. Although the picture of Thomas's career is not complete, what is known suggests that Thomas was more comfortable with formal business partnerships with other printers or publishers than with the informal exchange system developed by Carey. Thomas's many mergers include those with Henry Tinges in Newburyport in 1773, E. W. Weld in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1788; E. T. Andrews and O. Pennington in Albany in 1796; and Alexander Thomas in Windsor, Vermont, in 1808. His business partnerships throughout New England forced him to form a private messenger service that may have had the additional benefit of serving as a book delivery service.

Carey's and Thomas's careers do not encompass all the experimentation during these formative years. Milton Hamilton's *The Country Printer, New York State, 1785–1830* tells of Elihu Phinney's fitting up a barge on the Erie Canal during the early nineteenth century to serve as a floating bookstore to

bring literature to towns along the water. Mason Weems found county court and racing days to be among the best for selling books in the South because so much of the widely dispersed population could be found in one place. Even the first Federal Copyright Act of 1790 may have altered the existing networks of distribution. In 'Salesmanship of an Early American Best Seller,' Mrs. Roswell Skeel notes that Noah Webster sold the copyright of his *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language* to various regional publishers in order to limit the sale of his book to authorized agents in defined areas.

Despite the exhaustive bibliographical treatment of the output of the American press in the immediate post-Revolutionary period, no one has adequately explained the driving force behind the sudden new energy. Was it simply that there were more printers and people? Where did the printers come from? Certainly the presses, the roads, and the methods of transportation were no better after than before 1776. Aside from quelling the Bible trade and rebellious newspapers, there is no evidence that Great Britain actively suppressed American printers during the colonial years. The dominant political question for scholars of the Federal period has always turned on understanding the various efforts to forge a consensus on which to base a national government. Historians like Benjamin Spencer in *The Quest for Nationality* have transferred this issue from political to cultural studies by showing American writers and publishers energetically collaborating to forge modes of expression and themes that were distinguishable from English influence but still acceptable to their native readers. In this view, each pull of the printer's press bar inched America closer to fulfilling its vital literary mission; publishers and authors busily toiled to create a national literature that was worthy of their country's form of government and could serve equally well as a world model celebrating democracy and humbling the literary works produced by the subjects of the English monarchy, in much the same way Americans had

humbled British soldiers at Yorktown. If some printers and publishers of this period envisioned a national audience or readership, then they were thinking in terms of a unified American cultural identity that had been unimaginable a few years earlier and that still eluded many political theorists.

One question that arises is whether or not the shock of the Revolution disrupted existing business arrangements in the trade and created a vacuum that produced economic opportunities, which in turn inspired much of the rhetoric about developing American literary products for a home market. Although there was probably a mix of self-interest and genuine national pride in this rhetoric, one could argue that this was not the first time that entrepreneurial greed stalked the land clothed in patriotic language. A historian of Charles Beard's temperament would undoubtedly have little difficulty finding evidence to support a thesis that publishers were mainly interested in grabbing for a larger market share as British exporters temporarily faltered. Was it not the case that American publishers deserted all but a few creative writers, making little effort to distribute their works? In a chapter in her work-in-progress entitled 'The Novel in the New Republic,' Cathy Davidson of Michigan State University deftly blends the sense of republican virtue and the instinct for profits that motivated many printers and publishers as she updates and fleshes out William Charvat's model of novelist-reader-publisher relations sketched in his 'Literary Economics and Literary History.' James Barnes has also caught the opportunism among publishers in 'Depressions and Innovation in the British and American Book Trade, 1819–1939.'

The trade restrictions during the War of 1812 excluded most foreign goods from entering American ports, forcing Americans to rely on native manufacturing more than at any time since the disruptions to commerce caused by the American Revolution. The jolt given the economy by the greater reliance on American resources, combined with both the larger

urban markets and the surging population into western lands, signaled the beginning of a new era for book production and distribution in the nineteenth century. Enhanced production capabilities for books included the introduction of the stereotype process, steam power, the Fourdrinier machine, and mechanisms for mass producing case bindings that provided the industry with the means to print enough books to meet the new demands. The record for the years before the Civil War is less clear for distribution, and Carl Bode remarks, 'For the publishing industry, production turned out to be less of a problem than distribution. A publisher still had to sell his books. The market was there—indeed, it was growing all the time—but the question was how to reach it expeditiously.'

The brilliant first chapter of William Charvat's *Literary Publishing in America, 1790–1850* presents a thought-provoking thesis about the changes in book distribution caused by the new printing technologies and the expansion of publishers' markets in the nineteenth century, and the role these changes had in the shifting currents of influences on literary taste. Charvat was the first historian to link the transformation of the American book distribution network with that of the American transportation network. *Literary Publishing in America, 1790–1850* was enriched by the outstanding work in transportation history during the late forties and early fifties, notably Robert Albion's *The Rise of the Port of New York, 1815–1860*. Albion and his fellow transportation historians sense upheavals in the economic forces between the eastern and western parts of the country that were set in motion by the completion of the Erie Canal in 1817. Julius Rubin summarizes the canal's revolutionary impact: 'The Canal immediately took over from the turnpike a part of the westward trade and, when the immigrants it transported had built up the northern midwest, it carried their agricultural produce back to the east. For the first time, east and west were linked by a direct two-way trade' (p. 6). New York City's easy access to the canal, in these historians'

view, allowed it to spurt ahead of its rivals—Baltimore, Boston, and Philadelphia—as the economic and manufacturing capital of America during the pre-Civil War years.

Charvat adopts the transportation historians' model of the flow of goods and services along the canal for cultural studies; the West provided the East with raw material and the East returned to the West manufactured products. Charvat proposed that books were among the manufactured products the East shipped and that as western consumers made New York City an industrial power so also western readers established New York City as the nation's publishing center. The most adventurous corollary of this thesis about the flow of culture was Charvat's conclusion that the West transmitted taste along the Erie Canal, controlling what the East published by buying some books and spurning others. He wrote, 'Up to 1850, the publishers of the axis [Philadelphia-New York axis] were the discoverers and interpreters of American literary taste and were the channel through which the taste of the South and West moved, to influence—for better or worse—the production of literature on the coast' (p. 37). Charvat's general western reader shaped the national literary sensibility, a reader he characterized as being 'somewhere between the avant garde and the consumers of mass fiction.'

The thesis presented in *Literary Publishing in America, 1790–1850* is fascinating but far from incontrovertible. I know of no one who has directly challenged Charvat's work, but many writers about the history of nineteenth-century publishing proceed from a different set of assumptions. Eugene Exman's description in *The House of Harper* of the founding of Harper's in 1817 makes New York City, not the West, the firm's primary market, stating that on 'these thirty-three booksellers [in New York City] the Harpers pinned their hopes for survival' (p. 7). Henry William Herbert's frustration at having to compete for eastern American readers with English authors is stressed by Luke White Jr. in *Henry William Her-*

bert & the American Publishing Scene, 1831–1858. Eastern publishers were under constant pressure to reprint popular English books quickly and to get them to New York City. White gives an example of how American publishers rushed English books into print: 'On the ship's arrival in New York, the copy would be rushed from the dock to the printers and divided among the speediest compositors. Presses would run night and day until the edition was on the market. Later, publishers even made arrangements to have the type set on shipboard during the voyage' (p. 11). The lapse of a few hours would not have been so crucial if the primary market were still weeks away by barge up the Erie Canal. David Kaser in *Messrs. Carey & Lea of Philadelphia* narrates another race to reprint an English book but adds that the competition was not only in getting the book printed but also in distributing it in New York City. Kaser gives Abraham Hart's account of the event, as recalled by James Derby in *Fifty Years Among American Authors, Books, and Publishers:*

> Mr. Hart says, that on the day it was received, they distributed the sheets of this advance copy [Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Rienzi, the Last of the Tribunes*] among twelve different printers, in order to produce the book before Harpers put theirs on the market; and by nine o'clock the next morning, the sheets of the whole edition were delivered to the binders, who had the cases already made in shape for binding. That same afternoon 500 complete copies were forwarded to New York booksellers by the mail stage, the only conveyance by which they could reach New York by daylight the following morning, and this could only be accomplished by hiring all the passenger seats. Mr. Hart was the only passenger of the stage that morning, the remaining space in the coach being taken up with Bulwer's 'Rienzi.' The volume was for sale in all the New York bookstores, on the day earlier than Harpers' edition of the same work (p. 551).

Even if one accepts Charvat's conclusion in general, it is clear that some parts of the American publishing industry were intent on shaping the society of the West rather than bending

to its whims. Many religious publishers during the pre–Civil War years were charged with bringing religious civilization to the moral wilderness east of the Alleghenies. One of the most remarkable travel accounts in American history, Samuel Mills and Daniel Smith's *Report of a Missionary Tour through that Part of the United States Which Lies West of the Allegany Mountains*, is a catalogue of westerners' moral lapses from community to community in Ohio, Tennessee, and Kentucky. The authors proposed that the salvation of the West was through Bibles and other religious reading matter, pointing out that only one in five westerners had a Bible and that some were forced to wait years to acquire one. Mills and Smith's conclusions sparked the formation of organizations such as the American Tract Society and the American Bible Society. Lawrence Thompson's 'The Printing and Publishing Activities of the American Tract Society from 1825 to 1850,' Creighton Lacy's *The Word-Carrying Giant: The Growth of the American Bible Society (1816–1966)*, and Edwin B. Bronner's 'Distributing the Printed Word: The Tract Association of Friends, 1816–1966' give some idea of the extensive publishing operations of such societies. According to the 1847 *Annual Report of the American Tract Society*, more than 150 million pages of religious tracts were printed during the year. In 1836 the American Bible Society employed thirty-six traveling agents to distribute books. In one year an American Bible Society agent claimed to have distributed almost seven thousand Bibles in Kentucky alone.

The best history of western publishing and distribution, Walter Sutton's *The Western Book Trade: Cincinnati as a Nineteenth-Century Publishing and Book-Trade Center*, arrives at a conclusion strikingly different from Charvat's about the relationship between the eastern and western sections of the country. Sutton argues that the West was insulated from eastern publishers until after the extension of the railroad lines into Ohio during the 1850s. This protective isolation from eastern

book exports allowed Cincinnati publishers to establish themselves without competition as suppliers to Ohio and much of the rest of the western territory. Cincinnati's strength as a center for writers and publishers, according to Sutton, fed on a burgeoning sense of a western cultural identity that sought to distinguish itself from the East and on a system of internal improvements that welded the western states together into an economic unit. Cincinnati publishers issued the works of western writers like Daniel Drake that were then distributed by western jobbers and bookstores.

Other studies about the migration of books into newly formed western settlements present a confusing picture. Detroit's early settlers in Wallace Bonk's *Michigan's First Book Store* are interested in British authors, but it is not clear if they gathered books from New York, Philadelphia, or Cincinnati. In Howard Peckham's 'Books and Reading on the Ohio Valley Frontier,' early Ohioans augmented their reading material in new settlements by forming subscription libraries brought by wagons from Philadelphia. Peckham's emigrants tried to recreate the Pennsylvania culture they left behind by importing their former state's books. Louis Wright in *Culture on the Moving Frontier* saw Pittsburgh, at the confluence of the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers, as the staging area for pre-1815 culture in the Ohio Valley. Louis Wright's Ohioans attempted to establish 'a civilized way of life in the British tradition' by buying books from the Pittsburgh bookseller Zadok Cramer. Edward Stevens's methodologically inventive 'Relationships of Social Library Membership, Wealth, and Literary Culture in Early Ohio' garners evidence about the rapid diffusion of literary culture for middle and upper classes on the frontier through subscription libraries, but his study does not raise the question of book migration.

The disagreement about the direction and source of the flow of books, ideas, and culture in the early nineteenth century that is found in the works of Charvat, Sutton, Bonk, Peckham,

Louis Wright, and Stevens originates in part in the lack of scholarly attention given to specific book distribution systems. In spite of the many merits of the histories of nineteenth-century publishing houses, among them Ellen Ballou's *The Building of the House: Houghton Mifflin's Formative Years*, Eugene Exman's *The House of Harper* and *The Brothers Harper*, Warren S. Tryon's *Parnassus Corner: A Life of James T. Field, Publisher to the Victorians*, and David Kaser's *Messrs. Carey & Lea of Philadelphia*, only Walter Sutton's *The Western Book Trade* devotes a significant amount of space to distribution. The resulting difficulty in assigning the proper roles within the trade to retail bookstores, trade auctions, subscription publishers, the use of the mails, and new forms of transportation is inevitable.

The nineteenth-century trade auction is representative of the deficiency in knowledge about much of the system of book distribution in the United States. Held semiannually in Boston, Philadelphia, New York, and other cities, and often lasting for three or four days, the trade sale was a popular method of selling new and older books between 1825 and 1860. Alone among historians of East Coast publishing, John Tebbel includes this method of distribution in his study; but, because he took all of his evidence from the trade journals of publisher associations that were hostile to the practice, Tebbel thinks the trade sale undermined a stable price structure and hindered an effective distribution system. In his view, the trade sale flooded the market with unwanted books that discouraged publishers from issuing more. Looking at western bookselling, Sutton's *The Western Book Trade* takes a more positive view of early nineteenth-century commercial auctions. Sutton thinks that they served 'regional needs by providing Cincinnati publishers and booksellers with a means of distributing books through the Ohio and Mississippi Valley,' although there were abusive practices as time went on. Sutton's and Tebbel's brief discussions of this form of distribution leave many unanswered ques-

tions. Were booksellers or jobbers the major buyers at these auctions? What percentage of books in auctions was newly published material? Were schoolbooks or other types of books thought better candidates for these sales, or was the entire spectrum of published works auctioned?

Two dissenting voices are Fred Mitchell Jones's *Middlemen in the Domestic Trade of the United States, 1800–1860* and Warren S. Tryon's 'Book Distribution in Mid-Nineteenth Century America.' Jones's monograph is not restricted to books but addresses the distribution system for all goods in the American economy. Unlike Tebbel and Sutton, Jones does not find the trade sale an aberration but rather a normal and preferred form of dispersing goods for the time, offering the advantage of quick sales of large numbers of products to established customers, which in turn helped regulate credit between producers and retailers. Jones's view is that the trade auction moved the country's economic system further away from local markets dominated by craftsmen and towards a more efficient system for wider sections of the country. A study arriving at a conclusion similar to Jones's is Ira Cohen's 'The Auction System in The Port of New York, 1817–1837.' Using the records of the Boston publishing firm of Ticknor and Fields in 'Book Distribution in Mid-Nineteenth Century America,' Tryon considers the trade sale to have been an insignificant factor in mid-nineteenth-century book distribution but insists that the retail bookstore remained the most important part of the system. Tryon states that 'while many elements of the industrial revolution made up the needs and provided the means for a changing technique in book distribution, the process was channeled through the retail booksellers, which the rising urban movement in American life made effective' (p. 220). Highlighting the local New England market of Ticknor and Fields, Tryon points out that, in 1854, nine hundred of the three thousand copies of the first edition of Mrs. Eliza Otis's *The Barclays of Boston* were sold to Boston booksellers, a finding

that confirms part of Charvat's thesis in *Literary Publishing in America, 1790–1850*. Giving a different interpretation of the impact of Boston's reliance on a Massachusetts market, Charvat believes that Boston fell behind New York City as a publishing center because of its dependence on local retail sales, in contrast to New York City's reliance on wholesale purchases. Tryon informs us that the Boston publishers usually shipped books to Cincinnati by first sending them to Philadelphia, where they were then shipped by canal or railroad to Pittsburgh before finally arriving in Cincinnati by steamboat. It was indeed a circuitous route to the interior.

Ticknor and Fields's direct relationship with retailers led the firm to manipulate pricing and aggressively to promote its books for increased distribution. William Charvat's 'James T. Fields and the Beginnings of Book Promotion, 1840–1855' explores the company's practice of inducing booksellers to buy books by offering copies on commission, establishing a policy to buy back unsold books, planning activities such as window displays, and distributing advertising circulars. Sometimes sending as much as ten percent of a book's first printing to newspapers and magazines, James T. Fields resorted to various strategies to influence editors to review his firm's books favorably. For Charvat, nineteenth-century book reviewing was venal and uninformed by any sense of propriety. He explained that 'reviews were, for the most part, short notices, laudatory if the publisher advertised or had influence, libelous if someone on the staff, or some favored outsider, disliked the author or publisher' (p. 79). Despite the fact that such practices were not restricted to Ticknor and Fields and that many publishers expected authors to promote their own books, Charvat's study is the only published one I have encountered for publishers' stakes in nineteenth-century book reviewing. Hazel Pfennig gathers some information about reviews for the works of major authors in her unpublished 'Periodical Literary Criticism (1800–65),' and Nina Baym

has produced *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers,* which finds reviewers encouraging fiction.

Trade auctions are evidence that some publishers desired to shift the responsibility for distribution from their shoulders to those of the independent jobbers and retailers. Other publishers built their businesses on effective methods of mass distribution through subscription canvassing and mailing inexpensive paperbacks directly to the customers. Boston's Ticknor and Fields was committed to attracting writers highly regarded by the cultural establishments; but publishers of subscription books and cheap paperbacks found their greatest resource not in their authors' reputations but rather in their ability to reach readers quickly and inexpensively.

Because of the widespread reputation of Albert Johannsen's *The House of Beadle and Adams,* the misconception exists that Beadle and Adams's dime novels, the first of which appeared in 1860, were the first nineteenth-century paperbacks. However, Tebbel's *A History of Book Publishing in the United States* contains a short history of paperback publishing during the 1830s and 1840s (vol. 1, pp. 240–51). The growth of this kind of publishing was rooted in the popular education movement, according to Tebbel, who marks its beginning in 1829 with the establishment of the Boston Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge. The society's campaign to issue inexpensive educational books started in 1831 with the Library of Entertaining Knowledge. Also begun in 1831, Henry Carey's Library of Choice Literature was a venture similar to the Library of Entertaining Knowledge and came out weekly for ten cents in paperback. By 1839, paperback publishers were competing with traditional publishers through pirated reprints—in weekly newspaper formats—of the works of contemporary celebrated British authors such as Charles Dickens. These mammoth weeklies, as they were called, became so popular that the established publishers were forced to lobby the government to prohibit paperback books from being distributed through the mails.

Once this prohibition was in place, the paperbacks' distribution edge was eroded, and they faded in importance. Although Tebbel has provided a useful outline of the major events, the growth of the paperback publishing industry deserves more attention than it has received. The use of the mails to deliver books may have played a far larger role in history than has been realized. Wayne E. Fuller's *The American Mail* quotes the postmaster general's complaint, as early as 1814, that 'the mails were . . . overcrowded with novels and the lighter kind of books for amusement' (p. 119). If such a situation existed in 1814, then a new look at early nineteenth-century publishing and literary history is necessary. Charvat's Ohio River barges, Sutton's western auctions, and Tryon's New England bookstores may have supplied only a portion of the country's books. The flow of publications may be more properly traced along the post roads rather than along river and canal routes.

Researchers should be cautious about uncritically accepting the whole of Charvat's thesis in *Literary Publishing in America, 1790–1850,* as fascinating as it may be. The Erie Canal was only one among many novel methods of reaching out for markets during this time and was by no means the defining force Chavrat makes it out to be. The beginnings of deep cracks in the book distribution system begin to show during the pre–Civil War decades, cracks that would later splinter the industry. Publishers started to transform the book trade from an eighteenth-century version based on personal relations between bookseller-printers and readers to one established on more impersonal arrangements that groped towards defining larger groups spread out over wider geographical areas. Increasingly, higher investments in plants and equipment forced publishers towards regional distribution, although the local basis for distribution continued to exist in very rural areas, as Milton Hamilton points out. Before 1800, a printer looked toward his own city or town to sell books, and, if his imagination envisioned other audiences, special arrangements, such as

the subscription form, were required. With the exception of country printers and small publishers in the South who retained their local orientation, this method of dissemination lost its position of importance during the nineteenth century, since publishers needed books that would sell well regionally or in several major markets. As the center of capital formation and manufacturing, with a plentiful supply of labor, blessed by a variety of transportation networks intersecting within its limits, and possessing widely read newspapers that could advertise on a primitively organized national level, New York quickly became the dominant publishing and distribution center for the country. That Boston could remain even remotely competitive was due in large part to the ability of its publishers to deal directly with the many retail outlets in the uniform culture of small towns throughout New England. Boston was to New England what New York was to the nation. Although books did make their way to the interior, their scarcity made them particularly prized, as booksellers' advertisements show. However, for all parts of the country, the magic formula matching books with readers, and both with a method of distribution and pricing, was seldom found before 1850, with the exception of reprints of popular British writers whose reputations created instant markets simultaneously in the largest American cities.

The sale of books by subscription canvassers in rural areas after the Civil War is a form of direct distribution that is outlined in general terms in Marjorie Stafford's 'Subscription Book Publishing in the United States, 1865–1930' and Beverly David's 'Selling the Subscription Book.' By the careful examination of annotations and sales information found in a salesman's sample book, Michael Hackenberg's 'Hawking Subscription Books in 1870: A Salesman's Prospectus from Western Pennsylvania' provides a useful glimpse into the canvassing activities of one agent in Pennsylvania. Walter Sutton's chapter 'Henry Howe: Twenty Thousand Agents Wanted!' in

The Western Book Trade shows Howe's frequent use of traveling agents in Cincinnati during the 1850s. Other publishers deserve the same attention Sutton has given Howe. There is no account of the Hartford subscription publishers for the pre–Civil War period, in spite of the fact that by 1868 they produced an average of 200,000 volumes per year. Although traditional trade publishers characteristically printed only about 2,500 copies of a book and kept a large number of titles in print, subscription book publishers concentrated on fewer titles but issued them in numbers far exceeding those published by the traditional trade. Both Albert Deane Richardson's *Beyond the Mississippi* and Joel Tyler Headley's *The Great Rebellion* sold approximately 150,000 copies by subscription. We have some information about the large numbers involved in soliciting book subscriptions, but this form of publishing and distributing books needs a comprehensive treatment presented in terms of American literary taste and intellectual history. The copies of salesmen's dummies that I have seen suggest that many subscription books were devotional works, travel accounts, self-improvement manuals, general historical works about the Civil War, or biographies of presidential campaigners.

What can be learned about the writers of subscription books? Neither Richardson nor Headley can be found in *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*, and Richardson rates only one sentence in *Literary History of the United States*, in spite of the impressive sales figures for his books. The philosophy of hard work, perseverance, and frugality, exemplified in this period by Horatio Alger's characters, finds additional champions among the most successful book canvassers of the time. In fact, *The Young Book Agent; or Frank Hardy's Road to Success* appeared under Alger's name in 1905. Mixing the gospel of success with a secular spirituality, egalitarianism, and their own company's best interests, managers of subscription book companies advertised that virtually anyone, no matter what his education, experience, or station in life, could

achieve financial security through attention to the duties of a book agency. In a booklet sent out to his new agents, J. B. Smiley of Chicago wrote in *Instructions to Canvassers*: 'The basis of all success is *work*—steady, persistent work. The success is generally just in proportion to the amount of labor and thought given to the business. It is worse than folly to expect any success *without* work. With work, success can be attained. Anyone who resolves to canvass, as they would follow any other business, six or eight hours a day for one straight week, will succeed nineteen times out of twenty, if they can follow directions.'

Frank Compton's *Subscription Books* describes book agents as Civil War veterans, but this is not an encompassing description. Many of the memoirs of book agents were by women, such as the anonymously written *Facts, by a Woman, Annie Nelles; or, the Life of a Book Agent*, Mendell and Hosmer's *Notes of Travel and Life*, and Mrs. J. W. Likins's *Six Years Experience as a Book Agent*. These works are a particularly fascinating genre of nineteenth-century literature. Most books aimed at female audiences were light novels or fashionable romances in domestic settings. In the face of this frothy fare, the accounts of the female agents stand out in their depiction of earnest, hard-working women who acknowledge that their way of life causes them to be spurned by polite female society, understand that they do not have the access to society's modes of self-improvement enjoyed by men, but nevertheless press resolutely onward to take a defiant pride in their ultimate success. Their stories often begin with some devastating tragedy that deprives the author of house and home, forcing her to depend only upon her own exertions for support and consequently isolating her from the rest of society.

In *Annie Nelles; or, the Life of a Book Agent*, Nelles's mother, father, and siblings die, and the family plantation in Georgia is seized by a wicked stepfather. In Mrs. J. W. Likins's *Six Years Experience as a Book Agent*, Mrs. Likins opens her

account with the forced sale of the family home. These traumatic events, which in each case symbolize the women's break with their traditional role in the community, cast them at the threshold of despair. At this crucial moment, an encounter with an advertisement recruiting agent proves to be the fortunate vehicle that leads them out of the dire straits in which they find themselves. Mrs. Likins remembers landing in San Francisco on August 11, 1868, as follows: 'Now begins the one great struggle of my life. I scarcely know where to turn or what to do. As I look around the room, I see nothing but want and poverty on every hand. Bidding my dear ones keep up courage . . . , I started for the Post-office. Not being able to pay car hire, I went on foot. On my way I passed the book-store of H. H. Bancroft, then on the corner of Montgomery and Merchant street. In the window I noticed a card with the words "Agents Wanted" on it' (p. 52).

The anonymous author of *Facts, by a Woman* offers a strikingly similar scenario:

> Debating the question of ways and means, I hopelessly sat till my blood became chilled. Coldly shivering, I arose at last to wrap me away into deeper covering of my blanketed bed. I clad myself in my sleeping-gown and was woefully engaged in extinguishing the gas which gave a delicate light, through the dignified fixture of a tallow candle, and where, by its persistent obstinacy and repeated refusal to cease its bluish and sickening flame of existence, through a coinciding spirit with my own. I was prompted instinctively to pick up a city newspaper . . . , [and] I was instantly thrown into complete respiration and retroaction. It was a simple announcement, an advertisement only, of A. Roman & Co., who wanted agents to canvass 'Tom Sawyer, Mark Twain's new book' (pp. 34–35).

Although it is difficult not to suppress a smile at the tone of these passages, which almost seem to recall a divine visitation, it is important not to let their symbolic importance elude us. Unlike the typical Alger story in which a stroke of luck elevates a sincere, ambitious boy to a world of better things, or the

similar tale aimed at girls in which a young lady in impoverished circumstances marries the shopowner's son, the female book agents arrive at their good fortune solely by their own ability and industry. These autobiographies serve as effective counters to the fantasy world of the American 'strive-and-succeed' novel, and they remind their readers in vivid terms that achievement can be a bruising experience.

The market for subscription books is also not yet fully defined. Recounting his legal battles with the subscription house of Pollard and Moss in *Memoirs of a Publisher, 1865–1915*, George Haven Putnam gives his opinion about the composition of the market for subscription books. After the copyright for many of Washington Irving's works held by Putnam's firm expired, Pollard and Moss brought out an abridged version of Irving's writing. Putnam was not successful in legally preventing the sale of the Pollard and Moss edition and in his memoir argues that the distribution of the abridged edition substantially hurt the sales of his firm's authorized publication. Putnam assumed that the markets for his books and the Pollard and Moss subscription books were the same. However, a view different from and more credible than Putnam's is available in Hamlin Hill's *Mark Twain's Letters to His Publisher, 1867–1894*. Clemens thought the markets did not overlap. Hill quotes Clemens about his decision to publish travel books with subscription houses rather than with traditional publishing firms. In Clemens's view, 'Harper publishes very high-class books and they go to people who are accustomed to read. That class are surfeited with travel-books. But there is a vast class that isn't—the factory hands and the farmers. *They* never go to a bookstore; they have to be hunted down by the canvasser. When a subscription book of mine sells 60,000, I always think I know whither 50,000 of them went. They went to people who don't visit bookstores' (p. 7).

Hamlin Hill's *Mark Twain and Elisha Bliss* and *Mark Twain's Letters to His Publishers*, Arthur Vogelbeck's 'The

Literary Reputation of Mark Twain in America, 1869–1885,' Samuel Webster's *Mark Twain, Business Man*, and Leon Dickinson's 'Marketing a Best Seller: Mark Twain's "Innocents Abroad"' establish Samuel Clemens's reputation as the best-known subscription book writer. Among Clemens's books sold by subscription agents were *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *Following the Equator* (1897), *The Gilded Age* (1874), *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), *Roughing It* (1872), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), *The American Claimant* (1892), and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). Clemens was an anomaly because most novelists who wanted critics and reviewers to take their work seriously avoided subscription houses, thinking they were held in low repute and would taint their books' reception. Bryant Morey French in *Mark Twain and the Gilded Age* quotes a Boston *Literary World* editor's remark in 1874 that 'subscription books are in bad odor and cannot possibly circulate among the best classes of readers, owing to the general and not unfounded prejudice against them as a class' (pp. 10–11).

The fascinating thesis of Arthur Vogelbeck's 'The Literary Reputation of Mark Twain in America, 1869–1875' is that the sale of Clemens's books by subscription adversely affected his literary reputation among his contemporaries. Since subscription publishing houses did not usually send advance copies of books to newspapers and magazines for review, many of Clemens's books got little attention from the press. Vogelbeck also proposes that some critics dismissed Clemens's novels because of prejudice against books sold by subscription. Citing the case of *The Stolen White Elephant*, Vogelbeck argues that this comparatively minor work received more reviews than the popular and critically acclaimed *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* only because *The Stolen White Elephant* was published by the established firm of J. R. Osgood, whereas *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was sold by subscription. A *Chicago Tribune* critic remarked about the publication of *The Stolen White Ele-*

phant that 'this time he has done as other authors do, and placed his work in the hands of a respectable publisher.' Not only Clemens's reputation but also his writing was altered by the decision to distribute his books by subscription. Hamlin Hill's 'The People's Author,' in *Mark Twain and Elisha Bliss*, shows how Clemens employed anecdotes to lengthen his books so that they would be well received by typical subscription book purchasers.

Those interested in the stratification and the dispersal of ideas and culture in the last half of the nineteenth-century may discover that study of the forms of book distribution methods are the best evidence of the readership and circulation of books. Because books were scarce during the eighteenth century and their ownership better documented, there are more points of access available and a higher degree of precision possible for this early period than for the nineteenth century. David Lundberg and Henry May's 'The Enlightened Reader in America' and Mel Gorman's 'Gassendi in America' are two studies on the eighteenth-century based on evidence that historians who deal with the mountains of literature and people in the nineteenth century must envy. The Lundberg and May work analyzes 261 personal collections, library catalogues, and booksellers' list in order to count the appearances of British and European writers associated with the Enlightenment. Lundberg and May acknowledge that in the strictest statistical sense their analysis is flawed, because it gives equal weight to a title remaining unsold on a bookseller's shelf and one in a circulating library that was read by a score of people. Nevertheless, the fact that Charles Rollin's and Hugh Blair's books occur far more frequently than those of Montesquieu and Joseph Priestley should give American intellectual historians of the period some pause. Mel Gorman's 'Gassendi in America' examines extant copies of Pierre Gassendi's books on astronomy for ownership marks, the appearance of titles in library catalogues, and adaptations of his theories in textbooks and

almanacs as guides to this seventeenth-century scientist's reputation in America.

The enormous increases in readers and publishers in the nineteenth century makes the use of Gorman's and May and Lundberg's research strategies unlikely if not impossible. Books were too common to be listed by title in wills after 1800, and personal and institutional library catalogues are not useful measures for many of the cheap books published. A book's method of distribution may be the only evidence for a guess about its readership and the approximate number of copies printed. It is seldom possible to know exactly who read many books; but further research about distribution practice will allow intelligent speculation about the characteristics of typical readers and the role of books in sociointellectual history.

If the use of the mails to deliver paperbacks, subscription publications, and materials in trade auctions has not yet received its due from historians of the book, the formation of an orderly wholesale network has gone virtually unnoticed. 'The Machinery of Wholesale Distribution,' in Donald Sheehan's *This Was Publishing*, is a rare attempt to understand the role of independent jobbers and commercial travelers in nineteenth-century book distribution. Sheehan notes that wholesale independent jobbers like the American News Company distributed some books, among them *Mark Twain's Sketches*, but the companies devoted more time to magazine distribution. The American News Company's role during the nineteenth century is not certain, but it is a powerful force in the twentieth century. The firm's *Serving the Reading Public* claims that its book department was responsible for the sale of twenty to thirty-five percent of most popular books, including more than one million copies of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*.

Unlike subscription agents, who operated on a retail level, commercial travelers sold books wholesale to retail outlets. They helped distribute books by ensuring smooth relations between publishers and bookstores concerning ordering in-

structions, transportation, prices, and credit. By hiring commercial travelers, the traditional trade publishers became more aggressive about book distribution and ceased shifting the burden to others. As early as 1869 there existed a Society of Commercial Travellers with the purpose of advancing the common interest of commercial travelers from several New York City publishing houses. In *The System of Commercial Travelling in Europe and the United States*, members of this society argue that they are not subscription canvassers and should be exempt from the many state and municipal laws prohibiting drummers or peddlers. More needs to be known about these commercial travelers, how they operated, the books they sold, the markets they served, and the influence they exerted on the editors of the firms that employed them. Although the Society of Commercial Travellers was short-lived, a similar organization, the Brotherhood of Commercial Travellers, was organized in 1884. The status of commercial travelers quickly increased in publishing companies during the nineteenth century and by the early twentieth century they were among the most powerful figures in the industry.

A closer look at the wholesale network gives the clue to the direction taken by the machinery of distribution during the last half of the nineteenth century. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, geography had always been the publishers' enemy in distributing their books. Publishers and printers continually strived to conquer the problem of distance, fretting about getting books from Boston to small New England towns, or from Philadelphia to New York, or from New York to Ohio. Scholarship on the period after the mid-nineteenth century has always followed Charvat in assuming that geography remained the central worry of publishers and distributors. However, to proceed along these lines is to miss the most important trend in the distribution network, a development that in the end would shape the world of twentieth-century publishing. As the nineteenth century moved on, large-

scale publishers shifted their attention from overcoming geography to identifying common consumer groups in diverse areas. These consumer groups, which Daniel Boorstin calls 'statistical communities' in *The Americans: The Democratic Experience*, had similar interests to which publishers could tailor their products. Here was the answer to the search for the widest possible distribution of books: tightly-bunched markets replicated in city after city, with many local retail distribution points that were easily accessible by the expanding mechanized transportation network being built after the Civil War. In a sense, newspaper publishers had discovered this strategy long before book publishers happened upon it. Even early in the nineteenth century, newspapers associated with political parties or religious or reform movements circulated well in multiple cities or even regional areas because they spoke to captive, well-defined audiences.

One of the first classes of readers to be identified as a consumer market for books were women, whose role as portents of the publishing revolution has not been fully appreciated. Fred Lewis Pattee in *The Feminine Fifties* was a pioneer in recognizing the cultural phenomena of women writers and readers at midcentury. For many years Pattee's was the last word on this subject, but the recent rise in interest in women's studies has produced questions about Pattee's conclusions without diminishing the importance of his observation that women readers were a potent audience for a large segment of the publishing industry. Mary Kelley's *Private Women, Public Stage* is an adept account of Hawthorne's 'scribbling women' that neatly ties the influence of the publishers with the careers of the writers. Leaving aside the current debate about whether these women writers were revolting against the imposed constraints on their lives, or whether they were simply blindly following a blatantly sentimental stereotype, the fact remains that as a group they contributed a formulaic literature that deliberately aimed at a specific national strata of the popula-

tion. Before this time, even New York publishers had not thought routinely on a national scale. In 'The Domestic Novel as a Commercial Commodity: Making a Best Seller in the 1850s,' Susan Geary highlights the use of advertising schemes by publishers to produce large sales. Geary astutely observes that the publishing industry adjusted its marketing, advertising, and distribution budgets to fit best sellers, leaving other books to fend for themselves. For example, publishers offered bigger discounts to retailers if they purchased in large quantities. Since such a plan increased booksellers' profits for books that were ordered in bulk, these few titles drew a disproportionate amount of attention. The result was, according to Geary, 'an ever narrowing channel because of the self-limiting mechanism of the best seller syndrome, first because the few books achieved popularity at the expense of the many, then because those few books set the pattern for others' (p. 392).

The most important and vigorous elements in the post–Civil War period, story papers and dime novels, followed the lead of the publishers of feminine fiction of the 1850s. Story papers were novels, in most cases romantic fiction, that were printed in newspaper format and achieved a circulation in many instances of more than 100,000, dwarfing most other forms of book publishing. Occasionally, works long out of print, such as *Charlotte Hall* or *Emma*, would be issued as a story paper and would compile sale statistics far in excess of their original hardbound editions. It was as if the format and the access to the distribution mechanisms alone were able to transform any unknown commodity to a best seller. Dime novels, small cheaply printed paperbacks that contained sensational western stories, were equally successful in selling large numbers of copies.

Raymond Shove's *Cheap Book Production in the United States, 1870 to 1891* and Albert Johannsen's excellent *The House of Beadle and Adams* hint at the energy of the paperback industry after the Civil War but cannot cover the vast amount of literature and the dispersed and diverse audiences. Johannsen's book

has enhanced the reputation of paperbacks related to the American West, but other types of books were printed. Who were the readers of the reprinted classics in the Munro Library or the Seaside Library, to mention only two examples? J. S. Ogilvie, John Lovell, and George Munro, the titans of the paperback trade, do not yet have adequate biographies. Little about the distribution of paperbacks is known. Johannsen writes that dime novels were read by 'bankers, and bootblacks, clergymen and clerks, lawyers and lawbreakers, workmen and tramps, work girls and girls of leisure, soldiers and sailors, President Lincoln and President Wilson, Soapy Sam and Slippery Frank, men and boys, drummers and other train travelers, Henry Ward Beecher, Chief Justice Fuller, and a host of others' (vol. 1, p. 9). To claim that these books were read by everyone leaves unanswered the question of their primary audience and method of distribution.

Despite the difference between their typical subjects, the story papers and the dime novels were united in their strategy for capturing large audiences. In *Villains Galore*, Mary Noel reveals the basic strategy employed for producing popular fiction. Noel writes, 'Story-paper world, like the real world of the nineteenth century America, was governed by conventions. . . . Again and again the helpless authors of story-paper plots used the accepted, time-worn devices to accomplish their devious ends. The forged letter, the birthmark, the drug that would give the semblance of death, the accidental meeting, the two unrelated characters who looked exactly alike, all these aids were not only indispensable, they were desirable in themselves. A story without them was hardly acceptable' (p. 144). Readers of dime novels also demanded consistency of narrative structure and familiarity of characterization. The hero of the dime novel literature seems to transcend the genre by sheer force of repetition to enter an almost mythic plateau that expresses an important strain of the American spirit. In *The Dime Novel Western*, Daryl Jones finds that the plot requirements of

the dime novel were different from popular romances but that the necessity of following unstated rules and formulas was just as essential for success.

Although much remains to be learned about the distribution of these two forms of literature, there are some indications that they took advantage of the existing newspaper outlets that used national periodical distribution services such as the American News Service or Dexter & Brother. The more books became like newspapers or magazines, the wider was their distribution and the greater the profits they chalked up for their publishers. Once publishers discovered the easy access to this large audience, the more they relied on it, encouraging works that would satisfy its readers. Formula plots once established were endlessly repeated in order to fulfill the expectations of the readers who had previously purchased dime novels. The desire to encourage innovative literature was subordinated to the need to produce books with which the mass market audience felt comfortable. Advertising was diverted to trying to establish a brand-name loyalty to certain series and authors. Publishers endeavored to keep alive some authors' names such as those of Bertha Clay, Nick Carter, and Ned Buntline long after the stories offered under them were written in-house by many hands. Packaging became more and more important as publishers used dramatic and colorful graphics in their advertisements and on the covers of their books to spark customers' interest. Series were invented that would enable buyers to quickly identify the type of story that they might find. Examples are Beadle's Dime Baseball Players, DeWitt's Stories of the Sea, Factory Life Library, Munro's New York Boys' Library, Ogilvie's Railroad Edition, Soldiers' and Sailors' Dime Library, Young Athletes' Weekly, and the Vatican Library. All efforts were geared to allow a reader to make an instantaneous decision to buy on the basis of a quick glance at a book's cover rather than on the basis of a review, knowledge of the quality of a book's contents, or on the literary reputation of an author.

In a work-in-progress, Jean Masteller of Whitman College analyzes one category of story paper and dime novel fiction, the working-girl story. At the end of the nineteenth century, young women flocked to cities to find jobs, and publishers soon identified them as a potential new market. Masteller finds that there was a separate band of writers who devised novels with a new pattern of conventions in plot and characterization for this growing audience. These writers, who sometimes worked for several companies but seldom varied their story lines, produced books that at once appealed to these women's romantic dreams of escape from the drudgery of their lives and also their anger at the conditions in which they found themselves. The result was a long series of books like Laura Jean Libbey's *Leonie Locke; or, The Romance of a Beautiful New York Working Girl*, Francis Smith's *Bertha, the Sewing Machine Girl*, and *Maggie, the Factory Girl*. Masteller's work helps document how story paper and dime novel publishers created a new formula to fit an emerging class of urban readers.

In *Books: the Culture and Commerce of Publishing*, Coser, Kadushin, and Powell show convincing evidence that today's American publishing scene is increasingly dominated by chains of large, discount bookstores, impersonal multinational corporations, and nonliterary public relations agents. As this study points out, the result of this domination is a generic literature of books shaped by the tyranny of easy distribution channels. In a remarkable chapter, 'Books Without Authors,' they describe publishing factories that first try to identify a large, predictable, and easily accessible audience and then commission a book from a sometimes anonymous writer for these readers. Calling the product of these writing factories 'non-books,' they write, 'Non-books are to real books what frozen TV dinners are to home-cooked meals. They are not the creations of individual authors; they are much more like products manufactured on an assembly line. Non-books have assumed such an importance in the publishing industry that to ignore them would seriously

distort a picture of its workings' (p. 260). One need look no further than the story papers and dime novels for the roots of this contemporary publishing phenomena as outlined by Coser, Kadushin, and Powell. During the last half of the nineteenth century, the publishing industry began to turn in a new direction through the driving momentum of George and Norman Munro, Irwin and Erastus Beadle, and Robert Bonner. Ironically, publishers' accomplishments in establishing a distribution system increasingly held them captives of their own successes. In order to maintain profit margins, dime novel and story paper publishers sought or commissioned books that they knew would be well received by the mass market reader that they so efficiently reached. In many ways, distribution began to shape the types of books being produced in a large segment of the publishing world.

Individuals such as Henry Holt, William Appleton, James Harper, Charles Scribner, and George Putnam stood apart from this trend and self-consciously styled themselves as gatekeepers of the country's culture. They scorned the commercialism in their business and mourned the death of the gentlemanly agreements on which many of their publishing decisions had been based. They saw the established retail bookstore as their primary outlet and prided themselves on producing quality books. They lamented other publishers' efforts to take over bookstores across the country in order to create a virtual vertical monopoly in the book trade. But it was clear even to them that their efforts to turn the tide of mass market publishing were futile, and they settled into a resigned coexistence with many of their colleagues. The memoirs they produced at the end of their lives are full of remorse and disparaging remarks about the state of the trade. In *Sixty Years as a Publisher*, Henry Holt effectively expresses this sentiment for the group: 'I see little in the present [1910] conditions of the trade that gives me much satisfaction or hope—little but exaggerated competition in royalties, advances, discounts, drumming and adver-

tising, all of which has brought the trade to a point where it takes many times as much effort and many times as much capital to make a dollar, as it did when I began business. . . . But, take it all in all, my main hope for the future is that things must move—and as they cannot get very much lower than they are at present, possibly there may be a return, if even a forced one, toward the old spirit of co-operation, self-restraint, and self-respect' (p. 212).

In summary, the book industry splintered at the end of the nineteenth century with many of the fragments regrouping according to modes of distribution. Publishing houses based their choice of books and their method of operations on their adopted form of distribution and, consequently, the type of reader to which each wanted to appeal.

The literature of the history of book distribution in America has been astonishingly ahistorical in character. Many researchers have mined narrow, albeit rich, veins seemingly without a sense that they followed any tradition of scholarship or without rising to a level of generalization that would enable them to distinguish the fundamental difference between their conclusions and those expressed by others in the field. The purposes of this essay are several: to assemble the scattered secondary sources about book distribution in America; to begin to sharpen some of the differences in the literature; to give a general coherent outline of the main trends of book distribution that later writers can expand, challenge, or amend; to highlight a few of the areas needing further investigation as they have occurred to me; and to clarify several of the themes available to prospective researchers. A short catalogue of themes includes: speed of cultural transmission; relationship of types of literature, classes of readers, and forms of distribution; the importance of crucial individuals such as the London factors in the eighteenth century; the effects of general economic conditions; the impact of government legislation and the activities of organizations like the American Bible Society;

the effects of general economic conditions on the distribution of specific forms of books; how distribution affects authors' and books' reputations or even genres of literature; portals or spheres of geographical influence; the relationship between printing technologies and distribution networks; and the influence of the landscape and transportation systems on distribution. In this essay, each theme is associated with a specific period of American history, but all are not restricted to this chronology. There are examples of seamless webs of readers for nineteenth-century studies as well as those that I have discussed for the seventeenth century. I have used Samuel Clemens's publishing practices as one instance of how distribution can affect a book's content and an author's literary standing; others could have been chosen. Books that are circulated clandestinely may come to symbolize change in a community. Ronald Story's 'Class and Culture in Boston: The Athenaeum, 1807–1860' and Agnes Cleaveland's *No Life for a Lady*, a narrative of a woman's experience on the late nineteenth-century frontier, both illustrate how the acquisition of books represents tradition, authority, or power in radically different circumstances.

Some topics are omitted in this discussion because so little has been accomplished relating to them. Among these are the distribution of books in the Confederate States and in the far West. A recent work on colportage in the South is Gorrell Prim's 'Born Again in the Trenches: Revivalism in the Confederate Army.' Frank Freidel's 'The Loyal Publication Society: A Pro-Union Propaganda Agency' is a rare effort to cast some light on the circulation of pamphlets during the Civil War. Freidel adds some new information about this subject in the introduction to his *Union Pamphlets of the Civil War, 1861–1865*. There exists no detailed discussion of the relationship between price and distribution for American books. I have not strayed far into the thickets of the controversy of whether the act of reading and the book itself are associated only with an

elite class, although those interested can discover a survey of this literature in Jennifer Tebbe's 'Print and American Culture' and David Hall's 'The World of Print and Collective Mentality in Seventeenth-Century New England,' in John Higham and Paul Conkin's *New Directions in American Intellectual History*. So much remains to explore in all areas that it is perhaps sanguine to expect a balanced and complete history of book distribution before 1876 in the foreseeable future. However, the lack of such an encapsulation is of little consequence, as long as we have the stimulus of informed differences of opinion as expressed by imaginative writers like Sutton and Charvat who investigate book distribution with a sensitivity to the economics of the trade but with full attention to the book's place in all levels of American intellectual society.

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