**Introduction**

In September 1794, Matthew Carey, an Irish printer and bookseller who had immigrated to Philadelphia in the 1780s, reported on the state of the American economy to a relative in Ireland. "The human imagination can hardly reach to an idea of the prosperity and importance to which this country is rapidly verging," he wrote. Credit was becoming easier to obtain, according to Carey, and state and federal governments alike sought ways to facilitate growth by building roads and canals. Eager for the new nation to fulfill its republican promise, Carey saw opportunity in every quarter. Agriculture would flourish and manufacturing would develop out of American ingenuity and the desire for progress. Carey marveled at the young nation's unique position to set a republican example to a world well-acquainted with tyranny.

Carey's political writings of the 1790s and his letters to friends and family in Ireland are filled with enthusiasm. In the former, he prescribed a balance of agrarian and manufacturing pursuits, all under the umbrella of republican government. In the latter, he described his efforts to build a flourishing printing and bookselling business in his adopted country. This involved significant energy and risk. Carey hoped to provide the new nation with books. First, he needed to find titles that would meet with ready sale and to print them cheaply enough so they could compete with widely available imported books. He needed to develop a busy retail establishment from which to sell his books, and he would also have to strive to reach markets that extended beyond local boundaries and regions. A wide assortment of steady-selling books was key to success in early national publishing and bookselling, and Carey knew that cooperation with others in the trade could provide him with the assortment he needed. Carey was not the only aspiring publisher to face these formidable tasks. According to city directories and an analysis of surviving imprints, in 1790 Philadelphia was home to twenty-six printers who, like Carey, published books and pamphlets with their names appearing in the imprints. Five years later, the number of printers matching this description had risen to thirty-four. At decade's end, there were thirty-nine, and by 1800, fifty-one can be identified (see Appendix).
The rapid growth in the printing trade had major implications for the development of publishing in early national Philadelphia because many printers of the 1790s acted as publishers when they took on the risk of producing works for their own sake. In the early years of the republic, the word "publisher" was hardly ever used in connection with publishing books; it was more commonly employed to describe those who published newspapers, commercial sheets, and city directories, suggesting that sustained, or at least ongoing, periodic publishing activity was required for the description of "publisher" to apply. The term "bookseller" was generally used to describe someone who published and sold books. It became increasingly common, however, for those who published books to refer to themselves as publishers in the later years of the new republic, when publishing houses came into being. For the sake of clarity—and with a nod to modern usage—I use "bookseller" when referring to the London publishers and the eighteenth-century Americans who made publishing just one of their many activities; I use "publisher" to refer to those who later made publishing their primary activity, even if they had not yet fixed on the term.

Printing and publishing comprised different economic activities requiring different levels of capital and time investment. For the majority of printing jobs—work printed for customers—the level of financial investment for the printer was so low that in many cases he did not even have to buy the paper, the most expensive component of a printing job. If he did supply the paper, he charged his customer for it; otherwise, the customer was expected to procure it. Publishers, on the other hand, combined judgment, capital, and marketing strategies with the craft of printing in an attempt to create and sell printed matter. Publishers had their hands in the creation, the financing, manufacturing, and distribution of printed material. Profit from the sale of his own publications was the publisher's ultimate aim. Printers were not the only individuals to engage in publishing activity in the 1790s. Retail booksellers—who may or may not have had a direct hand in printing the works they sold—also increased in number, from eight in 1790 to eleven years later, and then held steady at sixteen between 1799 and 1813. Taken together, the printers who acted as publishers and the city's booksellers formed the nucleus of Philadelphia's early publishing trade.

In Philadelphia, throughout the period of this study, publishing was a function that could be performed by any number of individuals or groups in or out of the book trade: printers, booksellers, book binders, authors, civil or religious corporate bodies. Moreover, an individual could combine one or more of these roles with publishing in a variety of permutations. In the early years of the 1790s there were several members of the book trade who occasionally acted as publishers. By the 1820s and 1830s, some of these figures, most of them originally printers, had committed to publishing books on a more or less full-time basis, leaving the manufacturing and selling to others. They formed an increasingly well-defined and tightly knit subgroup. These are the figures whose careers this study follows to the exclusion of many others, and it is they who effected a transition to large-scale nineteenth-century commercial publishing enterprises.

The focus of this study is the process by which a group of late eighteenth-century Philadelphia printers and booksellers evolved into nineteenth-century entrepreneurs of the book trade. This transition did not occur overnight, nor was it fully complete by 1820. But the beginnings of the change can be traced to the 1790s, and over the next several decades the profession of "publisher" gained definition. Furthermore, the publishing profession did not emerge in neat, chronological phases; there appears to be no year or decade when printers began acting solely as publishers.

The printers and booksellers whose careers this study follows can be seen as transitional. Even as they struggled to move beyond the financial constraints of their craft and to develop markets, they continued to employ many traditional eighteenth-century business practices: they managed their own businesses, employing few clerks to help them in the day-to-day management of their concern; they had a direct hand in the production of their publications, even when some had abandoned printing; they combined retailing and wholesaling; and, unlike their successors, they did not have the railroad to rely on for distribution of their books. Stereotype plate printing and printing by steam were just gaining recognition and widespread use in the late 1820s, so the production of books during the years of the early republic remained costly, time-consuming, and labor intensive. Innovations in papermaking and binding would also produce important changes in the production of books, but they too, came a little too late for the publishers of the early republic.

Yet these publishers were not colonial craftsmen caught in the wrong century. Their business strategies reflected the intensity of a rapidly changing and growing society and suggest that their methods were far from
backward. To begin with, those in the business of publishing books were flexible. Most only made small-scale efforts to specialize, as the market for books was not developed enough to support specialty publishers. This flexibility led to innovation and a keen recognition of the need to efficiently combine competition with cooperation. Competition was common among the early publishers, who understood the reality of overproduction and the difficulties of reaching far-flung and often limited markets. Other ways to function in this competitive world of all-purpose publishing suggested themselves as well. Attempts to control production and costs came in the form of vertical integration and consolidation, activities usually associated with big business in the later decades of the century. Finally, the nature of the publishing business made these entrepreneurs unique. Their products were diverse: each book represented a separate investment strategy and a distinct risk. Even publishers who specialized in a degree—religious publishing, toy, or schoolbooks—still saw each title as a discrete product. One steady seller could provide the bedrock of a publisher's good fortune, while one uncompetitive book could cause enormous problems. Even if, as was typical, average sellers made up a publisher's list, each book had its own identity. Clearly, notions of interchangeability and specialization could not mean for publishers what they came to mean for other businesses in the nineteenth century.

* * *

Colonial printers operated very much within the confines of British mercantilism. They entertained notions of publishing only as long as they could guarantee for themselves relatively low risks in the undertaking. In the colonial period, this was mostly done by publishing books either by subscription or under the auspices of governmental or religious institutions. Printers could also publish expensive books, pamphlets, and newspapers which, for a variety of reasons, London booksellers would not or could not produce. Many printers sold books, stationery, and other goods to help keep them afloat. An assortment of English books and locally printed works could usually be found in late eighteenth-century American printing shops. The colonial printer, therefore, depended on material of local interest and sponsorship for local markets. While commodities such as molasses, tobacco, and hams linked colonial regions, printed matter was not considered a particularly valuable commodity for trade. It would take a relative degree of political and economic unity, as seen in the Revolutionary crisis and the years of the Confederation, before printers could see the utility in reprinting works published in other American regions; only with an increasingly national political and economic orientation did members of the trade begin producing printed material for distant markets.

The Revolutionary era saw a significant increase in the role of the press in politics, and the connection between the two grew more intimate with the formation of political parties in the 1790s. These events, combined with the relocation of the federal government to Philadelphia in 1790, contributed to a flood of printed matter from the presses of that city. Much of this publishing was political in nature, and some printers seized on patronage opportunities, becoming party spokesmen through their newspapers and other publications. The political publishing trade was matched by French émigrés, British radicals, and Irish dissidents who flocked to Philadelphia in the 1780s and 1790s, many taking up the trade of printing for political purposes or continuing in the trade after having been trained in their home countries. These immigrants had an impact on the trade itself and on the politicization of its members. As the 1790s drew to a close, political publishing had become something of a profession unto itself. Those engaged in it had begun to move away from bookkeeping and job printing, focusing instead on politics.

Nonpolitical book publishing also emerged in the years of the early republic. Domestic and international economic developments in the years following the ratification of the Constitution provided printers with more opportunities to act as book publishers than their colonial counterparts had enjoyed. The funding of the revolutionary debt and the accompanying assumption of the state debts, as well as the creation of the Bank of the United States and other banks, generated new pools of capital for speculation and investment. America's economic growth was phenomenal, particularly from 1810 to the turn of the century, when agricultural exports rose dramatically to meet the needs of war-torn Europe. Earnings from imports and re-exports left the new nation with almost no trade deficit. As part of what Thursday Doerrfinger has termed an "efflorescence of mercantile innovation," Philadelphia's merchant community engaged in high-risk trade and investment in the decades following the Revolution, and speculation was at an all-time high. This included speculation in publishing. Population growth and mobility also played a major role in the burgeoning book publishing business. The movement of people to the west and southwest in the
early decades of the new republic increased the need for printed matter over a larger area than before and stirred Philadelphia printers with visions of new markets for books. Further, the interregional flow of capital and the establishment of country presses and bookstores were integral to establishing far-flung markets for books. Beginning in the 1790s, a number of Philadelphia printers saw opportunities to expand their book publishing activities, and their efforts to muster credit, seek specialized markets, and find creative ways to speculate in books produced a sort of merchant class among printers. Increasingly, these individuals reduced or eliminated printing in their own shops, choosing instead to have the work executed by others.

Scholars of the early national period have examined subjects related to publishing such as literacy, the rise of the novel as a literary form, social and cultural changes relating to the dissemination of print, and the democratization of knowledge. Cultural, economic, and political development in the new republic were intertwined with the development of early national publishing. Dramatic changes in the nature of print culture and the uses of literacy altered American society in the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. Referred to by some historians and literary critics as the “reading revolution,” these changes took the form of widening literacy, readership, and consumption. At the same time, historians have argued, religion and communication underwent a process of democratisation, and the ranks of the literate middle class expanded. Members of an aspiring working class also sought self-improvement through knowledge and organized themselves around the printed word. Most scholars agree that a commercial economy developed in tandem with a broad reading culture, and many assert that books became inexpensive and widely available early in the nineteenth century. The popularization of print, whether effected by evangelical preachers, Bible societies, and a growing religious press, or by wider participation in local, state, and national economics and politics, encouraged printer-booksmen to create and pursue markets for books.

Concerns about education and citizenship in Philadelphia led to the relatively early establishment of public schools there, and the growth of public education and accompanying rise in literacy translated into an expanded reading market. Prominent Philadelphia printers Mathew Carey and William Duane were both active in the debate over public education, on the side of expansion and greater access. Their role was no doubt in accordance with the Controllers of the Public Schools’ larger aim to prepare young citizens for participation in a republican society, but they did not lose sight of the fact that education required books and that the needs of American education would best be served by American schoolbooks. Indeed, respected English and domestic schoolbooks became the bread and butter of the infant American publishing trade.

The history of printing in America has not been neglected by historians and bibliographers, but while there are excellent studies of colonial presses and printing, none has been concerned with the publishers of books in the early national period when book publishing began to be a viable economic activity. Scholars have generally been more attracted to mid-nineteenth-century publishing. This interest comes out of the study of authorship and literature on one hand, and developments in transportation and communication, on the other. The very existence of how histories for many major publishing firms has influenced the periodization of publishing history, drawing our focus to the middle years of the nineteenth century. For the period in between, however, we still lack a basic understanding of who produced books, how they were financed, how publishers’ credit and exchange networks worked, and how books found their way into the hands of American consumers.

A case study of early national book publishing in America could take as its site any of the major urban areas of the early republic. As in Philadelphia, the printing and publishing trades of Boston and New York were dynamic, with growing numbers of tradesmen. Baltimore, Charleston, Hartford, and Albany also boasted active publishing trades. In addition, publishing did take place in smaller towns, but many publications of small-town presses were financed by authors, local governments, church bodies, and other institutions, making them, rather than the craftsmen who printed the work, the publishers. An interest in early Philadelphia publishing flows quite naturally from the diversity of its presses’ output in the eighteenth century. It has been argued that printers in Philadelphia produced the widest variety of printed matter throughout the colonies. The printing trade gained extracurriculars when the new nation’s capital moved from New York to Philadelphia in 1790, and printers there expected to benefit directly from the proximity to the chambers of the federal government. Until 1800, when the capital moved to Washington, D.C., Philadelphia was alive with political publishing and publishing schools directly connected to political patronage. But some members of the trade were...
Introduction

equally active in their attempts to publish non-political works, and there was a dramatic rise in the number of general works published during that decade. The momentum did not let up until the late 1820s and 1830s, when the publishing houses of New York and Boston gained ascendancy over Philadelphia’s trade.

A picture of Philadelphia’s early national publishing trade emerges through analysis of the enormous cache of records that some of its members left behind. To begin with, this study could not have been undertaken without publishers’ surviving publications. It is possible, even assuming low survival rates, to count and analyze the products of the Philadelphia presses, something that would be difficult, at best, to do with other types of goods. From an economic standpoint, books are consumables, but they are unique in that they are often preserved by people and libraries, making them available for historians not only to read, but to assess as sources of material culture evidence. The books from Philadelphia’s publishing firms survive in great numbers in libraries. In addition, both the publishers’ high level of literacy and the risky nature of their endeavors are evident in their extensive correspondence and bookkeeping; the many account books, letterbooks, and collections of business correspondence from Philadelphia publishing firms that survive in libraries, archives, and historical societies make it possible to form an understanding of their operations. Some firms are better represented than others in the archives. Letters and accounts are particularly rich for Benjamin Franklin Bache, the Bailey printing family, the Bradford’s, Mathew Carey and his successors, Johnson and Warner, McCarty and Davis, and William W. Woodward. Their business practices become, of necessity, representative of the activities of the trade as a whole.

There are, of course, many things this study does not attempt to accomplish. This examination of the development of publishing in Philadelphia focuses mainly on book publishers and the publication of books. The many newspaper and periodical publishers of the early nineteenth century deserve separate treatment, and I argue that they engaged in quite different activities from those in the book trade, as described here. The same can be said about job printers, who, by the end of the 1820s, were becoming increasingly separate from publishers in terms of their business activities and their role in the trade. The forms that this division and specialization took in the 1820s and early years of the new century are explored, but by about 1820, when this process was more or less complete, attention is turned to the publishers of books. This study also does not attempt to bring into focus the book trade in Boston or New York, or any other major publishing center. The case of characters and the trade practices in each of these important hubs cry out for studies of their own, from which, it is hoped, a larger, national picture can be constructed. The products of German language printing and publishing were ubiquitous in colonial and early national Pennsylvania, but the German trade is only referred to in passing in this study. I have relied on, among other sources, an excellent study of the trade in Robert E. Carolin’s A Social History of the German Book Trade in America to the Civil War. Finally, this study makes no attempt to analyze consumption patterns, readership or literacy, all essential elements of a larger understanding of the history of the book in America. It is hoped, however, that this examination of the ways in which Philadelphia’s publishers financed, produced, and distributed books will shed light on these other areas of inquiry.

The generation of publishers that followed immediately on the heels of this study’s subjects viewed their trade and the market with new eyes. Less than fifty years after Carey penned his optimistic letters to Ireland, book publishing and publishers had changed considerably. Many mid-century publishers had no experience in the printing trade at all. With the growth of American literature, publishing houses were becoming identified with particular American authors and specific areas of literature, and publishers began to issue catalogues that showed their increasing specialization—lists of novels, or religious works, or medical texts. Most mid-century publishers were operating primarily as wholesalers and distributors of the titles they published, rather than relying on capital in retail stock or other publishers’ books. The railroads aided them in reaching a national market, and the technologies of steam printing and printing from stereotype plates were critical to the mass production of the literature in which they were engaged.

The story of early national publishing, then, is not one of unimpeded progress. Most of the Philadelphia publishers examined in this study were born in the middle decades of the eighteenth century and reached adulthood during the years of Revolution and the ratification of the Constitution. While the new nation was being formed and defined, these men were seeking to establish themselves in their trade. They set out to build a publishing industry and to create and serve new markets for books. Like many entrepreneurs of the early republic, their vision of a truly national market remained somewhat limited, as population growth and geographical expansion outstripped the nation’s communication, transportation, and financial capacities. The early publishers were often faced with markets that were difficult to penetrate. In
Introduction

the very places in which books were not readily available, most books were not yet considered necessities. Nevertheless, it is the intention of this study to bring this important transition in the history of publishing to life and, in so doing, to shed new light on the formative years of an industry and a nation.

I

The First Century of Philadelphia Printing and Publishing

To understand the rise of the publisher in early national Philadelphia, it is necessary to consider both the business culture of colonial printing and the publishing strategies of colonial printers. For most of the eighteenth century, printers in America engaged in a variety of printing-related occupations. In addition to printing job work, they imported and sold books and other goods, both retail and wholesale; they occasionally published small or otherwise low-rank books; and most printed newspapers at some point in their careers. Many also engaged in book binding, and some were involved in the papermaking business. Depending on circumstances, a printer would engage in all or some of these activities. Not until the end of the century did the trade begin to diversify.

In London, this process of specialization had already occurred by the seventeenth century, when the book trade had divided distinctly into printers and publishers, known as booksellers. By the middle of the eighteenth century, London booksellers were the entrepreneurs who mobilized the capital, evaluated the market, and employed printers and binders to execute the work. These booksellers used their economic leverage, gained by the aggressive acquisition of copy, to control printers. Printers were relegated to earning their living by printing for the booksellers or by moving to less crowded and competitive settings in English provincial towns or in the colonies.¹

During the colonial period, American printing developed as a part of the British book trade and early American printers functioned much like their English provincial counterparts. However, the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1669, which had restricted the numbers of printers admitted to the trade, and the increasing specialization of the London trade, encouraged the growth of provincial printing and bookselling.² The proliferation of presses in towns like Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle, and York was mir-
owed in eighteenth-century Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, as well as in some market towns throughout the colonies. Irish bookellers were extremely quick to reprint London books and boldly sell them at very competitive prices. The same can be said of some members of the Scottish trade. However, during the first half of the eighteenth century, American printers and bookellers did not regularly engage in the high-risk, intensive publishing activities characteristic of the London trade, or even of the Irish and Scottish reprint trade. Colonial markets were not highly developed or diverse, and importing a few copies of a book cost less than producing a whole edition locally.8

The Colonial Printer as Book Importer

The limitations of the American market, and the nature of the mercantile relationship between Britain and her colonies, made it difficult for early American printers to prosper from simply pulling the press. The printers’ craft made it logical for them to be involved in the dissemination of printed matter, and indeed, printers, acting as bookellers, figured prominently in book sales and distribution throughout the colonies. There were a number of ways American colonists could obtain the books they wanted to buy. A small minority of colonists with reliable correspondents in England could obtain books at “gentleman’s prices,” a small discount allowed to steady customers with good credit, and thus bypass local bookellers. Colonial print- ers usually kept stocks of imported books in their shops, and shopkeepers who sold dry goods often carried a selection of inexpensive books as well. In addition, some bookellers who were not necessarily in the printing business, were small-scale importers of British, European books and stationery.

The American colonial market for books was not small—it made up almost half of British book exports—but it was easily glutted. Colonial bookellers wanted an assurance of salable books, rather than many copies of one title. British bookellers, hoping to exploit the American market by selling to colonial retailers, maximized their profits by sending books whose copyrights they partially or fully owned. Only by doing this could they allow a large enough discount or long enough credit to make importation by colonial bookellers worthwhile. Therefore, the needs of the English bookellers and the American retailers were often at odds. Colonial dealers complained that their English suppliers were not sending what was most salable in America but rather the books rejected by the British market. By the 1740s, English bookellers aggressively began to dump their slow-selling titles onto the American market, following a trend in the British trade of remaining, or selling “rub books”—unsalable, overstocked titles—cheaply. These practices, hardly sensitive to colonial book-buying and reading needs, had the effect of flooding the colonial market with some books while others remained scarce.

Colonial printers were hardly willing simply to sacrifice all power in their relationships with British bookellers, however. David Hall, Benjamin Franklin’s printing partner and a large-scale importer of British books, arrived at one method to attain an equal footing with his suppliers in London and Edinburgh. He knew that, as a colonist, he could not beat the British exporting system, so he endeavored to work within it. He cultivated excellent relationships with British bookellers and carefully maintained these contacts, always making sure to pay on time. In exchange, he gained favorable terms of credit and, equally important, significant respect and cooperation from a number of prominent English and Scottish bookellers. Cooperation meant that he was less likely to receive rub books than others with more tenuous ties. But Hall took no chances; he was particularly exacting in his demands, never ceasing to remind his correspondents of his reputation as a large-scale buyer and prompt remitter. In an order to the Edinburgh firm of Hamilton and Balfour, Hall enumerated the sorts of books he did not want sent, as well as the terms he expected:

Remember Deity is a must dull Article here. Send nothing relating to Scots Affairs, such as Pictorcitia, Hathorizon, Guthrie, Fletcher &c. no Plutarch’s Lives, Knight of Malta, and such like. And you must send everything on the best and lowest Terms.9

Most of these books would be Scottish favorites, but Hall knew they would not meet with ready sale in the colonies. Yet the seemingly creditless lists of books he did order are a powerful reminder of his position in the trade. He continued to flex his muscles when the bankrupt London bookseller James Rivington moved to New York in 1760 to begin business anew. Rivington informed his American correspondents that “[t]here never was a Bookseller on the Continent till he came” and that the colonial printers “know nothing about Books, nor the Prices of them.” Rivington claimed that the British bookellers were “picking the pockets” of their American wholesale customers.10 Hall’s response was to write immediately to all of his British trading partners to demand satisfaction on this point, thus arranging written guarantees of the lowest terms possible, as well as tarnishing further his new competitor’s reputation.

Other printers besides Hall turned to alternative means to make ends
met. Competition in the trade, as well as the basic economic difficulties that all craftsmen faced in the eighteenth century, made enterprising printers seek out ways to augment their incomes. Soliciting government support was a standard practice for colonial printers. Benjamin Franklin wasted no time in securing the favor of the Pennsylvania General Assembly. "My first Promotion [in Philadelphia]," he later wrote, "was my being chosen in 1736 Clerk of the General Assembly," a paid position to be sure, but more importantly, one that gave him the advantage in bidding for government publications. The government printing and the "other occasional Jobs for the Public" proved to be "on the whole . . . very profitable," and Franklin found that he could persuade the assembly of the commonwealth's need for completion of acts and other expensive jobs. The importance of government-sponsored publications to the printer's success should not be underestimated. By "profitable," Franklin meant not only that he was given paying jobs by the assembly, but that his recognition and position in society were bound up in this very visible form of patronage. David Hall kept careful accounts in a separate book titled "Account Current Book for Printing work done for the Province of Pennsylvania and Governors of the Counties of New Castle, Kent, and Sussex on Delaware, 1730-69" for the purpose of keeping track of this important and lucrative part of their trade. 11

Along with imported books, the producers of their own presses, and their job printing, many printers stocked stationery and other goods in retail stores attached to their printing shops. Printing blank legal forms was a lucrative business. They sold all sorts of imported dry goods and medicines, invented in real estate, bound books, and erected paper nulls Franklin and others advertised standard stationery supplies such as "Slates, Pensills, Ink and Ink Powder, blank Accompl Books and Pocket Books, Writing Paper of several Sorts, blank Bonds, Indentures, and all other Blanks in Use, with other Stationary Ware. Also very good Chocolate, and coarse and fine Edgings." 12 Rare was the printer who did not follow an advertised list of books with an enumeration of other items for sale, usually, but not limited to, stationery sundries. Consider one of William Bradford's ads of 1742:

"A curious series of five pictures, either painted on Glass, Mezzotint or otherwise, such as Cartoons, the 7 Works of Mercy, Sea Pirates, Views of the most Magnificent Buildings in Europe, sets of fine Horses and a Variety of other Sorts." 13

As odd as this collection of goods might seem, Bradford's competitor, Franklin, would not be caught without at least some of these very same items, as his accounts with Bradford indicate that he bought a number of

the "mezzerint pictures" to sell in his own shop that same year. 14 Commercial activities such as these were typical among British provincial printers of the time and had been common in the London trade a century earlier, so there was nothing exceptional about this form of diversification. 15

And, of course, printers printed. There was a lot of job printing—commissioned printing—that needed to be done in the colonies—enough to keep fifty-one Philadelphia printers busy throughout the century following the establishment of Pennsylvania's first printing press in 1688. Nine of these fifty-one printers opened before 1740. 16 Jobs could range from printing legal forms, contracts, and licenses, to government printing, broadsides, sermons, and other pamphlet-sized material. It is impossible to determine the number of items printed that had no imprint—forms, contracts, and licenses, for example—but surviving works that contain Philadelphia imprints rose dramatically throughout the eighteenth century. The following table shows how many imprints survive for the first years of each decade, offering some indication of the steady growth in Philadelphia's output from the earliest printing to 1800. 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of surviving imprints</th>
<th>Printers with imprints</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1680</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1690</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: North American Imprints Program Catalogue (NAIP), American Antiquarian Society, and H. Glenn Bond, Made O. Brown, A Dictionary of the Book Arts and Book Trade in Philadelphia to 1800.

Despite the amount of available job work and their other commercial activities, many printers kept their eyes open for opportunities to publish books, an activity that could make their presses more profitable. Yet book publishing was risky. There were relatively few safe opportunities for colonial printers to act as publishers of books. Printing was capital- and labor-intensive, which meant that publishers had to produce editions large enough to spread the cost of composition over as many copies as possible. Cost-effectiveness often required book edition sizes too large for local colonial
Colonial Publishing

Although they were discouraged from undertaking major publishing projects, printers in colonial Philadelphia did publish work that required only small amounts of capital, paper, and type. Broadsides could be published with minimal risk. Consisting of only one sheet of paper and requiring small amounts of type, broadsides automatically involved lower investment of capital than longer works. Furthermore, the broadside format lent itself distinctly to subjects of high, if temporary, interest, enabling them to meet with ready sale. If the broadside printer miscalculated, however, and produced a sheet that did not sell, it was not likely to be a major loss, and he would know this immediately. There would be no agonizing wait with large amounts of capital tied up, books gathering dust on the shelves, and creditors impatient for payment.

Books and pamphlets, consisting mainly of political tracts, catechisms, printers, collections of ballads, and chapbooks, were relatively inexpensive to print and to buy. Chapbooks were pamphlet-sized books, usually containing popular tales, ballads, poems, short plays, and jokes. Small, sewn in format and number of papers, they were generally bound in boards (a form of cardboard) or merely stretched in paper wrappers (a sewn accompaniment of modern day paperbacks).19 Pamphlets and chapbooks did not require fine paper or a great deal of type to produce. They could thus be printed in large, cost-effective editions and sold cheaply. These inexpensive productions were obviously attractive to the would-be publisher concerned about financial risk.

By far, the most appealing publishing investments were to be found in small books that had proven to be steady sellers. Steady sellers were not necessarily "best sellers" in the modern sense. Rather they were books or pamphlets that provided a reasonably reliable source of income for the publisher. They would not, by nature, be highly topical or political, as such publications would prove of fleeting interest, and, in any case, pamphlets of this sort were usually financed by their authors or other interested sponsors. While published frequently, sermons and political pamphlets were not steady sellers. The former were almost all subscribed for by congregations or families who wished to see their ministers' words in print. Election day the colonies, made it possible for printers occasionally to act as publishers, if not as publishers of major books.

Almanacs, on the other hand, provided the perfect steady seller. They were one of the most common types of books published in the colonies, because of their astronomical calculations pertaining to the locale in which they would be used; by the same reasoning, imported almanacs were clearly unsuitable for the local colonial markets. A publisher could know from the previous year's sales roughly how many to produce, giving almanacs a sort of built-in mechanism for "market research". In great numbers jumped to wrack up this obvious hole in the net of British imports.20 According to one scholar, "almanac publications during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries actually outnumbered all other books combined—religious included."21 Almanacs had a few extra advantages as well. They provided a salable name recognition for printers, and the illustrations and complicated tables found therein advertised the craft and skills of their producers. Between 1764 and 1788, Pennsylvania printers published almost 30 percent of all American almanacs, far exceeding the number produced in either New York or Massachusetts.22

Broadside, almanacs and other pamphlets, schoolbooks, chapbooks, and small devotional works had the additional advantage of being relatively easy to distribute throughout the countryside. Colonial peddlers hawked them along with other wares. Peddlers bought their supplies in cities and radiated out to country towns and rural areas to resell them.23 In short, their cheap production and easy sale and distribution made pamphlets well suited to the American printing trade, just as they were to the British provincial trade.24 No matter who underwrote the cost, publishing these inexpensive productions suited the authors, the trade, and the market.25 From 1660 to 1770, small publications fitting these descriptions made up about 75 percent of Philadelphia publishing.26 While it may seem to modern
eyes—and perhaps may have seemed to members of the London book trade—that such pamphlets were ephemera hardly meriting the trouble of production and distribution, they represented the bulk of locally produced reading matter for most American colonists. These products of the colonial presses were the stuff of which early American publishing was made.

Colonial printers did occasionally publish more expensive books, although the ways in which they did so confirm the importance of risk as a factor in their decision making. Collecting advance subscriptions was one way to publish books without governmental or religious institutional sponsorship. This entailed issuing a proposal to publish a title, which would usually include the terms of publication, the price to subscribers, and the timetable for payment. Proposals would indicate whether the work was to be published serially, how many volumes the whole would be, and the expected completion date. Subscription publishing was a common practice in eighteenth-century England. Sometimes it was the author who, unable to convince a publisher to take the risk, solicited subscriptions as a means of subvention. Most commonly, however, publishers resorted to subscription plans to gauge the market and to capitalize on expensive projects.

The earliest instance of a colonial subscription plan was Bradford's proposal to publish "a large house-Bible" in 1688. He explained that publishing certain books by subscription was necessary, "for the printing of large Volumes [sic], because Printing is very chargeable." As was the case with many proposed publications, Bradford's Bible was never printed. Usually, proposed works did not appear due to insufficient numbers of subscribers. Literally hundreds of books were proposed in the colonial period, with only a portion of them ever seeing print. This further emphasized to printers the limits of the colonial market and the constant need to test that market before plunging into publishing. One scholar has pointed out that colonial Americans were accustomed to subscriptions of all sorts. The developing status of British North America made it particularly suited to subscription plans andLorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Curabitur iaculis magna et lorem vehicula, non faucibus turpis. Aenean pulvinar, risus ut scelerisque lacinia, tellus felis mollis libero, a dictum libero lacus et ante. Nulla ac tempor turpis. Fusce ac turpis et nunc auctor lacinia.

Publications that had not received enough advance support. Proposals increasingly cautioned that the work would only "go forward" if sufficient numbers of subscribers were gathered. Nevertheless, subscription remained through the 1790s, in the words of Franklin's grandson, "the most usual & safest mode" of publishing. English booksellers had turned increasingly to credit networks within the trade to finance their publications in the eighteenth century, making subscriptions less necessary. True to form, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, their American counterparts followed suit.

Some colonial tradesmen actively engaged in more during publishing activities. Benjamin Franklin provided a prototype for the pre-Revolutionary printer who wanted to turn publisher. He acted as publisher when he took the financial risks of printing books such as Isaac Watts's The Psalms of David, imitated and George Whitefield's A Journey from Guilnaltar to Georgina. Franklin took risks in publishing only when firmly convinced that his investment would be returned. Whitefield's popularity in the colonies made the publication by subscription of his Journal a safe bet, and Franklin's calculations went away with Watts's Psalms, which lay on his hands for almost two years.

Franklin's decision to act as a publisher may also have been bolstered by the printing network he devised, made up of family members and trusted former apprentices. His intention in creating this network was motivated, at least in large part, by the fact that the business was an investment in the future of his family. Franklin's need to set up in competition with him, as he had done when he left Samuel Keizer's shop and set up shop on his own. Second, thinking of economies of scale, he could use the network to create and then supply markets throughout the colonies. He could thus avoid the problems of oversupplying his local market with his publications. Other colonial printers developed similar connections for distributing books throughout the colonies. These methods would be copied and refined later when other printers acted as publishers during the years of the early republic.

Early American Newspaper Publishing

If ambitious colonial printers avoided publishing risky books, they were less hindered in publishing newspapers, something most printers throughout the colonial period attempted. Newspapers and literary periodicals
were popular publishing choices for printers in early eighteenth-century England. Periodical literature offered greater financial control to publishers. Newspapers provided steady work and, when they were successful, brought their publishers a degree of financial stability and public recognition.88 In fact, the practice of subscribing to book publishing had borrowed its methodology from newspaper publishing: subscribers were solicited and expected to pay on a regular basis.99 Printing advertisements, of course, was also a significant way to offset the costs of newspaper publishing. In addition, there were other ways to decrease risk, the simplest of which involved altering the numbers of copies printed to match the number of subscribers; if subscriptions declined, it was not necessary to continue to print larger numbers. In this way, the printer could avoid the common book publishing problem of overstocking. The popularity of English newspapers was matched in the colonies, and as the eighteenth century progressed, newspapers took on increasing importance as the ubiquitous and locally produced reading matter for colonial Americans.99 Between 1730, when the first newspaper was published in Philadelphia, and the 1760s, practically every successful Philadelphia printer, at one time or another, printed a newspaper.

Newspapers also served to increase name recognition for printers and their printing shops. Advertising in their own papers not only helped to finance the newspapers, but also promoted the sale of books and other goods they sold from their shops. Keimer, Franklin’s first employer and later competitor, made sure that the readers of his Pennsylvania Gazette knew they could simply apply to the office of the newspaper to acquire “choice melodies, very cheap,” as well as “choice Nuncalps, Fine Gun Arribick,” “Rogg’s Blanters, [and] Brooksooths” recently imported from Ireland.99 He also took the enterprise, if logical, step of acting as a consignee of goods sold through classified ads in his paper. He offered to “fairly sell goods, with exact Justice, unweadiy Dilligence, and profound Secrecy.” In the sellers’ favor was the fact that the goods would be advertised in the Gazette, Two Hundred and Fifty of which are printed every week.999 The colophon of Franklin’s newspaper read: “Printed by B. FRANKLIN, Postmaster, at the New Printing-Office near the Market. Where Advertisement are taken in, and Book Binding is done reasonably, in the best manner.”999 In short, the publishers of newspapers used them to promote their businesses, to generate money through advertisements, and to establish themselves as central figures in colonial commercial life. Publishing newspapers became an imperative for printers of any ambition, in fact, once a competitor began to produce a newspaper, it was practically impossible for others not to follow suit. James Green has argued that competition among printers, both in job printing and in newspaper publishing, was a prerequisite for the development of publishing as an entrepreneurial activity in the colonial period. In Philadelphia, Franklin’s arrival on the scene spurred Bradford and Keimer to new levels of innovation. Franklin’s lively, well-written newspaper prompted Bradford to look for more interesting news for his own publication. Ultimately, Franklin proved the most innovative and competitive, driving Keimer out of business and significantly reducing Bradford’s market share.99

While most colonial newspaper printers sought some level of public recognition through their papers, many were wary of the sort of attention. They feared alienating patrons and customers. In an important study of colonial printers, Stephen Botein argued that they were “naive mechanics,” attempting to remain neutral and inoffensive in order not to jeopardize their businesses. Economic exigencies drove printers’ decisions about the content of their own publications. According to Botein, the proprietorship of newspapers allowed American printers to “take pride in the intellectual dimensions of their craft,” but, ultimately, a printer’s success in the colonies required “neutrality” and a comfortable relationship with governmental authority. Such neutrality would ensure contracts for printing paper money, laws, and other official work.999

Franklin was acutely aware of this delicate relationship between printer, patrons, and politics, to the point where he could claim that his newspaper could not guarantee freedom of expression to contributors who would have his paper become overly political. He later explained this position in his Autobiography:

In the Conduct of my Newspaper I carefully excluded all Libelling and Personal Abuse, which of late Years become so disgraceful to our Country. Whenever I was solicited to insert any thing of that kind, and the Writers pleaded as they generally did, the Liberty of the Press, and that a Newspaper was like a Stage Coach in which any one who would pay had a right to a Place, my Answer was, that I would print the Piece separately [as a pamphlet form] if desired, and the Author might have as many Copies as he pleased to distribute himself.99

In Franklin’s mind, “liberty of the press” as understood by some had at least the potential to deny printers their daily bread. Rather than granting access to the newspaper, which carried no one’s name but his own, he offered to political commentators the anonymity, safety, and liberty of the real press,
the "stagecoach" with platen and frisker. Franklin obviously saw nothing wrong with being a printer and being political; however, it is worth pointing out that he had largely retired from the printing business before his official political career got underway.15

In no small part because of Franklin's aversion to political fighting in the newspaper press, Philadelphia newspapers may have been less politically charged than their counterparts in New York and Boston, but the political press was not dormant in the Quaker city, as Franklin's "stagecoach" statement suggests. Every pamphlet was backed out over the Logan-Lloyd power struggle as well as other disputes in the early years of the eighteenth century.16 Political pamphlets, as Franklin pointed out, offered greater anonymity for author and printer alike. And the printers of pamphlets, if they were known, were not so readily blamed for offensive content as the publishers of newspapers. This was largely because of the prevailing view that to print was to perform a job for another; to publish was to take on risk and responsibility. In essence, publishing a newspaper made a printer an editor and entrepreneur, and publishing a political newspaper committed the publisher to the opinions expressed therein.

Historians have seen the development of a political press in the first half of the century as a prelude to the flood of political publishing during the Revolutionary struggle.17 The steady rise in numbers of newspapers published in the colonies, and their increasingly political nature in the second half of the eighteenth century, indicate that printers were beginning to see their role in society as more important than simply that of craftsmen.18 Largely through their newspapers, printers became increasingly public figures, and this affected how they perceived themselves and their trade, as well as the kinds of publishing decisions they made. They were increasingly willing to take on the role of publisher in both a financial and social sense.

Pauline Maier has argued that the politicization of printers, as seen in their memberships in the Sons of Liberty, made their newspapers the "prime vehicle of uniting the population."19 The Revolution and the partners divided among colonial printers, according to Botkin, "reshaped the self-imagery, or 'occupational ideology,' of the printing trade," turning printers into individuals who were conscious of the role they played in forming political discourse.20

Throughout the Revolution, and in the 1780s and 1790s, this relationship between printers and politics became even more complicated. As Pennsylvanians clashed over the nature of the commonwealth's constitution, and as struggles for power and party dominance gripped the new state, the rec-