

Publishing in America: Needs and Opportunities for Research

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The publisher's calling is not, in truth, a mere trade. He is the dispenser of knowledge to the community, and even his material interests are best served by whatever excites and appeals unto that desire for knowledge which it is his lofty mission to satisfy.¹

One day when we were playing golf at St. Andrews, Mr. Carnegie turned to me and asked in his modest Scotch way: 'How much money did you make in your book business last month?'

I told him I could not tell—that no publisher made up his books more often than once a year, and it was impossible to figure profits month by month.

He said: 'Do you know what I would do if I were in a business in which I couldn't tell the amount of monthly profit?'

'No,' I replied; 'what would you do?'

'I would get out of it,' he said.²

I

IN THIS PAPER I plan to investigate the history and impact of publishing in the United States through 1876 and to suggest

I would like to thank my colleagues Hugh Amory and Roger E. Stoddard for their help and encouragement in preparing this essay. My students at Columbia University's Rare Book School in the summer of 1984 provided a test for the usefulness of many of the ideas contained in the essay, including the diagrammatic model of the book trade, and I thank them for their input. Richard S. Tedlow, assistant professor at the Harvard Business School and editor of the *Business History Review*, was kind enough to take time to discuss with me some of the economic aspects of publishing; it was he who pointed me to the anecdote about Carnegie and Doubleday quoted at the head of this essay.

¹ Extract from an editorial statement in *American Publishers' Circular and Literary Gazette* 1 (1863):2.

² Frank N. Doubleday, *The Memoirs of a Publisher* (New York, 1972), pp. 58-59.

some of the important needs and opportunities for research into publishing that should contribute to our understanding of the role of the book in American culture and society. I believe that the publisher was the central, indeed indispensable, figure in the book trade and I intend here to illuminate the role of the publisher and to show how his relationships with other segments of the book trade came into being and developed.

In the past, general histories of the American book trade have tended to take the role of publishing for granted without investigating its precise nature. Indeed, Isaiah Thomas in his pioneer work *The History of Printing in America* (Worcester, 1810; 2d ed., Worcester, 1874; 3d ed., New York, 1970) preferred to concentrate on manufacturing, particularly printing, and to ignore its necessary corollary, publishing. Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt and his collaborators in *The Book in America: A History of the Making and Selling of Books in the United States* (New York, 1939; 2d ed., New York, 1951) give a still-unmatched overview of the American book trade, but again the role and nature of publishing is implied rather than made explicit. Two more recent works—Charles Madison's *Book Publishing in America* (New York, 1966) and John Tebbel's massive, four-volume *A History of Book Publishing in the United States* (New York, 1972–81)—have, as their titles suggest, concentrated their attention on publishing, but the approach of both authors has been generally that of a chronicler rather than a historian. I am aware of no work that attempts to analyze the role of publishing in the early American book trade or to provide a historical analysis or interpretation of its importance in American culture and society.³

Fortunately, it is unnecessary to burden this essay with a long bibliographical list or description of publications and pre-

³ An exception might be Sheila McVey, 'Nineteenth-Century America: Publishing in a Developing Country,' *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Studies* 421 (Sept. 1975):67–80. However, this attempt to relate early American publishing to the situation in modern developing countries remains too general to be very helpful.

vious research relevant to the study of American publishing, since that function is admirably served by G. Thomas Tanselle's indispensable *Guide to the Study of United States Imprints* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971). I do intend, however, to describe briefly the major categories of material available to us. Many specific works will be referred to throughout this essay or will be found listed in Tanselle's *Guide*.

The largest group of publications relating to American publishing are those that have been prepared under the auspices of the different publishing firms and are most often published by these firms. These include firm histories, anniversary volumes and anthologies, autobiographies and memorial biographies of leading publishers and editors, and a great variety of other promotional material. In spite of the self-congratulatory and propagandistic nature of many of these publications, as a group they remain the major source of information about many publishing houses. Samuel G. Goodrich's *Recollections of a Lifetime* (New York, 1856) and Ellen B. Ballou's *The Building of the House: Houghton Mifflin's Formative Years* (Boston, 1970) are among the best, which are often full of important information, insights, and sound scholarship.

Scholarly studies of publishers and publishing are comparatively rare. There are studies of particular periods: Lawrence C. Wroth's *The Colonial Printer* (New York, 1931; rev. ed., New York, 1938) and Donald Sheehan's *This Was Publishing: A Chronicle of the Book Trade in the Gilded Age* (Bloomington, 1961). There are also studies of particular places: Walter Sutton's *The Western Book Trade: Cincinnati as a Nineteenth-Century Publishing and Book-Trade Center* (Columbus, 1961) and Milton W. Hamilton's *The Country Printer, New York State, 1785-1830* (New York, 1936); and there are studies of particular publishers: Clifford K. Shipton's *Isaiab Thomas: Printer, Patriot and Philanthropist, 1749-1831* (Rochester, 1948) and David Kaser's *Messrs. Carey & Lea of Philadelphia: A Study in the History of the Booktrade* (Philadelphia, 1957).

All of these investigate narrow areas of the book trade and shed much light on publishing practices. However, no matter how thorough and authoritative these studies may be, they are generally lacking in depth of historical perspective and analysis and tend to focus on publishing in much the same fashion as the general studies mentioned above.

In one area, the publication of a particular genre, these scholarly studies can be particularly sophisticated and useful. In a few cases these genre studies are little more than a memorial history of a dominant firm in that field, for example, William Arms Fisher's *One Hundred and Fifty Years of Music Publishing in the United States: An Historical Sketch with Special Reference to the Pioneer Publisher, Oliver Ditson Company, Inc., 1783-1933* (Boston, 1933). But in other cases—Richard Crawford and D. W. Krummel's 'Early American Music Printing and Publishing,' in *Printing & Society in Early America*, ed. William L. Joyce et al. (Worcester, 1983), pp. 186-227 and Richard J. Wolfe's *Early American Music Engraving and Printing: A History of Music Publishing in America from 1787 to 1825* (Urbana, 1980)—they provide an excellent base for future studies of publishing. This approach to publishing has been most extensively developed in the field of periodical publishing, best represented by Frank Luther Mott's marvelous five-volume *A History of American Magazines* (Cambridge, Mass., 1930-68), as well as in numerous works on newspapers.

Following the lead of French scholars of the *Annales* school, and learning from many publications of European scholars over the past twenty-five years, American scholars of the book are beginning to approach their field with new questions and a new set of models and analytical tools. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the bulk of European work has concentrated on periods before the nineteenth century. But the nineteenth century was the period when American publishing first became established as an independent institution, and it is a century that presents special problems because of the tremen-

dous expansion of the book trade brought on by mechanization, expanding markets, and increased literacy. Two European studies—Ilse Rarisch's *Industrialisierung und Literatur: Buchproduktion, Verlagswesen und Buchhandel in Deutschland im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1976) and Frédéric Barbier's 'The Publishing Industry and Printed Output in Nineteenth-Century France,' in *Books and Society in History*, ed. Kenneth E. Carpenter (New York, 1983), pp. 199–230—are cited here because they present general statistical surveys of nineteenth-century publishing in Germany and France and suggest the direction that future American studies in the field might take.

II

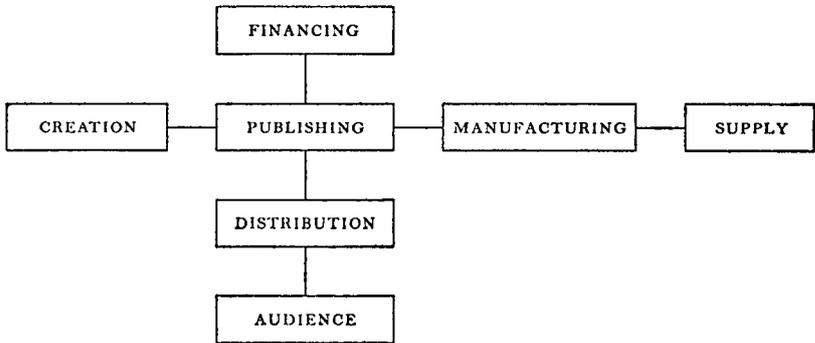
For the purposes of this essay I have found it useful to define publishing in functional rather than occupational or business terms.⁴ Specifically, I intend to separate out a particular set of activities from all those involved in the manufacture and distribution of books and other printed matter and to refer to these activities as publishing. It is important to remember, however, that any particular individual or firm that used the term publisher may not have been responsible in every instance for all of these activities, and almost certainly engaged in other activities that I have chosen to exclude from my consideration of publishing.

The position of publishing within the book trade is indicated in the attached diagram, which is meant to provide a model of

⁴ A useful insight into the development of the concept of publishing can be gained by examining the usage of the term *publishing* and related words as documented in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Dictionary of American English*. In England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the *publisher* was that individual whose name appeared in the imprint of pamphlets (usually of a nature to make them suspect to authorities) that he undertook to distribute, although they had been printed at the expense of others; see Michael Treadwell, 'London Trade Publishers: 1675–1750,' *Library*, 6th ser. 4(1982):99–134. The modern meaning of the term seems to have become current only at the beginning of the nineteenth century. An interesting contrast is provided by the German term *verlegen*, which, as early as the sixteenth century, carried the sense of the entrepreneurial aspects of publishing; see Rarisch, *Industrialisierung und Literatur*, p. 35.

the book trade as a whole.⁵ As with publishing, each square in the diagram represents a function or set of activities, though again in any particular case a single individual or firm might be responsible for many of these, or many different individuals or firms might be involved in a single function. *Creation* is taken to represent the activities of authors, editors, annotators, illustrators, and designers, among others. *Manufacturing* includes such activities as composition, platemaking, printing, and binding. *Supply* covers both suppliers—for example, the dealers and importers of paper, type, book cloth, binder's board, etc.—and the producers of the materials required in manufacturing—such as typefounders, paper mills, die cutters, machine and press manufacturers. On the vertical axis, *financing* is that function, perhaps involving bankers or silent partners, that provides the capital for publishing firms and ventures. *Distribution* includes the activities of a variety of businesses and institutions, such as book shops, jobbers, auction houses, and libraries. Finally, the *audience* represents the ultimate consumers in the book trade: the individual readers, who, as we

MODEL OF THE BOOK TRADE



⁵ This model was developed from one proposed by Robert Darnton in 'What Is the History of Books?' in *Books and Society in History*, p. 6. A similar scheme is used by John P. Feather in 'The Commerce of Letters: The Study of the Eighteenth-Century Book Trade,' *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 17(1984):407. Darnton's model has the advantage of showing the circular nature of the book trade and of emphasizing the influence of earlier publications on authors and the book trade.

are now learning, read their books in a variety of ways, or other consumers, who may have acquired or purchased their books for any number of reasons and uses that did not involve reading.

The position of *publishing* in this diagram makes clear what the functions of publishing are. Publishing is that set of activities that connect the production or manufacturing activities of the book trade, here laid out on the horizontal axis, with the commercial or distribution activities, laid out vertically. In a sense, the publisher is the entrepreneur of the book trade, making the decisions that bring together all the other activities and arranging for the coordination and credit—always important in a business where income realized from the sale of a product often comes months or years after the expense of production—and taking the risks necessary to make the whole book trade function.

This diagram is intended to be a model of the book trade that helps to separate the different functions or activities, but it is clearly too schematic to account for the actual relationships, even in the simplest cases. During the eighteenth century, individual booksellers might have been responsible for the costs of at least part of an edition of a particular book. They might also have bound it for the customer in their own shops. Thus, they were involved in finance, publishing, manufacturing, and distribution. Although the nineteenth century saw more specialization in the book trade, this pattern of taking responsibility for multiple functions remained common. A hypothetical example might be a town history published by a local historical society, for which the historical society took responsibility for creation, finance, publishing, and distribution but would also have been the main audience, thus leaving only manufacture and supply outside its direct control in the publishing venture.

At this point, a brief digression to discuss publishing as an occupation or business is useful. Clearly, as I have defined it

here, publishing has always been an important, indeed central, part of the book trade and cannot be said to have a separate origin or development. However, as the book trade expanded and became more complex, the different functions within it became more defined, and it became possible for an individual or a firm to specialize in a particular set of activities. Thus, it became possible in particular cases for a publisher to be named who was distinct from the manufacturer, distributor, or creator; and eventually it was possible for a firm to specialize in this activity. In North America, these developments seem to have depended on the expansion of the book trade, signaled by the expansion of productive capabilities and of book-consuming audiences. Although some major eighteenth-century figures—such as Benjamin Franklin, Isaiah Thomas, and Mathew Carey—were certainly beginning to specialize and to see themselves primarily as publishers, it was not until the first decades of the nineteenth century that it became feasible for publishing to exist as a separate specialized activity within the book trade. The further development of publishing into even more distinct functions, such as editing or promotion, carried out by a professional staff or managers responsible to the owners or stockholders, does not seem to have become possible or common until the end of the century. It is important to note that, although it became possible at the beginning of the nineteenth century to concentrate on publishing as a specialized and distinct activity, this was not necessarily the normal or preferred pattern. Indeed, many successful firms—Harper and Brothers of New York, and Houghton Mifflin and Company of Boston are two prominent examples—continued to maintain a variety of manufacturing and distributing functions. The question of the possibility and advantages of specialization as against diversification is a complicated one, and much further work will be necessary before any clear patterns or criteria for these developments can be suggested or established.

For the remainder of this essay, I intend to restrict my dis-

cussion to the narrower functional and entrepreneurial aspects of publishing. I will also focus on the nineteenth century, since this is the period when American publishing first became an independent and fully developed activity. Implicitly, the origin of publishing in America in the eighteenth century is an important part of our work, but this study belongs in large part to European publishing history of the period. There is much to be learned from a comparative study of other colonial publishing (especially that of Ireland) during that century. Finally, I will concentrate on the common ground between different types of publishing, in an attempt to expose and clarify a general concept of publishing. Most of my examples will come from the publishing of books, especially literary ones, since this is the area I am most familiar with. An investigation into the distinctive features of specialized branches of publishing—such as periodical, medical, children's, Catholic, or music publishing—will be necessary and informative, but much more so when seen in contrast to a general model that illustrates normal patterns of publishing.

III

To begin my discussion, I will explore the relationships of publishing to each of the other functions of the book trade depicted in my diagram, in the hope of sharpening this concept of publishing as the central entrepreneurial activity of the book trade. In investigating these relationships, I will concentrate on how they affected and formed the several activities of publishing. I will attempt to summarize the important work of earlier scholars in the field and the lessons we can learn from that work, as well as to suggest the many further areas of research that should add to our knowledge in important ways.

The relationships between publishing and creation are particularly complex. This is an area that has attracted many excellent scholars, particularly from the field of literary studies. In this regard, the unequalled work of William Charvat—*Lit-*

erary Publishing in America, 1790-1850 (Philadelphia, 1959) and *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1878*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (Columbus, 1968)—should be mentioned, although the work of other scholars—for example, Carl J. Weber's *Hardy in America: A Study of Thomas Hardy and His American Readers* (Waterville, 1946) and C. Harvey Gardner's *Prescott and His Publishers* (Carbondale, 1959)—have made thorough studies of the relationships of a single author to his publishers. These works have already provided a good analysis of the types of agreements and contracts that were typical between authors and their publishers, as well as of the delicate negotiations involved in soliciting and editing manuscripts, and of the variety and amounts of royalties and other payments that were made to authors. Much further information is readily available in the many published memoirs and biographies of authors, publishers, editors, and other literary figures, as well as in their published and unpublished journals, diaries, correspondence, and other papers. Hamlin Hill's edition of *Mark Twain's Letters to His Publishers* (Berkeley, 1967) is an example in which this kind of raw material has been brought together in a single published volume. In my work, I have frequently been struck by the amount of untapped information there is to be found in the papers of writers of the second rank, who were certainly more numerous than the major literary figures and whose experiences were probably more typical and thus potentially more informative. Literary scholars have understandably concentrated on writers whose literary standing has survived intact to the present and who are still studied and read in graduate departments of American literature, but I believe that it is part of our work to look at minor authors as well.

Further work remains to be done in this area, particularly in investigating the boundaries between creation and publishing. Authors were commonly required to act also as publishers by assuming at least part of the risks of publication and also by

providing credit and perhaps some input into design and editorial decisions. As the book trade expanded during the nineteenth century, there seems to have been a general trend toward separating the functions of creation from those of publishing. In many cases, authors managed to gain a certain autonomy and to force their publishers to assume the risks and to make credit arrangements on their own. At the same time, a new role evolved for literary editors, publishers' readers, professional book reviewers, and vanity publishers (and, at the end of the century, for literary agents),⁶ who acted as mediators between authors and publishers. These remain shadowy figures and it would be fascinating to know more about their relationships with publishers, what their exact responsibilities, obligations, input, and rewards were, and how these relationships developed and changed over time. For example, I wonder which of their functions came to be controlled by authors and which by publishers.

Another area where our ignorance remains large is that of the design of books. We know very little about how design decisions, whether conscious or unconscious, were made and who exactly was responsible for them. Undoubtedly, authors were very concerned about how their books looked; this is made clear by the care that William Hickling Prescott took with the appearance of his histories, which appeared in a magnificent quarto format, and the disappointment of Richard Henry Dana, Jr., when his *Two Years before the Mast* (New York, 1840) appeared in the smaller, less elegant format of *Harper's Family Library*.⁷ Nonetheless, I suspect that design

⁶ See James Hepburn, *The Author's Empty Purse and the Rise of the Literary Agent* (London, 1968) and Linda Marie Fritschner, 'Publishers' Readers, Publishers, and Their Authors,' *Publishing History* 7 (1980):45-100. Although these works are primarily concerned with the British book trade, the former briefly discusses the American book trade.

⁷ See Gardiner, *Prescott and His Publishers* and Eugene Exman, 'Before the Mast with Dana,' in *The Brothers Harper: A Unique Publishing Partnership and Its Impact upon the Cultural Life of America from 1817 to 1853* (New York, 1965), pp. 124-40. Both studies discuss these authors' concern with the design of their books. Interest-

decisions remained in large part the responsibility of the publisher. I wonder, though, if it is not possible to trace the origins of book design as a distinct activity of publishing.

A related field of inquiry is that of book illustration. Here we have at least some guides, notably Sinclair Hamilton's *Early American Book Illustrators and Wood Engravers* (Princeton, 1958; suppl. 1969), which provides us with the names of illustrators and a list of their works. But, again, much remains to be discovered. How were illustrators paid? What were their wages? Clearly, illustrators developed special relationships with particular publishers, but what exactly were these relationships? What was the input of the publisher in the creation and execution of book illustration? To what extent were the illustrations a more important part of a book than the text itself? A particularly interesting study would be to examine the development and importance of the stable of notable illustrators at Harper and Brothers after the Civil War who worked under the direction of Charles Parsons. Their work, which was certainly important to the success of Harper's periodicals, also appeared in many other publications.⁸ To what extent is the importance of Harper as a publisher responsible for the present fame of these illustrators?

The ties between publishing and manufacturing were particularly strong; in fact, many publishers started their careers as printers and maintained their own printing establishments, often with binderies attached, long after their efforts were concentrated on publishing. Occasionally, members of other branches in book manufacturing also became involved in publishing, as in the case of the Philadelphia binder Henry S.

ingly, in the contract between John Lothrop Motley and Harper and Brothers for the publication of *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* (New York, 1856) and *History of the United Netherlands* (New York, 1861-68), it is stated that they should appear 'in good style, similar to the Editions of Prescott's works'; see *The Archives of Harper and Brothers, 1817-1914*, microfilm edition (Cambridge, Eng., 1980), A1: 251, 378-79.

⁸ Eugene Exman, 'Charles Parsons and His School of Artists,' *The House of Harper: One Hundred Fifty Years of Publishing* (New York, 1967), pp. 102-20.

Altemus and the New York stereotyper J. S. Redfield. On the other hand, some successful publishers—Ticknor and Fields of Boston, for example—never became directly responsible for book manufacturing, apparently choosing different printers and binders as the occasion arose. Still other publishers, such as the Century Company of New York, seem to have established a special relationship with a particular printer or binder, and we find that the majority of that publisher's publications were manufactured at this establishment. The publishers of daily newspapers were a special case; their dependence on speed meant that they were forced to control their own manufacturing facilities, which were dedicated to their needs. Indeed, these publishers provided the major incentive for the development of the larger and speedier printing machines that we associate with the nineteenth century.⁹

An investigation of the relationship between manufacturing and publishing will shed much light on our understanding of the place of the publisher in the book trade. Although the expansion of the book trade made it possible for a firm to concentrate on publishing, many apparently chose to remain or to become intimately involved in book manufacturing. What exactly were the advantages and incentives for this choice? Whatever these may have been, they were clearly not simple, since many publishers who maintained their own facilities for manufacturing would still have some of their publications produced elsewhere or would take on work for other publishers. In investigating these relationships, the different nature of the two activities must be kept in mind. Whereas publishing remained a high-risk activity, where freedom to expand or contract allowed a firm to take full advantage of a particular set of circumstances, manufacturers were restricted by the necessity of making decisions based on having their capital tied up in expensive plants and machinery; to a lesser extent, manufacturers

⁹ See Frank E. Comparato, *Chronicles of Genius and Folly: R. Hoe & Company and the Printing Press as a Service to Democracy* (Culver City, 1979).

were also restricted by the responsibility of maintaining a sufficient staff of skilled and semi-skilled employees. Another element of the relationship between manufacturing and publishing that needs investigation is the question of credit and payment. Although the manufacturers were dependent on publishers for work, the latter often could not have received their return from the manufactured product, the book, until long after the work had been completed. How is this situation reflected in the financial arrangements between the two enterprises?

The distinction between manufacturing and supply is a complicated one, since many suppliers—papermakers, typefounders, ink manufacturers, printing and binding machine suppliers—were manufacturers themselves. For the purposes of this essay, it is important only to investigate those situations in which the publishers were directly responsible for the arrangements between suppliers and manufacturers. Through the end of the nineteenth century, some of the materials required for book production continued to be imported, and publishers may have been in a better position to deal with foreign suppliers and manufacturers than were individual printing firms or binderies. On the other hand, publishers may have insisted on materials of American origin for patriotic reasons, especially during the first decades of the new nation. Surviving publishers' records strongly suggest that it was common for the publisher to be responsible for deciding on and ordering the paper stock for his publications.¹⁰ Again, it would be interesting to know more about how these decisions were made, which papermakers and suppliers dealt with which publishers, and what the financial arrangements for credit and payment were. It also seems probable that the publishers were responsible for some of the arrangements involved in supplying cuts and dies

¹⁰ Warren S. Tryon and William Charvat, eds., *The Cost Books of Ticknor and Fields and their Predecessors, 1832-1858* (New York, 1949) and David Kaser, ed., *The Cost Book of Carey & Lea, 1825-1838* (Philadelphia, 1963).

that were intended to decorate and illustrate particular publications.

Much less certain is the relationship between the suppliers of binding cloth and publishers. Once publishers were in a position to offer a particular publication in a uniform publisher's binding, which used a specific color and grain of book cloth, were they also responsible for arranging for the shipment of that cloth to their binders? This situation may well have held for Ticknor and Fields, who in the 1840s and 1850s established a characteristic house binding in a deep brown ribbed (T grain) cloth that seems to be distinctive to their publications. Did they make special arrangements with the British book cloth manufacturers for its supply to the several Boston binderies that they employed?

The financing of publishing activities has barely been touched upon by previous scholars of American publishing. The very nature of publishing as a business, with the returns from a particular publishing venture almost impossible to predict—usually they must have been low, but in some cases they were spectacularly high, and not available until long after the date of publication—underscores the importance of maintaining an adequate supply of the capital and credit that publishers needed to stay in business and to keep the book trade working. A variety of approaches to this problem seem to have been common: in some cases, the author was required to provide capital or credit in the form of delayed royalty payments to cover the costs of their publications; in certain types of subscription publishing, the subscribers, the audience, either provided capital when they paid for their copies in advance or else offered a type of credit by promising to pay for their copies on delivery; in still other cases, some sort of sponsorship was sought by the publisher from a governmental body or other institution in order to help cover the costs of publication. Also, arrangements between publishers and their printers and binders, which specified that the notes paying for work performed

would not come due for an extended period of time, must have helped in financing the activities of publishers. Nonetheless, much ordinary publishing must have relied on the availability of risk capital. Who provided this capital? Under what conditions was it provided? What were the risks and the returns, normal or otherwise, from such investments?

A start in answering these questions will come from an investigation of the frequent changes in the names of publishers in the imprints of their publications. Surely a change in the style of an imprint reflects a new financial relationship or arrangement within the firm. Further evidence must be sought in the surviving archives of particular publishing houses, in the records of a variety of financial institutions such as banks and credit reporters, and in the probate court files relating to bankruptcies in the trade and to the estates of publishers. In this regard, the records of the credit-reporting firm of R. G. Dun and its predecessors, roughly covering the years 1841 to 1890, now housed at the Harvard Business School's Baker Library, seem particularly promising.¹¹ In using these records, however, we must remember that they represent a single source and that the information contained in them must be verified elsewhere when possible. We must also recall that any conclusions based on a credit report will reflect the reliability of the original informants and the purposes for which the record was compiled.

The relationships between publishing and distribution, like those with manufacturers, are particularly close and complicated. Again, many publishers began in business with a book-

¹¹ These are briefly described in Florence Bartoshesky, 'Dun Credit Ledgers at Baker Library,' *The Book 3* (1984): 5-6. See also Roy A. Foulke, *The Sinews of American Commerce* (New York, 1941) and James Madison, 'The Evolution of Commercial Credit-Reporting in Nineteenth-Century America,' *Business History Review* 48 (1974): 167-68, 174-76, 184; also see James D. Norris, *R. G. Dun & Co., 1841-1900: The Development of Credit-Reporting in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport, Conn., 1978). In surveying these records, I have found that the coverage of publishing is incomplete, perhaps because publishers did not rely on normal commercial channels for credit, or because they tended to operate small businesses in large business centers and were overshadowed by larger commercial concerns.

shop and maintained their own retail outlet, which handled both their own and other publishers' publications, long after this was a minor sideline to their publishing activities. At the same time, the expansion of the book trade in the nineteenth century, together with the development of the railroads and other improved means of communication that opened up access to the expanding markets in the South and the West, created a need for wholesalers and jobbers to take charge of the mass distribution of printed materials. The importance of these distributors is suggested by the increasing number of popular bestsellers, though I confess that I am at a loss to explain exactly by what means a particular book—for example, 300,000 copies of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Boston, 1852) in a single year,—passed in such large quantities from publisher to reader.¹² This is an extreme but not an isolated example, and clearly the means of distributing printed material were well established by 1852 and were capable of handling such large numbers of books. Fortunately, another essay will deal with this problem, and I look to that discussion for some of the approaches that will serve to explain this phenomenon. In this essay, I intend only to discuss a few of the aspects of publishing's relationships with distribution and the final audience that seem to me to present important insights into the nature and development of publishing in America.

A need for cash to meet obligations and notes coming due seems to have been a regular feature of publishing and called for some means of liquidating stock to raise this cash. The trade sale auction served this purpose and became a regular and important, though often maligned, institution in the nineteenth-century book trade.¹³ Much research remains to be done before

¹² See Frank Luther Mott, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States* (New York, 1947) and James D. Hart, *The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste* (New York, 1950).

¹³ Trade sales are described in Edward Hazen, *The Panorama of Professions and Trades; or Every Man's Book* (Philadelphia, 1836), pp. 196–97; Sutton, 'The Cincinnati Trade Sales, 1838–77,' *The Western Book Trade*, pp. 262–76; and Lehmann-Haupt et al., *The Book in America*, 2d ed. (1951), pp. 258–63.

we understand exactly how trade sales worked, who participated in them, and their role in disposing of remainders and other stock, including printing plates and stationery, no longer of use to the consignor, as well as their role in providing a normal means of distribution for new publications and a publisher's backlist. A first step in studying this aspect of publishing will be to search out surviving copies of trade sale catalogues, especially any that are annotated by purchasers with the prices that they paid, as well as contemporary accounts of the sales in letters, trade journals, and newspapers. A full study of the trade sale should provide invaluable insights into the business of publishing and distribution.

The relationships between publishers and bookstores and other distributors also need to be investigated and analyzed. Discount schedules, responsibility for the costs of shipping, policies on credits and returns, and agreements for exclusive rights to distribute a publication in an area have not yet been the subject of any systematic scholarly study. Such a study could be based on surviving publishers' and book dealers' records and correspondence, as well as on evidence that can be found in the advertisements, catalogues, and publications that publishers aimed at distributors. A particular need is for a list of publishers' catalogues, many of which have been stamped or printed with the name of an individual distributor or wholesaler, and for a list of the variety of leaflets, posters, newsletters, and other printed ephemera produced by publishers to advertise their publications.

Another area where investigations into distribution patterns should teach us about publishing are those cases where the publisher sold his product directly to the individual consumer. One wonders what role the post office played in allowing individuals with no access to bookstores to purchase books from the publisher through the mails. This distribution method may have been encouraged by the frequent practice of inserting publishers' advertisements in publications, as well as by the

distribution of a variety of periodicals through the mails, which served to advertise, review favorably, and publish excerpts from a publisher's current list of publications. Such periodicals not only served literary publishers—notable examples are *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, founded by Harper and Brothers in 1850 and *The Atlantic Monthly*, which was founded by Phillips, Sampson & Company in 1857, but which after 1860 became the organ of Ticknor and Fields—but were probably more important for more specialized publishers. Examples of these periodicals are the *American Phrenological Journal* for Fowler and Wells, the *Medico-Chirurgical Review* for J. B. Lipincott's medical list, and *The American Agriculturist* for Orange Judd & Company. The answer to the question of the role of direct distribution may be found in surviving publishers' archives, but further evidence will come to light through an investigation of the style and wording of the advertisements that publishers placed in the newspapers that reached a local audience on a regular basis. It may also be useful to investigate postage schedules and the congressional debates, reports, or hearings involved in revising these rates. Certain publishing schemes—such as the use of the periodicals just mentioned that tied in with a publisher's current list, and the publication of cheap series, which maintained the fiction of regular publication in order to take advantage of cheaper postage rates for serials¹⁴—seem to have been designed to allow for the direct distribution of publications to the consumer, and one wonders what role these schemes had in a publisher's overall strategies. The rise of a special form of subscription publishing after the Civil War, which was based on door-to-door canvassing and sales, may also have been an attempt at direct distribution.

¹⁴ James J. Barnes, *Authors, Publishers, and Politicians: The Quest for an Anglo-American Copyright Agreement, 1815-1854* (London, 1974), pp. 17-28, describes such ventures in the 1830s and 1840s. A superb example of the fictional aspect of regular publication of dated series is provided by *Nye and Riley's Wit and Humor* (New York, 1896), which, although issued under the date January 15, 1896, contains an obituary of Edgar Wilson Nye, who died on February 22, 1896.

However, I suspect that the canvassers probably offered the publications of several publishers at the same time and were in fact agents for specialized distributors, who in turn dealt with the individual publishers.¹⁵

The development of a characteristic and readily recognized house style, which was aimed at encouraging a consumer to purchase a particular book by a particular publisher, is another instance where aspects of distribution have an important influence on publishing decisions. A house style was not only dependent upon specialization in particular genres or subject fields, with a list of consistent quality, but it also depended on packaging the publications in a distinctive fashion. This house style could be defined by a particular typographic style, size, and format, but in the nineteenth century it was also often marked by a uniform style of edition binding. For example, the Boston publishers Ticknor and Fields were particularly successful at establishing a house style: in the 1840s and 1850s their list contained an unmatched collection of the best literary writing of contemporary American and British authors, all dressed in a familiar binding of brown ribbed (T grain) cloth, which seems to have been adapted from the London publisher Edward Moxon, and, as far as I know, was not copied by other American publishers. A later Ticknor and Fields house style, the smaller '*blue and gold*' editions of belle lettres first published in the late 1850s was very successful, although it was widely copied.

Another manifestation of this approach to publishing that was of particular importance in America was series publishing. Clearly, publishers hoped that by offering their books in a uniform style and binding as part of a series, often numbered, that the success and reputation of popular titles would boost the

¹⁵ See Frank E. Compton, 'Subscription Books,' *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 43(1939):879-94; Sutton, 'Henry Howe: Twenty Thousand Agents Wanted!' *The Western Book Trade*, pp. 215-35; and Michael Hackenberg, 'Hawking Subscription Books in 1870: A Salesman's Prospectus from Western Pennsylvania,' *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 78(1984):137-53.

sales of the entire series. A particularly interesting and successful form of series publishing was used by Harper and Brothers in the 1830s and 1840s; their extensive *Family Library* and *School District Library* series was supplemented by a number of smaller, more specialized series. In fact, many Harper titles were recycled through a number of series.¹⁶ Similar to series publishing was the practice of offering a collective edition of an author's writings in a uniform format and binding. Again, the goal was to sell the less popular titles along with the more popular ones. All of these types of publishing need to be investigated and analyzed, including the development of a publisher's series or house style, the ways in which publishers attempted to control and affect the decisions of the individual purchaser or reader, and publishers' efforts to control distribution patterns.

In our investigations of publishing, it is important to remember its central position in the book trade. It is not possible to study publishing in a meaningful way as an isolated activity, since the chief role of publishing is to connect the various branches of the book trade and to assure the smooth functioning of the trade as a whole.

IV

In this section I intend to discuss the relationships of publishers among themselves. These relationships were various; they ranged from friendly competition to outright hostility, or to attempts, usually short-lived, at some sort of cooperation for mutual advantages and benefits. Whatever these relationships were, our investigation of publishing will require that we analyze and understand them.

One important characteristic of the American book trade

¹⁶ These series are discussed in Exman's *The Brothers Harper* and *The House of Harper*.

was a widespread commitment to the goal of producing printed materials at a low cost, aimed at a mass audience—the ideal of providing the most books to the most people at the lowest possible price. This commitment was based on an oft-stated ideological conceit that, in the great American democratic experiment, access to information was not only a requirement but also a right. Until very recently, printed materials were the main source for this information. Parallel to this conceit was a widely felt mistrust of any form of combination or special privilege and a belief in the correctness of laissez faire competition. These facts of American ideology were certainly reflected in the relationships of publishers to each other. Still, the economic realities of their business required that publishers to some extent coordinate their activities and learn to come to terms with each other.

Formal attempts at coordinating publishing activities resulted in the formation of a series of trade associations, usually restricted to a particular city. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, publishers participated in a variety of booksellers' and printers' associations, but as the book trade expanded and publishing became established as a separate activity, a number of specialized organizations arose that were dedicated to the needs of publishers. A history of these associations would be of great interest, for it would shed light not only on what their stated purposes were but also on how well they fulfilled these goals. My sense is that these associations were generally formed for the purpose of regulating publishing activities, and particularly, to establish standard discount schedules and maintain retail prices, often in reaction to a perception that trade sales had a damaging effect on publishing. Even trade sales required some sort of formal organization, however. I doubt that American publishers, unlike their colleagues in London, were able to maintain such controls for any period of time, and I suspect that their associations generally served merely a social function, providing for celebratory dinners and perhaps for

funeral expenses or charity payments to a deceased member's family.¹⁷

The investigation of trade periodicals devoted to publishing is also worth further investigation. A German visitor to the United States in the 1840s noted the general disorganization of the American book trade and particularly the absence of any periodical that would serve to record new publications and provide a forum for discussions of publishing developments.¹⁸ Even by that time, however, there had been a few hesitant attempts at filling this need; by 1876, *Publishers' Weekly* was firmly established as the chief, but by no means the sole, organ of the trade. We need to make a full list of American publishing trade periodicals and to locate and examine unbroken runs.¹⁹ Although many of these periodicals—such as *Wiley & Putnam's Literary News-Letter* and *Appleton's Literary Bulletin*—were published by a particular house and were mainly dedicated to their own publications and affairs, others—such as the *Literary World* or *Norton's Literary Gazette and Publisher's Circular*—were much broader in scope. These periodicals are all an invaluable source of information on publishing activities; they also serve as a record of the relationships among publishers.

Another important field for further research is that of the various less-formal arrangements between publishers, arrangements that served to regulate their activities. During the eighteenth century, the exchange of lists between publishers was a well-established means of distribution, and I suspect that this pattern survived well into the next century. The most familiar arrangement in the nineteenth century, however, was what is

¹⁷ The early history of book trade associations are discussed in Rollo G. Silver, *The American Printer, 1787-1825* (Charlottesville, 1967), pp. 78-89. The British situation is discussed in James J. Barnes, *Free Trade in Books: A Study of the London Book Trade since 1800* (Oxford, 1964).

¹⁸ Hermann E. Ludewig, 'Die Organe der Erscheinenden Literatur,' *Serapeum* 7(1846):177-90.

¹⁹ Adolph Growoll, *Book-Trade Bibliography in the United States in the XIXth Century* (New York, 1898), remains the best guide to these important periodicals.

known as 'courtesy of the trade.' This arrangement established a standard set of procedures that regulated the rights of publishers to reprint in America the uncopyrighted works of foreign authors.²⁰ A number of questions arise: How did 'courtesy of the trade' work in reality? Which publishers followed this convention, and for what periods of time, and with which types of publications? What sorts of pressure was used to maintain it? Were there practical reasons involving the costs and technology of book production that served to encourage the practice, in addition to more obvious means of coercion?²¹

A number of other informal arrangements between publishers deserve our attention. Although the practice of establishing congers of publishers to pool resources and share the risks of publishing a particular work never became as firmly established in the less-centralized book trade of America as it did in London, it was not an uncommon event during the first decades of the nineteenth century and needs to be investigated. I know of no American instance of the activity of trading in shares that was so characteristic of British publishing in this period, but such a practice may have existed.²² We also need to investigate the arrangements that are reflected in multiple imprints on a single publication or in multiple issues, each with a different publisher's imprint. Were there not other concealed relationships between publishers—agreements for exclusive distribution rights to particular publications or for the exchange of lists—that need to be revealed and analyzed?

During the period that we are considering, the American book trade developed from a minor branch of the British book trade into an independent and highly successful business in its

²⁰ Exman, *The Brothers Harper*, pp. 52–59 and Ballou, *Building of the House*, pp. 70–84, both give examples of how this convention did and did not work.

²¹ I have suggested this possibility in my 'Printing with Plates in the Nineteenth-Century United States,' *Publishing History* 5 (1983):15–26.

²² For an overview of the British situation see Terry Belanger, 'From Bookseller to Publisher: Changes in the London Book Trade, 1750–1850,' in Richard G. Landon, ed., *Book Selling and Book Buying: Aspects of the Nineteenth-Century British and North American Book Trade* (Chicago, 1978), pp. 7–16.

own right. This development is important for all of our investigations as we attempt to identify and understand the characteristics and contributions that are peculiar to the American book trade. For this investigation of publishing in America, it is particularly important to examine the relationships between American publishers and their foreign colleagues. A significant proportion of American books originated abroad, either as foreign texts reprinted here or as books produced abroad but imported and distributed here. In addition, many aspects of American publishing were copied from or influenced by foreign practices. Moreover, American texts and books were popular abroad and sold there, and their story is also part of our investigations. The ties between American and British publishers, who shared a common language and heritage, were particularly strong. A number of American publishers (Mathew Carey, for example) began their careers in Britain and in Ireland, and several American firms, such as Wiley and Putnam, established London branches to look after their interests in Britain. It would be interesting to know more about the role and activities of those individuals, men such as John Miller and Obadiah Rich, who served as agents mediating between American and British publishers.²³

American publishers also established important relationships with Continental publishers that need to be investigated. America was populated by immigrants, who established their own ethnic and foreign-language publishing houses in their new homeland. To what extent did these publishing establishments build connections with the book trade of their country of origin, and to what extent did they remain independent? What were their relationships with other American publishers, and what was their fate as the immigrant population that they were

²³ See James J. Barnes, 'John Miller: First Transatlantic Publisher's Agent,' *Studies in Bibliography* 29(1976):373-79; Adrian W. Knepper, 'Obadiah Rich: Bibliopole,' *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 49(1955):112-30; and Norman P. Tucker, 'Obadiah Rich, 1783-1850: Early American Hispanist' (Ph.D. diss. Harvard University, 1973).

designed to serve became assimilated into American culture and society? An interesting study would be that of the influence that the flood of German immigrants after 1849 had on American publishing. These immigrants brought with them their experience of the highly organized German book trade, centered on the Börsenverein of Leipzig, and it can be no coincidence that the names of Hermann E. Ludewig, Frederick Leyboldt, Nicolas Trübner, and later Adolph Growoll and Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, are all associated with the beginnings of American book trade bibliography and history. In any case, we must avoid an isolated approach in our investigations; surely our understanding of the book in American culture and society will be more complete and richer when placed in this broader international perspective.

V

Thus far in this essay I have limited my discussion of publishing to the context of the book trade, though all publishing activities also took place within the larger matrix of American society and culture and were influenced by intellectual, economic, and political trends and forces. These too must be considered in our investigations of American publishing. Although it is beyond the scope of this essay to examine these cultural influences in all their variety and complexity, I do intend to note several of the more important ways in which they affected publishing activities and decisions and to suggest areas where further work is needed.

American society has always produced numerous intellectual and cultural movements that were reflected in and influenced by our published output. The attention that intellectual and literary historians have paid to transcendentalism and the publications that it produced illustrates this point, although such movements as abolitionism and religious revivalism were far more important in the quantity and range of publications that they spawned. The role of publishing in fostering and spread-

ing awareness of such movements was considerable and provides an important incentive for our investigations. But more specifically, we need to discover and research the ways in which these movements and the social forces they represent influenced publishing decisions and activities. They certainly played an important role in providing new subject matter for publications and in opening up new audiences. We need to examine how a variety of organizations and institutions were responsible for sponsoring particular publications, series, and periodicals. In this regard, the role of governmental bodies—city, state, and federal—and religious organizations—tract, Sunday school, and missionary societies—is well understood and easily recognized, but the sponsorship role of a number of other organizations—such as educational, learned, and historical societies—is also relevant. The importance of official patronage in fostering the spread of printing on the American frontier has been well documented.²⁴ But what exactly were the arrangements that were made, and how did patronage encourage and restrict publishing activities?

In addition to formally sponsoring particular publications, the federal government undertook to encourage publishing activities in a variety of more general ways. A number of scholars have already examined the ways that copyright legislation and treaties, or rather the lack of the latter, affected publishing, although in general they have focused their attention on the influences of copyright on authorship and the earnings of authors.²⁵ Further work will be needed on the history of copyright legislation and treaties, and on their influence on other aspects of the book trade and publishing during the nineteenth century. The availability of a large pool of popular foreign works that were unprotected by copyright certainly played an important part in the expansion of the American book trade, for it allowed these works to be reprinted in very cheap edi-

²⁴ For example, see Wroth, *Colonial Printer*.

²⁵ The best study is Barnes, *Authors, Publishers, and Politicians*.

tions. I wonder, though, if it can be documented, as was frequently claimed, that the lack of international copyright actually discouraged the publication of copyrighted American works. Such works were indeed published and can often be found in editions every bit as cheap as the foreign works, but perhaps the cost of their publication was underwritten in part by the profits from the foreign works, on which no royalty payments were required. Federal legislation and policies also affected publishing through protective tariffs. The role of imported books in America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries cannot be overemphasized, but our knowledge of their importance in the nineteenth century remains incomplete. I suspect that imports were then largely limited to expensive technical and scholarly books aimed at a small audience, even though foreign books were certainly produced cheaply enough to be able to compete with the cheapest American publications. An investigation of tariff legislation and the accompanying debates, petitions, and reports would certainly provide useful insights into this question. A third area where federal action must have had a direct effect on publishing was through the control of postal rates and policies. I have already suggested the possible importance of the mails as a means of direct distribution of printed materials, and feel sure that an examination of postal regulations and rates will add to our understanding of publishing.

Another important field for investigation of publishing's relationship with society is the question of the censorship of seditious, libelous, blasphemous, and obscene materials. During the colonial period, government control of the press was not uncommon, as evidenced by the experiences of William Nuthead in Jamestown in 1683, of William Bradford in Philadelphia in 1693, and the Massachusetts law of 1662 that required that a text be approved by a licensing board before being published. In a few cases, the people took affairs into their own hands and plundered or burned printing offices. The

celebrated libel case of John Peter Zenger of New York in 1734 may have established an important precedent for the freedom of the press, later reinforced in the Bill of Rights, but censorship continued to be practiced in America. For example, Ezra H. Heywood spent time in jail for distributing his curious free-love tract *Cupid's Yokes* (Princeton, Mass., 1876) through the mails, although the large number of copies of this work that were produced suggests to me that this was not a totally successful attempt at censorship. We need to investigate further the extent and effectiveness of formal censorship. Did the federal or state governments have other means of restricting the circulation of undesirable works than banning their circulation through the mails? We must also remember, however, that in addition to formal, legal censorship, a whole range of social forces could and undoubtedly did serve to remove or limit general access to certain printed materials that violated a community's moral, cultural, or political sensibilities. These forces could surface and influence the circulation of printed materials in many ways: the queasiness of backers or manufacturers when faced with certain works or ideas; the refusal of distributors, bookshops, or libraries to handle materials they deemed questionable; or, ultimately, a refusal by the consumers to purchase a publisher's products in reaction to what they regarded as a transgression of their standards of morality or propriety. All of these forces, which had the effect of censorship because they limited publishing activity and choices, deserve to be part of our investigation.²⁶

VI

Any study of publishing must confront one important area that, for our period at least, remains barely touched upon: its nature

²⁶ Most studies of censorship in America underestimate the problem before the activities of Anthony Comstock at the end of the nineteenth century, although James C. N. Paul and Murray L. Schwartz cover the earlier period briefly in *Federal Censorship: Obscenity in the Mail* (New York, 1961).

as a business. Ultimately, the measure of any publishing venture depended on its economic failure or success, and we must begin to analyze how economic factors influenced publishing decisions in specific cases and how such factors affected the business of publishing in general.

The first step in such an investigation will be to analyze the costs of individual publications. Fortunately, publishers seem to have developed a rudimentary form of cost accounting early in the nineteenth century and some of these cost books survive. Building on the information recorded there, we must attempt to analyze the costs of publications and to establish what were normal patterns and ratios for the relative costs of paper, printing, binding, advertising, and royalties in comparison with the overall cost of a publication. We also might consider what the normal ratios were between production costs per copy and the retail and wholesale price. A more difficult problem will be to develop a sensible system for reckoning overhead—editorial and clerical salaries, rent, and interest on capital—and distributing these costs to the various publications in a publisher's list. These calculations will allow us to compare gross profits to net profits and to begin to judge in a quantitative way the profitability of particular publications and publishing strategies. We need to look for distinct patterns in these cost ratios between different types of publications, or between the lists of different publishers, and to analyze how changes in edition size, royalty rates, or advertising expenses affected these ratios and profitability. Were certain publishers more successful because they established and maintained more advantageous cost ratios for their publications? Were certain types of publications more profitable? Did cost ratios change over time as new manufacturing technologies and more sophisticated distribution networks became available? What were the optimum edition sizes? Were economies of scale arising from an increased edition size offset by increased risks and costs of venture capital? The answers to these and many other related

questions will provide many important insights into the economics of publishing.²⁷

A further step in this investigation of the economics of publishing will be to look at publishing in the larger business environment of the entire book trade. I have already suggested some aspects of this investigation—for example, in discussing the role of financing in publishing—but others remain to be investigated. We need to examine how economic factors were reflected in publishing activities and strategies. Is there evidence that the types of analysis suggested in the preceding paragraph were actually used in assessing past performance or planning future publishing programs? If not, what was the basis for such judgments? What were the economic forces that led to the concentration of publishing in urban centers and eventually led to the absolute predominance of New York City over several important earlier centers such as Philadelphia, Cincinnati, or Boston? What economic advantages encouraged the strategy of specializing in a particular genre or subject field, as opposed to the strategy of publishing a broad range of material? What sorts of organizational strategies, such as vertical or horizontal integration, did publishing develop to cope with and take advantage of our expanding and increasingly complex economic and technical environment? What role did publishing play in the evolution of this complexity? How did publishers react to and cope with the business cycles of boom and bust that have characterized the American economy? What economic forces encouraged or hindered the consolidation of publishers into large combinations, as opposed to their remaining small, independent entrepreneurs? The opportunities for research into the economic aspects of publishing are many, and the results should be fruitful.

The final stage in this investigation, possible only after our

²⁷ Leonard Shatzkin, *In Cold Type: Overcoming the Book Crisis* (Boston, 1982), provides concrete examples of how the economics of publishing can be usefully analyzed, although he is concerned exclusively with modern-day publishing.

understanding of the economics of publishing has reached the stage where we have begun to postulate the answers to many of these questions, will be to compare publishing with other American business enterprises. To what extent was publishing similar to and how did it differ from other businesses? What sorts of strategies and structures did publishing share with or borrow from other businesses? How does publishing compare with them in terms of risks and potential profits? Was publishing typical in its reactions to the changing economic environment, or, if it was not, in what ways did it differ? Scholars have tended to consider publishing as a special activity and to emphasize its unique qualities, but I wonder whether it is not in reality much the same as many other business enterprises, such as the garment or shoe industry. These matters will only become clear after much further work in the field.²⁸

In our investigations of the economic aspects of publishing, one interesting aspect of the field will become better understood. This is the curious perspective that publishing is a creative intellectual act only tangentially influenced by practical business considerations. This perspective is hinted at in the passages quoted at the head of this essay, but is made much clearer in the memoirs and biographies of American publishers. For example, James T. Fields's *Yesterdays with Authors* (Boston, 1872) and James C. Derby's *Fifty Years among Authors, Books and Publishers* (New York, 1884) emphasize the publisher's association and friendship with famous authors and literary figures but largely ignore their business activities or associates. Part of our study of publishing will be to investigate this ideology and to explore the self-image of publishing as a profession and the ways that this image inhibited and encour-

²⁸ General histories of American business that I have found helpful are Arthur H. Cole, *Business Enterprise in Its Social Setting* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959); Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of Industrial Enterprise* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962); Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977); and the essays in Stuart W. Bruchey, ed., *Small Business in American Life* (New York, 1980).

aged the business of publishing. We will need to relate this self-image to the mercantilist ideology of the eighteenth century and the developing American business attitudes and ideals of the new republic.

VII

Before concluding this essay, I want to stress two basic needs that seem to me to be of the highest priority. Throughout this essay I have suggested many areas that need further research, and I have tried to point to new approaches that seem to me to be useful in increasing our understanding of publishing. The two needs discussed here encompass many of these more specific projects, but it strikes me that addressing our energies to them will be a basic step for all further investigations and research.

The first need is to identify, locate, and interpret the primary sources for publishing history. Although many specific archives and types of material are well known and have already been used by scholars in their work, there has not yet been a systematic attempt to uncover and make available the basic resources for our work. Surely we must begin here.

An important step towards this goal will be to identify as many different types of source materials as possible. Although certain classes of material come immediately to mind—memoirs, business records, archives, and publishers' and trade sale catalogues—others are not so obvious and have not yet been used to full advantage. The bankruptcy records kept in the Massachusetts probate courts have provided invaluable insights into the publishing activities of the Boston firms of Thayer and Eldridge, as well as of the Arena Publishing Company.²⁹ Are there not also insurance, banking, tax, and incorporation records that will also be useful? Shouldn't we look at

²⁹ Roger E. Stoddard, 'Vanity and Reform: B. O. Flower's Arena Publishing Company, Boston, 1890-1896,' *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 76(1982): 273-337. I thank Rollo G. Silver and Madeleine B. Stern for bringing the Thayer and Eldridge bankruptcy records to my attention.

the mass of data contained in printed government documents and census records? Are there customs records that will document the import and export of books? Can we use library records and catalogues to analyze purchasing and distribution patterns of books? This search for source material is, in some sense, limited only by our imagination and ingenuity in discovering new data and new ways that the book played a role in American culture and society. It will be important, however, not to restrict our search to manuscript or archival materials, especially when we consider the intimate connection between publishing and printed objects.

Next, we will need systematically to locate the surviving examples of each type of source material. In America—in contrast with many foreign countries where legal requirements, more stable business environments, and a stronger sense of the importance of tradition have all encouraged the preservation of cultural and historical records—we have often been very profligate with such material. Very few publishing firms that existed one hundred years ago are still in business today, and it seems safe to say that even fewer publishing archives or records survive from that or earlier periods. This situation makes it imperative that we locate those records that do survive. But a finding list will not be sufficient. If we are to pursue our research, we will need to make sure that these sources are preserved for the future, made accessible to serious scholars (in cases where they remain in private repositories), and, in appropriate cases, made more available by being published in microform or print.

The final step will be learning to interpret and analyze the data contained in these sources. Only rarely has the exact data needed for our investigations been recorded, and, even in those cases where it is available, it is not necessarily organized in a way that is useful for our studies. Often, the meaning of the data preserved is anything but self-apparent. We need to develop a set of analytical methods and tools with which to inter-

pret this data in useful and meaningful ways. In those cases where relevant data is missing, incomplete, or inadequate, we will need to develop strategies that will help us fill in the picture, such as through the manipulation of related information that does survive and by building and testing general models based on that information. It is particularly important that we bring a critical attitude to our use of these sources, and that we evaluate them in terms of the variety of functions—advertising, inventory, cost accounting, recording past agreements and future obligations, meeting legal responsibilities and requirements—that these materials were originally created to serve. We need to learn to interpret the data contained in these sources. Too often, work in our field has been marred by an uncritical use of sources; data has been accepted naively, without being verified by a study of related evidence, in much the same way that investigations of literacy have been based simply on signature counts, without a full appreciation of what exactly was being measured.

Given the primary importance of this need, an appealing project would be to address it in one all-encompassing guide. Unfortunately, this approach strikes me as impractical. The types of sources are too various and are preserved in too many different forms and places, and the meaning and usefulness of many of them remains obscure or has not yet been discovered. The very complexity of the materials makes it difficult to imagine how they could be brought together meaningfully in a single way. A more plausible approach would be to plan a series of guides, each limited to a distinct type of source or group of related source materials. Each guide would not only attempt to list all the surviving material within its scope, giving the present location of that material, but it could also describe the nature of the source and explain the meaning of the data it contains. In addition, each guide might suggest meaningful ways that the source materials could be used for research. Such guides will need to be compiled by scholars who understand

and have actually used the sources for their researches. Inevitably, the progress in creating such a series of guides would be dialectical: the publication of a list of surviving source materials will undoubtedly bring additional material to light, and, as our work in the history of the book in America progresses, new uses for the sources with which we are already familiar will probably be discovered, and new types of source materials will be found to be relevant.

Our second basic need is bibliographical. We must complete the work of establishing the record of the published output of the American book trade for our period. This output is the primary source for all studies of publishing, and the task of compiling and analyzing the imprint lists of individual publishers is an indispensable first step for further investigations. A book, by its very physical nature, provides the final test that will confirm our theories, models, and generalizations. This primary role of the book, and the great need for more bibliographical work, was recognized by G. Thomas Tanselle in his important essay 'The Historiography of American Literary Publishing' (*Studies in Bibliography* 18 [1965]: 3-39), published nearly twenty years ago. In this essay, Tanselle points to the importance of compiling imprint lists as a first step in our work, but thus far few scholars have accepted this challenge.³⁰

Fortunately, work on this bibliographical task is well underway, however far from completion it remains. The monumental work of Charles Evans and his successors covers American publications through 1800, and is at present being supplemented by the North American Imprints Program here at the American Antiquarian Society. This coverage has been extended into the 1830s by Ralph R. Shaw and Richard H. Shoemaker and their successors. Particular genres and locations are

³⁰ Tanselle states in part: 'It should be a truism, but apparently is not, that a knowledge of the lists of individual publishers underlies all broader investigations into publishing history. Generalizations about the output of any publisher, about the characteristics of publishers in any period, or about the trends in American publishing from one period to another, must begin there' (p. 38).

the focus of many excellent bibliographies and checklists, many of which build on work sponsored by the WPA in the 1930s. Further lists of American publications are found in many types of sources, such as publishers' catalogues, book trade periodicals, copyright records, publishers' archives, and library catalogues. But none of these bibliographies or sources is comprehensive and, as the published output multiplied with the expansion of the book trade during the nineteenth century, coverage became less and less complete. Many kinds of important printed ephemera are scarcely recorded, and have frequently been excluded from the scope of past bibliographical work. Full bibliographical control of all these sources is an unattainable goal, but, nonetheless, it remains an important one.

For the study of publishing, it will be necessary to organize the bibliographical work into the form of imprint lists, that is, chronological lists of the publications of an individual firm. Compiling these lists will involve searching through many of the already existing bibliographies—a formidable task that will become easier as it becomes possible to make computer searches of large bibliographical databases such as OCLC and RLIN. This work will also involve discovering and identifying publications that have not yet been recorded or described but, are listed in publishers' advertisements, catalogues, and records. But bibliography is more than simply listing books. For our work, it will also be necessary to analyze the imprint lists in order to discover and document the characteristics of a publisher's list for a certain period and to identify trends and developments that arose. Until this bibliographical analysis is done, our conclusions will remain unproven and our discussions impressionistic. After the imprint lists have been compiled and analyzed, it will, for the first time, be possible to make definitive statements about a publisher's list, to assess the amount of specialization in his output, and to interpret how the published output reacted to or affected a whole range of intellectual, political, and cultural movements.

In doing this work, it will be of first importance to locate surviving copies and to examine and analyze them bibliographically. Although these printed objects are our primary source of information, the evidence they present is often hidden or confusing. Frequently, a title page is a false witness that, if accepted without question, will mislead us in our understanding of the nature or subject matter of a publication, its author or publisher, and the date and means of its publication. Only a careful and bibliographically informed examination of each publication, both of its text and its physical structure, will make it possible for us to interpret accurately and usefully the important, but often duplicitous, evidence it provides. For example, a single text discovered with a variety of imprints may signify a popular work frequently reprinted, a single publishing venture issued simultaneously for a number of distinct markets, or a failure that was remaindered several times with canceled title leaves. Only careful examination of the bibliographical evidence will allow us to discriminate between these possibilities.

These then are the two basic needs that I see as crucial to our investigations into the role of publishing in the history of the book in American culture and society. All of our theories and conclusions will ultimately be based on the evidence found in the surviving records of the book trade and its published output. The success or failure of our work will depend on our ability to meet the challenge of identifying, locating, and interpreting these basic source materials.

VIII

We find ourselves at a very exciting stage in the investigation of the history of the book in American culture and society. The history of the book is in the process of becoming established as an important field of research, and in the future we should find ourselves with the access to resources that will allow us to call on the expertise of a wide range of scholars and specialists. But

this favorable situation is also a challenge for us to come up with approaches and results that satisfy the interest and the excitement that the history of the book is generating, results that help us interpret history in a meaningful and useful way.

In this essay I have attempted to explore and illuminate the importance of publishing to the study of the book. Future investigations should add to our understanding of the role of publishing in the book trade. But in pursuing these investigations we must avoid limiting ourselves to the perspectives of a chronicler or antiquarian, however useful and important these approaches may prove to be. Publishing is more than a branch of the American book trade or American business history. The greater value of publishing is inherent in the significance of printed materials, which for our period remained the major agent of communication and which document many important developments and changes. In marked contrast to many other material objects, such as furniture, tools, or shoes, books generated an intense amount of interest and excitement, as well as other reactions, both positive and negative. Books were the object of concentrated attempts to increase or limit their accessibility. Books were responsible for the spread of new ideas and for the survival of old ones. For all these reasons, our study of publishing will not only contribute to our understanding of the history of the book but will also add to our understanding of the role books played in significant intellectual, social, and cultural trends in American history.

Postscript

This paper was prepared for a needs-and-opportunities conference on the history of the book in American culture held at the American Antiquarian Society, November 1-3, 1984. It was not meant to be a definitive study of publishing in the

United States but rather to serve as the basis for discussion and to suggest questions and directions for further research. It is here offered as originally written in the hope that it may still usefully serve these functions.

After a year, I find no reason to alter the main points presented in the paper, but I believe that two further aspects of publishing might have been included. The first is the investigation of the social, religious, and political environments within which individual publishers found themselves. Which of their relatives were also involved in the book trade? Who were their neighbors? To what church did they belong? How did they stand on such issues as temperance, abolition, and women's rights? Did they participate in the activities of political parties? The answers to these and similar questions may go a long way to explaining publishing strategies and decisions. The second potential area for study is the recognition of the important connections between publishing and jobbing. Whereas publishers leave behind physical evidence of their activities in the imprints of the books that they published, wholesalers and jobbers often remain anonymous. It seems likely to me that this difference has meant that modern scholars have tended to underestimate the importance that distribution played in the emergence of publishing as a distinct activity in the nineteenth century. Several firms—D. Appleton & Co. of New York and Parry, M'Millan & Co. of Philadelphia come to mind—may have been more significant as jobbers than as publishers, and I feel sure that a closer investigation of the interplay between both activities will prove fruitful.

Both of these points became clear to me as I was working on the research for a paper on trade sales in nineteenth-century America, which was delivered at a conference on the book in nineteenth-century America held at the University of Chicago, October 18–19, 1985. Many of the papers delivered at this conference—which are to be published in a separate volume by the Library of Congress's Center for the Book—deal directly

with problems or issues relevant to publishing that I have outlined in this paper and show that the present interest and activity in the field of book history in America is beginning to discover the answers to many of the questions that I have posed. In addition, Joshua L. Rosenbloom, a graduate student in the field of economic history at Stanford University, has prepared an excellent paper on the emergence of modern publishing in the United States during the first decades of the nineteenth century; his work brings new theoretical and analytical approaches to the topic that seem promising.

In the penultimate section of this paper, I suggest two needs that are of such priority that they seem basic to further investigations and research. The first of these, the need to identify and locate the primary sources for publishing history, is being addressed by the Bibliographical Society of America. Under its direction, a pilot project, funded by the H. W. Wilson Foundation, is now drawing to a close and should result in a concrete proposal for the compilation of a comprehensive guide to surviving book trade and publishing archives. Progress on the latter has not been so promising, and the need for bibliographical work on the output of American publishers cannot be overemphasized. Nevertheless, two relevant projects should be mentioned. William Clarkin's *Mathew Carey: a Bibliography of His Publications, 1785-1824* (New York, 1984) lists the output of one of the most important figures in the emergence of American publishing, although it leaves much to be desired in its accuracy and analysis. Robert Harlan of the University of California, Berkeley, is preparing a list of San Francisco imprints through 1869 that promises to add significantly to our understanding of publishing on the American frontier.

This work is encouraging, but the task at hand remains formidable. Although current work in the study of the history of the book in American culture and society has confirmed our convictions of the fruitfulness of the topic for our investigations, it is clear that much work remains before us and that

many more questions remain to be posed than have yet been answered. The central role and function of publishing in the book trade cannot be questioned, and as our understanding of publishing increases, so must our understanding of the importance of the book in American culture and society.

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