# William Cobbett's Account Book

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THE American Antiquarian Society has in its library the account book used by William Cobbett as a bookseller in Philadelphia and New York from June 1796 to June 1800. Work on the preparation of a book on Cobbett, to be entitled 'William Cobbett and the United States, 1792–1835: A Bibliography,' made mandatory an examination of this account book, and the following study is a result.

William Cobbett, 1763–1835, is probably best known today as the author of *Rural Rides* (which was recently reprinted in paperback) and other English works, or as the political reformist who spent two years in Newgate prison for his outspokenness and who at the end of his life was a member of Parliament. But Cobbett really began his career of writing and politics in the United States in the years 1794–1800 when, as 'Peter Porcupine,' he became, I believe, the most widelyread newspaper editor and pamphleteer in the country.<sup>1</sup>

Cobbett leased a house and shop in May 1796 at 25 North Second Street, Philadelphia. He had broken with his first publisher, Thomas Bradford, in March and was employing Benjamin Davies on an interim basis. In July he had a formal opening of his shop, and *The Scare Crow* appeared as the first work of which he was publisher. The earliest entry in the account book is for June 22, 1796, and entries continue until Cobbett's departure from the country on June 1, 1800 (with a few entries

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>For a very good description of this portion of Cobbett's life, see Mary E. Clark, Peter Porcupine in America: The Career of William Cobbett, 1792-1800 (Philadelphia, 1939).

made after that by John Ward Fenno who acted as collection agent for Cobbett). Hence the account book covers the full span of Cobbett's book-selling and publishing activities in this country (leaving aside his second sojourn here in 1817–1819).

The account book is large folio with 160 double pages and some miscellaneous single pages, including an index. A single page measures approximately  $15\frac{1}{2} \times 9\frac{1}{4}$  inches. On each double page the left hand has the customer's name and debits and the right hand has credits, and in some cases addresses or other identification. The entries are by Cobbett and at least two others. The customers' names, in large flowing script, may well have been written by Cobbett, who had a copybook hand when he chose to use it. Some customers' accounts ran to several pages, while some pages contain as many as four accounts. Some pages have over forty entries and others only a handful.

Frequent references in the accounts to a 'day book' indicate that transactions were entered there first in detail and then posted to the account book when customer credit was being extended. In general, there appear to be no cash transactions, and cash sales to customers who visited the shop would not be reflected in the account book.

As to the books which Cobbett dealt in, about 340 titles are represented, a good many by only a copy or two which were evidently ordered specially for customers. There are many English imports in the latter category. As might be expected, the books and pamphlets which were sold in quantity were mainly Cobbett imprints. Appendix A is a chronology of these as derived from the accounts, within the limitations noted. Appendix B gives sales data for these imprints similarly derived. It may be observed that the sales prices roughly correspond with the size of the pamphlet or book, and the dealer discounts with the sales prices. One exception is *Cannibal's Progress*, which Cobbett priced very low as an anti-French propaganda document. Parenthetically, it appears that Cobbett once took in trade for books one 'Pointer Dog', valued at \$52.50 (fol. 49).

Some of Cobbett's publishing ventures as disclosed in the accounts are deserving of special mention. One of these was his publication in May 1798 for the Reverend G. W. Snyder of Fredericktown, Maryland, of his work in 213 pages: *The Age of Reason Unreasonable; or, the Folly of Rejecting Revealed Religion. In a Series of Letters to a Friend* (Evans 34568). This was scarcely a dashing success, but is interesting for the publishing details (fol. 103). The printing was by Budd & Bartram, the binding in boards by [David] Patton and the binding in sheep by [Phillip] Limeburner, all of Philadelphia. 500 copies were printed of which 305 were in sheets at 50 cents, 97 in boards at 56 cents and 98 in sheep at 75 cents. The costs were as follows:

9 reams printing paper	\$ 31.50
Cash paid for 'coppyright'	1.20
Advertising of D° 10 times	2.75
Printing	72.00
Binding in boards at six cents	5.82
Binding in leather at 13 cents	12.74
	\$126.01

Cobbett sold one copy in boards at 56 cents (two reported sold elsewhere in the accounts must have been returned). The Reverend Mr. Snyder paid \$80 in cash. 36 copies in boards and 98 in sheep were delivered to his order, leaving 60 copies in boards and 305 in sheets. Since the minister was also charged with the advertising costs at \$2.75 for another Cobbett imprint, Patrick Kennedy, *An Answer to Paine's Letter to General Washington* (Evans 33947), his deficit was \$47.64, upon payment of which Cobbett was ready to deliver the remainder. On June 20, 1799, the firm of Isaac and John Mentz of Snyder's Fredericktown received the remainder in exchange for their 'note of hand payable in 4 months' in the amount of \$47.64 (fol. 74). Presumably this was arranged by Snyder. John Lowell had Cobbett print *The Antigallican* (Evans 32393) on a commission basis (fol. 75). Printing costs were \$78.20 for 300 copies of 86 pages each, February 5, 1798. The sale price was  $37\frac{1}{2}$  cents. Cobbett credited himself with commissions of \$9.37 $\frac{1}{2}$  on '100 Antigallican retailed at Philadelphia,' at 25%, and of \$22.55 on 200 'sent to correspondents in different parts,' at 30%. There seems no basis for the suggestion which has been made that Cobbett was actually author of this work.

Timothy Pickering, the Secretary of State, evidently in the interest of person and party, had Cobbett arrange a reprint (by John Ward Fenno) from his *Porcupine's Gazette* of January 24, 1799, of one thousand six hundred eighty-two copies of the *Message from the President of the United States Accompanying a Report of the Secretary of State* regarding France, dated January 21, 1799 (Evans 36548). The charge was \$28.00 (fol. 104).

Bibles and prayer books were evidently important staples. In April 1798 Cobbett purchased of John Cross forty-four folio bibles at eight dollars each, less 25% (fol. 99). In May of that year he received from Thomas Allen, bookseller of New York, on commission of 25%, 54 prayer books as follows: 32 plain at  $62\frac{1}{2}e$ , 6 in red 'morroco' at \$1.75, 2 do. with clasps at \$2.00, 2 in blue do. at \$1.75, 3 in calf gilt at \$1.50, 3 in green 'morroco' at \$1.75 and 6 in sheep gilt at \$1.25.

Cobbett made a significant investment in the United States Court Kalendar (Evans 36601) in December 1799 and January 1800 by the purchase from John Morgan of Philadelphia of 398 copies for \$367.50. The bindings were interestingly varied: 36 in morocco with locks at \$1.50; 14 in morocco but locks not put on, not priced; 183 in morocco with tucks at \$1.25; 129 in red sheep at \$.75 and 36 in red sheep with locks at \$1.00 (fol. 153).

Booksellers of course did not confine themselves to books. Cobbett sold writing paper, sealing wax, tooth powder, quills, brushes, and red ink. He purchased from Robert Field of New York 174 prints at 75¢ and another 86 at 371/2¢ or 25¢ (fol. 119,133). He purchased from Morgan & Wigmore, 'pocket book makers,' in 1798 and John Morgan in 1799 and 1800 \$693.16 worth of pocket books (fol. 60,153). On February 10, 1798, he purchased from Dr. William Burrell of New York 20 Godboldt's Balsam<sup>2</sup> at \$4 per bottle. One of the purchasers from Cobbett was the eminent geographer, Rev. Jedidiah Morse (fol. 100).

An extraordinary amount of money was spent for lottery tickets, which varied in price from 6 to 14, with the bulk sold by Cobbett in the range 6.50 to 8. Over the period June 2, 1797 to March 7, 1799, the account book records sales of 263 tickets for just over 1900. Some of the lotteries are designated as 'Canal,' 'Canal No. 2,' or 'Washington.'

As to customers, the account book shows 229, of which 75, or one-third, can be identified with some certainty as fellow booksellers because so noted in the accounts, or in book-trade lists, or simply because of the quantities billed and discounts allowed. Appendix C lists the booksellers arranged by geographical distribution, which was quite wide. Also, the accounts with some of them show fairly large sums, indicating that Cobbett did a substantial business. Thus the account with Archibald Drummond in New York ran to a total of \$2943.25 and was settled May 2, 1799, by a bill on London for \$1373.30 (fol. 134). James and Andrew Duncan of Glasgow received £148/10/6 to settle their balance (fol. 139) and John Wright of London received a bill of exchange for £600 December 5, 1799 (fol. 147). Asbury Dickens of Philadelphia ran a total of \$754.85, George Hill of Baltimore \$1928.85, William Pritchard of Richmond \$1748.66, James White of Boston \$987.36, and William Young of Charleston \$562.85.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* (Hartford 1789), pp. 723 and 725, lists six kinds of balsams or balsamic compositions, good for rheumatic complaints, dysentery, haemorrhages, wounds, coughs, ulcers, colic, etc. etc.

There were individual customers of some distinction. Among these were the British Minister, Robert Liston, Cobbett's friend Edward Thornton, Secretary to the British legation, Messrs. MacDonald and Rich, British Commissioners under the Jay Treaty, Richard Soderstrom, Swedish Consul, Uriah Tracy, Senator from Connecticut, Samuel Sitgreaves, Representative from Pennsylvania, and Robert G. Harper and William Laughton Smith, Representatives from South Carolina.

Firms and individuals who did work for Cobbett appear throughout the accounts: Bookbinders include [John] Cameron, Michael Conrod, Derickson, and John Rain; employees were James Douglas, Edward Mitchell, William Mitchill and Ezra Sergeant; folder and sewer, Hannah Kesler. Paper-makers in the accounts give an idea of the scope of Cobbett's publishing activity (although one cannot tell if any paper was purchased for Porcupine's Gazette which began March 4, 1797 and continued through August 1799). For the period June 15 to November 7, 1797, George Hirst sold him 325 reams of paper at \$3.50, or a total of \$1137.50, paid for in large part by the delivery of about 9000 pounds of rags at 5¢ per pound. From April 4, 1797 through June 23, 1798, Mark Willcox, located on Chester Creek near Philadelphia, sold him \$3088.39 worth of paper as follows: 98 reams at \$4.50; 42 reams at \$4.00; 52 demy at \$31/3; 536 F[oolscap?] Royal at \$4.00, and 54 reams at \$3.00. From June 4 through September 24, 1799, Cobbett purchased of Thomas Meeteer & Sons of Baltimore 518 reams of paper at \$3 each 'for my works.'3 On May 13, 1800 he purchased 134 reams for the same purpose. Lesser purchases were made during 1798 from William Young of Philadelphia, William Levis of Philadelphia, who owned a paper mill in Upper Darby, Penna., and one Pepper.

304

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Cobbett issued a proposal in 1799 for publishing his works in a collected edition and printing had begun when Cobbett left Philadelphia for New York and the Benjamin Rush judgment was entered against him in December 1799. The proposed edition was junked as waste paper to help satisfy the judgment.

Budd & Bartram, just down the street from Cobbett's shop in Philadelphia, was his principal printer appearing in the accounts. On December 17, 1798, the firm acknowledged receipt of \$744.04 representing the balance due of an account stated in the amount of \$3949.53. A further bill of \$171.54 was paid February 20, 1800. John Furman, of New York, had a bill of \$33.75 March 10, 1800 'for printing Rush Light No. 1.' John Ward Fenno of Philadelphia charged \$84 June 4, 1799 for printing Gifford's *The Baviad and Maeviad* (Evans 35546). On August 11, 1798, Samuel Sansom, Jr., also of Philadelphia received \$294 'cash on acct. for printing History of Jacobinism,' by William Playfair (Evans 31016).

There has been a question over the years whether or not Cobbett ever actually did his own printing. It does appear from the account book that Cobbett owned a printing press, which was sold, probably in 1800, to Hugh Maxwell, printer of Philadelphia, for \$130.00.

There is much else of interest in the Cobbett account book. But, as the prophet said, enough is enough for now.

#### APPENDIX A

## Chronology of Cobbett Imprints Derived from Earliest Sales in His Account Book<sup>1</sup>

	Short Title	Evans	Sale Date
1.	The Scare Crow	30231	July 23, 1796
2.	The Life of Peter Porcupine	30212	August 8, 1796
3.	The Political Censor [for September 1796]	30225	September 26, 1796
	A New Drawing Book	30844	September 29, 1796
5.	Mackenzie, Henry, An Answer to Paine	30727	October 18, 1796
6.	The Gros Mousqueton Diplomatique	30208	November 25, 1796
7.	Playfair, William, The History of		
	Jacobinism	31016	November 28, 1796
8.	An Antidote for Tom Paine's Poison	30204	December 5, 1796
9.	Porcupine's Political Censor, for		
	November, 1796	30226	December 20, 1796
10.	Porcupine's Political Censor, for		
	December 1796	30227	January 24, 1797
11.	Adams, John, A Defence of the Constitutions	31689-91	February 20, 1797
12.	Burke, Edmund, Two letters Addressed		
	to a Member	31895	February 23, 1797
	Porcupine's Political Censor, for Jan. 1797	31946	March 10, 1797
	Porcupine's Political Censor, for March, 1797	31947	April 24, 1797
15.	Erskine, Thomas, A View of the War		
	with France	32097	May 18, 1797
16.	[Smith, William L.], The Pretensions of		
	Thomas Jefferson (2 pts.)	32853	June 22, 1797
	An Accurate Plan of the Blockade of Cadiz	31943	September 23, 1797
18.	Gifford, John, A Letter to the Hon.		
	Thomas Erskine	32191	November 3, 1797
19.	Erskine, Thomas, The Speeches of		
	in King's Bench	32093	November 10, 1797
	[Lowell, John], The Antigallican	32393	January 19, 1798
21.	Kennedy, Patrick, An Answer to Paine's	00045	1
~~	Letter Washington	33947	January 19, 1798
22.	The Democratic Judge Equal Liberty of	00500	March 00, 1700
00	the Press	33523	March 22, 1798
z3.	Harper, Robert G., The Speech	33844	March 27, 1798
QA.	House 29th of May, 1797 Bobison John Proofs of a Constitution	33844 34477	
Z <b>Ŧ.</b>	Robison, John, Proofs of a Conspiracy	377//	April 9, 1798

<sup>1</sup>The earliest entry in the Account Book is for June 22, 1796. Cobbett's break with Bradford as publisher occurred in March of that year. The chronology does not reflect the works published by Bradford or by Benjamin Davies, who succeeded him briefly. In a few instances it was necessary to disregard entries which from their timing and isolation were evidently advance orders and not sales. There are many entries in the Account Book for 'Porcupine's Works,' but it cannot be determined what imprints are involved. A number of Cobbett imprints are not found in the Account Book, although published during the period covered by it.

	Short Title	Evans	Sale Date
25.	Instructions to Pinckney Envoys	MP48719 <sup>2</sup>	April 10, 1798
	Watson, Richard, An Address		r,
	People of Great Britain	34962	April 20, 1798
27.	Allen, John, Speech in the House		r,
	20th April 1798	33284	May 4, 1798
28.	Harper, Robert G., Observations		<i>.</i> ,
	Dispute United States	33841	May 4, 1798
<b>29</b> .	Muir, James, A Sermon Alexandria		2 /
	9th of May 1798	34157	May 16, 1798
30.	French Arrogance; or, the Cat Let Out of		•
	the Bag	33526	May 25, 1798
<b>91</b> .	Aufrère, Anthony, The Cannibals'		•
	Progress French Invasion	33334	June 18, 1798
32.	Lewis, Matthew G., Ambrosio, or the		
	Monk: A Romance	BSUV <sup>8</sup>	July 16, 1798
<b>33</b> .	Snyder, G. W., The Age of Reason		
	Unreasonable	34568	July 25, 1798
34.	Harper, Robert G., A Short Account		
	Congress in a Letter	33838	August 1, 1798
35.	Sorlie, Sholto., A Treatise on the New		
	Sword Exercise	34572	August 1, 1798
	Gifford, William, The Baviad, and Maeviad	355 <b>4</b> 6	May 17, 1799
	United States Court Kalendar	36601	December 26, 1799
38.	Anthing, J. F., History of the Campaigns		
	Prince Suworow	36845	February 10, 1800
	The Rush-Light 15th Feb. 1800	37198	February 25, 1800
40.	do. 28th Feb. 1800	do.	March 10, 1800
41.	do. 15th March, 1800	do.	March 24, 1800
42.		do.	April 14, 1800
43.	Polwhele, Richard, The unsex'd Females;		
	A Poem	38293	May 1, 1800
44.	The Rush-Light 30th April 1800	37198	May 21, 1800

<sup>2</sup> MP number locates item in American Antiquarian Society-Readex Microprint Corporation, *Early American Imprints*, 1639–1800, ed. Clifford K. Shipton. <sup>8</sup> Secretary's News Sheet of the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, No. 52 (August 1966), p. 29.

#### APPENDIX B

## Cobbett Imprints Sales Data from Account Book

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		Copies			Deale <del>r</del>
	Item	Sold <sup>1</sup>	Prices to Public	Pages	Discount
1.	Scare Crow	425	$12\frac{1}{2}c$	23	25%
2.	The Life Porcupine	513	31¢	60	do.
3.	Censor [September]	664	31¢	80	do.
	Drawing Book	46	Began at \$1.25. Reduced to 75¢	Unknown	do.
5.	MacKenzie, Paine	399	37½¢	96	do.
	Mousqueton	400	25¢	76	do.
7.	Playfair, <i>Jacobinism</i> , 2V.	259	\$2.50-sheets; \$3-boards; \$3.50-leather;	384	1/6
			\$3.75-gilt.	352	
8.	Antidote Paine	56	\$1.25 plus 20¢ for binding.	80	20%
9.	Censor November	2305	25¢	80	25%
	Censor December	1228	25¢	72	do.
11.	Adams, Defence, 3V.	382	\$5-boards; \$6-bound; \$7-calf gilt.	430, 487, 566	20%
12.	Burke, Two letters	199	371/2¢	86	25%
13.	Censor Jan.	628	25¢	56	do.
14.	Censor March	1160	25¢	76	do.
	Erskine, View	528	37 <sup>1</sup> /2¢	100	do.
16.	[Smith], Jefferson	117	50¢	Unknown	do.
17.	Blockade of Cadiz	882	$12\frac{1}{2}c$	do.	do.
18.	Gifford, Erskine	607	50¢	132	do.
	Erskine, Speeches	643	$12\frac{1}{2}c$	23	do.
20.	[Lowell], Antigallican	300²	37½¢	86	do.
	Kennedy, Paine	321	25¢	44	do.
22.	Democratic Judge	1618	50¢	102	do.
23.	Harper, Speech	594	50¢	44	do.
24.	Robison, Proofs	93	\$1.75-boards; \$2-leather	<b>398</b>	20%
25.	Instructions Envoys	115	$12\frac{1}{2}c$	15	25%
26.	Watson, Address	347	25¢	40	do.
27.	Allen, Speech	109	25¢	32	do.
28.	Harper, Observations	918	50¢	96	do.
	Muir, Sermon	127	$12\frac{1}{2}c$	14	do.
<b>30</b> .	French Arrogance	90 <sup>3</sup>	25¢	91	

<sup>1</sup>Copies are before returns.

<sup>2</sup>Fol. 75 shows 300 copies printed and sold. The printing costs were \$78.20 and Cobbett received commissions from Lowell of \$31.92, out of which dealer discounts were payable on about 1/2 of the copies. \*88 of the copies were sold to one Peyton it would appear (fol. 119).

## William Cobbett's Account Book

	Copies			Dealer
Item	Sold	Prices to Public	Pages	Discount
31. Cannibal's Progress	6078	3½¢	47	
32. Lewis, The Monk, 2V.	432	\$2.00	323, 325	1/6
33. Snyder, Age of Reason	34	50¢-sheets;	213	
		56¢-boards;		
		75¢-sheep		
34. Harper, Account Congress	564	25¢	22	25%
35. Sorlie, Sword Exercise	263	25¢	24	do.
36. Gifford, Baviad	178	\$1.50	167	20%
37. Court Kalendar	22	75¢-sheep;	134	1/6
		\$1.25-morocco		
		with tucks;		
		\$1.50-morocco		
		with locks.		
38. Anthing, Suworow, 2V.	428	\$2.50	192, 219	25%
39. Rush-Light No. 1	1618	25¢	48	25%5
40. do. 2	1742	25¢	68	do.
41. do. 3	1269	25¢	52	do.
42. do. 4	1659	25¢	<b>48</b>	do.
43. Polwhele, Females	89	62 <sup>1</sup> /2¢	72	25%
44. Rush-Light No. 5	551	25¢	52	25%5

<sup>4</sup>See the preceding text. 500 copies printed. Copies were delivered to Snyder, and a remainder of 365 copies was sold for the balance owing. <sup>5</sup>Large buyers got 331/3%, such as Asbury Dickins who bought 1245 copies.

# APPENDIX C

## List of Booksellers

CONNECTICUT	
New Haven,	
Beers, Isaac & John	1796–97, 1800
GEORGIA	
Savannah,	
Miller, Thomas	1798-1800
MARYLAND	
Baltimore,	
Campbell, Conrad & Co.	1799, 1800
Hill, George	1796-1800
Rainbow [See Norfolk]	1797
Chestertown,	
Arthur, James	1797, 1798
Easton,	
Cowan, James	1798
Neale, Greenbury	1796, 1797
Fredericktown,	
Menby, J. & J.	1798
Mentz, Isaac & John	1797-1800
Georgetown Crossroads,	
Lathim, George	1796, 1797
Williamsport,	
Byus, Stanley	1797
MASSACHUSETTS	
Boston,	
Nancrede, Joseph	1798-1800
West, David	1797
White, James	1796-1800
Newburyport,	
Blunt, Edmund	1797-99
Pittsfield,	
Van Schaak, W.	1798, 1800
Salem,	
Cushing, Thomas C.	1798
NEW JERSEY	
Trenton,	
Dunham [David?]	1798
NEW YORK	
Albany,	
McDonald, John	1797
New York City,	
Allen, Thomas	1798-1800

Brown & Stansbury	1800
Campbell, Samuel	1796-1800
Caritat, Hocquet	1800
Davis, Cornelius	1800
Davis, George	1797
Drummond, Archibald	1797-99
Fenno, John Ward [See Philadelphia]	1800
Herring, Abraham	1798
Rivington, James	1798
Somerville, Alexander	1797-1800
Swords, Thomas & James	1799
Waite, George & Robert	1800
PENNSYLVANIA	
Carlisle,	
Loudon, Thomas	1797, 1798
Lancaster,	
Albright, John	1798
Philadelphia,	1100
Bradford, Thomas	1796-97
Campbell, Robert & Co.	1796-99
Carey, Mathew	1796-97
Davies, Benjamin	1796-99
Dickins, Asbury	1800
Dickins, John	1798
Dobson, Thomas	1796-1800
Fenno, John Ward [See New York City]	1798-99
Morgan, John	1798-1800
Morris, B <sup>s</sup> W <sup>m</sup>	1798
Ormrod, John	1796-99
Rice, Henry & Patrick	1796-99
Stephens, Thomas	1796
Young, Mills & Son	1796-97
Young, William	1797, 1800
Pittsburgh,	1101,1000
Scull, John	1798
Reading,	1750
Jungmann, Gottlob	1798
SOUTH CAROLINA	
Charleston,	
Young, William P.	1797-1800
VIRGINIA	
Alexandria,	
Price, Ellis	1797-98
Chambersburg,	
Riddle & Lahn	1797-98
Fredericksburg,	
Henderson, David	1797-1800
Norfolk,	
Hannah, Andrew	1797-99
Pollard, B. & Co.	1800
Rainbow & Hannah	1796-97

Petersburg,	
Bacchus, Eleazer F.	1796-1800
Richmond,	
Prichard, William	1799-1800
Pritchard & Davidson	1796-98
CANADA	
Halifax,	
Henry, Anthony	1797-98, 1800
Hodge	1796-97
Montreal,	
Edwards, Edward	1800
GREAT BRITAIN	
London,	
Wright, John	1799
Glasgow,	
Duncan, James & Andrew	1797-98
JAMAICA	
Stevenson, Aikman & Smith	1800
NOT LOCATED	
Anthony, J. & Co.	1798
Helmouth, Henry K.	1799
Spencer [Thomas of Albany?]	1798
Stevenson	1797-98
Storey, Elizabeth-Wilmington	1797
Taylor, J. B.	1798
Urquhart, William	1798

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