

Collecting the Scattered and Forgotten: Printers, Collectors, and Early Archival Societies

by

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Abstract

The formation of archives in America, according to most archival literature, began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This view, however, fails to consider the pivotal roles played by individuals before archives formalized into a specific profession. Printers, as disseminators of the written word, had a significant role in the development of the American press and in the preservation of its materials. The nature of their profession acquainted them with the intimacies of creating printed matter and in many ways, equipped them to preserve it. Collectors, through their efforts to build their own cache of materials, helped rescue historical materials. Printers' trade activities enabled them to encounter and acquire a large amount of books and printed materials, which in turn, inspired some of them to become collectors. The lives of Isaiah Thomas and Peter Force, both printers and private collectors, indicate how printers functioned as early archivists in the early nineteenth century. By considering a new identity for printers and collectors, this thesis also contemplates the identity of the archives in the nineteenth century.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
List of Abbreviations.....	v
Chapter One: A Printer's Identity	6
Chapter Two: Isaiah Thomas and the American Antiquarian Society	41
Chapter Three: Peter Force and his Library	74
Conclusion	104
Bibliography	116

List of Abbreviations

MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society
AAS	American Antiquarian Society
AHA	American Historical Association

Introduction

The first printing press arrived in the British American colonies in 1639 without its benefactor. Reverend Glover, intending to establish the Harvard College press, perished of fever while sailing to the New World. Stephen Daye, allegedly descended from a printing pedigree, initiated the college's and colonies' first printing projects.¹ The inauspicious Rev. Glover's printing press did not remain the only machine of its kind in the colonies for long. By 1800, there may have been as many as one hundred fifty newspapers and by 1810, three hundred sixty six.² The American colonies boasted a high level of literacy, which not only contributed to the growth of newspapers, but also shaped the political and historical development of the United States. An abiding belief in the power of the written word inspired the nascent government's leading statesmen to create documents delineating the rights of individuals and the powers of government. Despite the significance of documents in shaping the government, a reliable system for storing and protecting records of national import was noticeably absent.³ The United States waited until 1934 when the National Archives and Records Administration formed, to have a repository solely for national records.⁴ The preservation of valuable records fell to the lot of concerned private citizens who formed historical societies and amassed large private libraries.

¹ Isaiah Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 1 (Worcester: Thomas, 1810), 205, 226-27.

² S. N. D. North, *History and Present Condition of the Newspaper and Periodical Press of the United States with a Catalogue of the Publications of the Census Year* (United States Census Office, 1884), 38.

³ Hugh A. Taylor, "The Collective Memory: Archives and Libraries As Heritage," *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982-83):129; James O'Toole, "Democracy – and Documents – in America," *American Archivist* 65 (Spring/Summer 2002):110.

⁴ Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 1, 205.

By considering the relationship between archives, collectors, and printers in the early American republic, this thesis unites three distinct entities responsible for building archives in the United States. Archives, in the modern sense of the word, has several definitions. It may refer to a collection of materials, the place in which these materials are stored, the organization responsible for maintaining records, or the professional field trained in collecting and preserving materials.⁵ During the early republic, there existed collectors, historians, and others involved in gathering and preserving historical documents, but few used the terms archives or archivist. Despite the absence of these words in the vocabulary, the concept of an archives as a historical collection which merited collection, preservation, and study, existed in the early republic. Archival consciousness, a term used in this thesis to convey an emerging preoccupation with historical materials in the nineteenth century, denotes an understanding of the value of, as well as a concern for the survival, preservation, and dissemination of historical materials.

Printers not only created many records, but also collected newspapers and other records as part of their business routine and, for some, collecting morphed into a personal preoccupation. Printers' access to book auctions, book trades and fairs, and newspaper exchanges promised reduced prices and invited certain printers to not only stock their business warehouse, but also their personal library shelves. The printing careers and collecting efforts of Isaiah Thomas and Peter Force, two printers from the early republic, will demonstrate how printers contributed to the development of archival institutions in America.

⁵ Gregory S. Hunter, *Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives: A How-to-Do-It Manual* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2003), 2; Richard Pearce-Moses, "A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology," Society of American Archivists Glossary, <http://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/a/archives> (accessed July 27, 2013).

To understand the relationship between printers and archives in the early republic, chapter one of this thesis discusses the printing profession and how its practitioners viewed their trade and themselves. While the printing press in America appears in multiple monographs, Silver's *American Printer* describes the printing trade in the early republic.⁶ Lawrence Wroth's classic text on printing in colonial America offers readers a general description of printer's responsibilities and concerns in that period as well as specific examples from printers' lives during that period.⁷ Many printers, such as Joseph T. Buckingham and Thurlow Weed, recorded and published their memoirs that related their experiences as printers from their apprenticeship through their later careers.⁸ While these sources relate basic information about printers, they do not endeavor to explore the role of printing in a printer's life. Chapter one connects the nature of printing, its reputation as the art preservative, to creating access to information and collecting ephemera. By illuminating the nature of printing and the book trade, this chapter shows that printers kept archives of their periodicals and generally sought to disseminate knowledge. The trade of printing helped create collectors who then sought to ensure the survival of their collections through archival facilities.

Chapter two considers the life and legacy of Isaiah Thomas. As one of the most prominent printers in the early republic, Thomas exerted a considerable influence over the development of the American press and over his long tenure shaped the business habits of his

⁶ Rollo G. Silver, *The American Printer, 1787-1825* (Charlottesville, N.C.: Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, University Press of Virginia, 1967).

⁷ Lawrence C. Wroth, *The Colonial Printer* (Portland, Me: Southworth-Anthoensen Press, 1938).

⁸ Joseph T. Buckingham, *Personal Memoirs and Recollections of Editorial Life*, vol. 1 (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1852; Thurlow Weed, *Life of Thurlow Weed including his Autobiography and a Memoir*, ed. Harriet A. Weed (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1884).

numerous apprentices. As a historical figure, Thomas has received a measure of scholarly attention. Hollis Roger Yarrington's dissertation pays tribute to business-minded aspects of the printer. He thoroughly traces the course of Thomas' life, devoting considerable attention to his numerous business ventures. His cultural contributions and the significance of the American Antiquarian Society do not receive much coverage.⁹ John Roger Osterholm examines the literary career of the eminent printer, by analyzing items written and printed by Thomas. While Osterholm provides brief biographical and background information, his dissertation primarily offers a literary analysis of Thomas' works.¹⁰

Although there have been numerous books and articles devoted to Isaiah Thomas, most dwell on his business affairs, and few delve into the cultural significance of the American Antiquarian Society. Chapter two explains how his printing career influenced his interests as a collector and eventually led to the formation of the first national historical society. Thomas' influence distinguished the American Antiquarian Society from similar institutions by shaping its collection policy to include often overlooked ephemera. The American Antiquarian Society amassed archival materials, and, at the behest of Thomas, built a permanent facility to house safely its collections. His insistence on an archives occupying a physical space and creating a suitable internal environment for preservation helped preserve thousands of books, printed works, and manuscripts.

Perhaps one of the most notable printers and collectors of the nineteenth century was Peter Force. Force's contemporaries, shortly after his death, composed several articles about his

⁹ Hollis Roger Yarrington, "Isaiah Thomas, Printer," PhD diss. University of Maryland, 1970.

¹⁰ John Roger Osterholm, "The Literary Career of Isaiah Thomas, 1749-1831," PhD diss., University of Massachusetts, 1978.

life, character, and collections. These brief articles, written by Ainsworth Spofford and others, relate personal attributes of Force, but fail to place him in any historical context. Carolyn Hoover Sung's dissertation on Force provides a biography of him, but centers on the painstaking process of compiling and publishing his historical tomes, the *American Archives*. Sung details the political and financial struggles the printer endured, but fails to connect his printing career with his publishing and collecting ambitions. Chapter three examines specifically how experience in printing techniques prepared Force to collect and preserve rare historical materials. Along with Force and his remarkable personal collection, chapter three considers Ainsworth Spofford, the Librarian of Congress who succeeded in incorporating Force's library into his institution.

Unlike other histories of printing and archives, this thesis explores how these seemingly separate fields were intricately connected in the early American republic, namely by the opportunities afforded printers to collect printed items. As an archival consciousness began to crop up in the United States, printers were among the standard-bearers for collecting and preserving historical materials. Thomas and Force demonstrated their own archival consciousness through their printing endeavors, collecting efforts, and the institutionalization of their private libraries to ensure public access.

Chapter One: A Printer's Identity

It is in the power of printers, by proper study and application, to promote the cultivation of literature and science, on which the prosperity of their business, and the happiness of society, so much depends.

-Cornelius Van Winkle, *The Printer's Guide, or, An introduction to the Art of Printing*, 1818

Serving as minister to France during the late 1780s, Thomas Jefferson witnessed the beginnings of the French Revolution. "But time and truth will rescue and embalm their memories," Jefferson wrote of the innocent victims of the revolution, "while their posterity will be enjoying that very liberty for which they would never have hesitated to offer up their lives."¹ Believing that the changes in France symbiotically corresponded to the American experiment in freedom, Jefferson was primarily concerned with the politics and policies of the new government. The brief excerpt from his letter, however, with its emphasis on memory and posterity, recognized that the events of the revolution would have far-reaching effects on both the present and distant future.

With the first fall of the guillotine, the French Revolution transformed European politics. Although its political ramifications inspired, excited, and later terrified Americans, a more subtle revolution occurred, one that centered on the new republic's recordkeeping system.² Although the ideals of liberty and equality permeated both the American and French Revolutions, only the latter spurred the creation and maintenance of a national archives.

¹ Thomas Jefferson to William Short, January 3, 1793, *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity*, Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media and American Social History Project, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/592/> (accessed July 31, 2013); Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 176-188.

² Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 176, 188.

Despite the accounts of mass destruction of certain documents, genealogies, orders of knighthood and others bestowing titles, the citizens of the French Republic realized that their documentary history merited preservation.³ The French Revolution produced three advances characteristic of twentieth century archives: centralization, the state assuming responsibility for national records, and a commitment to making archival records accessible to the public. Beginning in 1789 and culminating in 1796 when the Archives Départementales formed, France's recordkeeping fell under one government department.⁴ Although the state fluctuated between sponsored destruction of Old Regime records and preserving them, there emerged an understanding of how the former records justified the measures of the revolution.⁵ As the number of property holders increased, the information contained in the archives became more significant to a greater portion of the population. To serve the needs of the public, the archives opened three days a week, for nine hours each day.⁶ These three innovations changed the ways in which the public and government interacted with records. The French Revolution reasserted the value of records and resolved to make them accessible to the public.

The development of American archives did not follow the same tumultuous, revolutionary course of its French counterpart. Although the United States similarly emerged from a revolutionary struggle with new republican ideals, its recordkeeping remained archaic.

³ Carl Lokke, "Archives and the French Revolution," *American Archivist* 31, no.1 (January 1968):27; Ernst Posner, "Some Aspects of Archival Development Since the French Revolution," *American Archivist* 3 (1940): 162.

⁴ Posner, "Some Aspects of Archival Development," 161-162.

⁵ Judith M. Panitch, "Liberty, Equality, Posterity?: Some Archival Lessons from the Case of the French Revolution," *American Archivist* 59 (Winter 1996): 45.

⁶ Posner, "Some Aspects of Archival Development," 162; Panitch, "Liberty, Equality, Posterity?" 39.

The archives of the United States, scattered among state and local offices, forgotten in the attics and dusty cabinets of private homes, were far from centralized. The young American republic strove to embody every virtue of republicanism and shirked from any appearance of monarchical extravagance.⁷ Combined with a determination to promote “practical and useful knowledge” through its earliest learned societies, there was little likelihood of the government of the early republic sponsoring any historical or archival program.⁸ Unlike the French Republic, the United States did not take steps to create a centralized, national repository until the twentieth century.

The haphazardness of the United States’ recordkeeping inspired citizens to intervene. Private collectors, concerned citizens, and even tradesmen participated in finding, preserving, and maintaining records of national significance. The independence and initiative exerted by individuals preoccupied with saving stacks of historical documents democratized the wellspring of records extant in the United States. The personal archives of leading men as well as tradesmen became the basis of archival materials. In the absence of professional archiving standards, certain professions prepared individuals to become collectors and curators of records. Printing in the early republic not only influenced national politics, but also equipped its practitioners to procure and preserve materials of enduring value. This chapter will outline the recent scholarly work on printing and printers, provide an overview of the printing profession in the United States during the early nineteenth century, and examine how printing endowed its practitioners with a unique identity as creators and distributors of information.

⁷ Neil Harris, “Public Funding for Rarity: Some American Debates,” *Libraries and Culture* 31, no. 1 (1996): 39.

⁸ H. G. Jones, *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic: The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and Collections, 1791-1861* (Chapel Hill: North Caroliniana Society and North Carolina Collection, 1995), 2.

Printers were more than craftsmen and artisans with typeface and paper. Elizabeth Eisenstein traced the history of printing from its European debut in the fifteenth century and pondered the immense changes that this new technology introduced in her monograph, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*. Eisenstein argued that printing changed the presentation of material to readers, which in turn, altered how they interacted with information. Early printers included new reference features, such as a table of contents, footnotes and cross references, which made printed works more useful to readers. Printing brought fixity to texts, made books available to larger audiences, and by bringing information to greater audiences allowed for correction of errors. Printing led not only to an increase in information, but also, in some cases, improved the quality of information.⁹

Unlike other authors concerned with the history of printing, Eisenstein elevated printers from simple mechanics to operators in the information trade.¹⁰ Similarly, Neil Rhodes and Jonathan Sawday in their book, *Renaissance Computer*, portrayed printers as skilled artisans who revolutionized the organization of information. Rhodes and Sawday asserted that as operators of the printing press, which represented such an advance in information technology that it merits an

⁹ Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Some of Eisenstein's claims, particularly the fixity of print, have been challenged by others, see especially Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Printers and their cultural significance comprise a relatively small amount of the available literature. Many printing histories concentrate on illuminating the ways of the trade, such as Rollo Silver's *American Printer, 1787-1824*, its technological advances, seen in James Moran's *Printing Presses: History and Development from the Fifteenth Century to Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), or the business aspects of the trade, such as Rosalind Remer's *Printers and Men of Capital* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000). General histories of journalism, including Robert A. Rutland's *The Newsmongers: Journalism in the Life of the Nation 1690-1972* (New York: Dial Press, 1973), discuss the development of the press and its features without delving too deeply into the lives of printers.

analogy with a modern computer, printers functioned as information professionals. During the Renaissance, printers and publishers were responsible for financing texts that clearly organized disparate information, such as dictionaries, histories, and compendia. The works of Eisenstein and Rhodes and Sawday contemplated the cultural significance of printers, who spent their careers producing useful texts that fundamentally altered how people interacted with the written word.¹¹

The revolutionary machine reached America in the seventeenth century and expanded throughout the eighteenth. As a crisis with England loomed, the emphasis on printing transitioned from mildly informative and amusing to politically vibrant, rallying colonies to war and subsequently, spouting the messages of feuding political parties. In a letter to Edward Carrington, Thomas Jefferson expressed his views on the dynamic, informative, and corrective power of public opinion articulated through newspapers. He memorably wrote, “were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”¹² The contentious relationship between the government and the press Jefferson observed in his time has captured the attention of recent scholars whose works on journalism in the early American republic largely concentrate on the political alignment of printers.

Carol Sue Humphrey in *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783-1833*, provided a readable generalization of the character of the American press covering the first fifty years of the

¹¹ Neil Rhodes and Jonathan Sawday, *The Renaissance Computer Knowledge Technology in the First Age of Print* (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹² Thomas Jefferson to Edward Carrington, January 16, 1787, *The Letters of Thomas Jefferson 1743-1826*, accessed June 4, 2013, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/thomas-jefferson/letters-of-thomas-jefferson/jefl52.php>.

nation. Her approach highlighted the role of newspapers in national political debates. An attitude emerged in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century that the press had an obligation to choose a side in polarized politics. Humphrey considered the American press during the early republic from a political lens in which printers are primarily mouthpieces for national parties. Humphrey's general conclusions garner support from later studies that focus on prominent figures of the press.¹³

In *Scandal and Civility* Marcus Daniel examined the lack of civility that came to characterize political debates between the Federalists and the nascent Republicans between 1789 and 1800. Newspapers became vehicles for intense partisan struggles that employed the “politics of character,”¹⁴ mercilessly scrutinizing the private lives of public officials for political gain. Six journalists of the period, John Fenno, Noah Webster, and William Cobbett siding with the Federalists and Philip Freneau, Benjamin Franklin Bache, and William Duane pledging allegiance to the Anti-Federalist cause, each received detailed attention. By giving each newspaper editor his own chapter, Daniel succeeded in portraying the various personalities that shaped national politics during the first two administrations.¹⁵

Although Daniel presented newspaper editors as necessary adjuncts to politicians desiring to sway public opinion, Jeffrey Pasley studied these newspapermen as politicians in their own right. In *Tyranny of the Printers*, Pasley ventured to recapture the pivotal role that newspapers and their editors played in American politics from the late eighteenth to the early

¹³ Carol Sue Humphrey, *The Press of the Young Republic, 1783-1833* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Marcus Daniel, *Scandal and Civility: Journalism and the Birth of American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

twentieth century. He argued that newspaper editors were among the first politicians in the early republic. Newspaper editors became the leading spokespersons for parties, explaining policies and galvanizing support for candidates. The advent of partisan newspapers began at Thomas Jefferson's behest to create an anti-Federalist paper and later became a fixture during the Jacksonian period. As these editors rose to prominence, politicians became more aware and self-conscious of their tradesmen backgrounds and ungentlemanly manners. Politicians began to seek more refined men to oversee the newspapers as the nineteenth century progressed, but editors remained essential to political success through Jackson's administration. In return for their periodicals' support, Jackson rewarded editors who espoused his cause with political appointments, thus ushering in tradesmen to the typically upper-class status of government officials.

Pasley considered the influence of "newspaper politics," the study of how newspapers and their editors helped democratize the American political scene. He relied on biographical sketches of printers to render a general idea of their status, social, and political roles. While this approach effectively described the particular traits and circumstances of certain printers, it ran the risk of not providing a general view of the profession. Not every printer was as bellicose as William Duane or had the advantage of being the grandson of Benjamin Franklin as was Benjamin Bache. Overall, Pasley's study successfully analyzed the active roles that printers played in shaping politics and promulgating a partisan message.¹⁶

Although often political in nature, the discourses opened by printed matter initiated societal changes. In *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of US Nation Building 1770-*

¹⁶ Jeffrey L. Pasley, *"The Tyranny of Printers" Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

1870 Loughran considered the role that printed materials played in first creating a national identity and then later jeopardizing it with the coming of the Civil War. She examined the legitimacy of the idea that there was a functioning public sphere in early America. While she argued that newspapers, pamphlets, and other printed materials in the nineteenth century were influential, their actual reach was limited. The absence of an information infrastructure, such as a consistent network of post offices and printers in rural areas, restrained the reach of printed matter.

While the scarcity of printers and postal offices slowed the transmission of printed materials, it smoothed the way for the development of the United States as a nation. Loughran posited the ratification process of the Constitution depended on a loose network of communication. Without a consistent pattern of communication the Federalists could not be confronted with a unified source of opposition. Within the first few decades of the nineteenth century canals, steamboats, railroads, and telegraphs closed the communications gap but failed to unite the country. Loughran noted that as the country became more connected, readers were exposed to a greater number of conflicting ideas. For instance, the American Anti-Slavery Society and its massive publication campaign helped expose the deep divisions within American society.¹⁷

Political and social histories of the American press contribute to a current understanding of the role printers and printed matter, however, most fail to present an integrated view that includes printers, authors, and audiences. Editors Robert Gross and Mary Kelley's second volume in the series, *A History of the Book in America*, encompassed the diverse world of people, genres, and associations involved in producing printed matter during the early republic.

¹⁷ Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Unlike other histories of the period or of printing, this volume provided a comprehensive discussion of the printing and book trade, the political, educational, and social role of the press. The editors included essays that explain the life of printers as well as the tastes and varieties of readers from 1790 through 1840. The press served many causes, from political campaigns, organs of presidential administrations, abolitionism, formal education, cultural and scientific advancement, and moral improvement. Oft-overlooked shapers of the American press, such as Ebenezer T. Andrews, as well as larger forces, including advances in technology, which began to influence the printing trade by the 1830s, appeared in this volume.

By considering the history of print in the early republic, the authors presented a thorough history of life during that period. The contributors aptly demonstrated the ubiquity of print available to most Americans, including women, Native Americans, and African Americans. Certain consumers of print matter did more than casually glance at their materials. Robert A. Gross concluded the volume with specific examples of how individuals personally interacted with published materials. Almanacs doubled as diaries for many people, from Thomas Jefferson to a midwife in Massachusetts. Similarly, certain individuals, such as Hiram Harwood, carefully assembled collections of newspapers that they bound, preserved, and formed into a personal archives. Although the activity of collecting information and accumulating an archives began to intensify during the early republic, a lengthy discussion of such activities is lacking.¹⁸

Most histories of the American press during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century center on politically charged personalities of the press, instead of printers' contributions to the intellectual vibrancy of society. A unique group of early American printers has not been

¹⁸ Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840* (Chapel Hill: Published in Association with the American Antiquarian Society by The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

recognized, the printer who became a collector. The approaches outlined above fail to appreciate how the work of several printers led to the development archives in the United States. The contribution that eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century materials made to the formation of archives in America has been underrated. The role of printers and publishers, such as Isaiah Thomas and Peter Force, situated them to be producers and conservators of historical papers. Their unique experiences and identities as printers in the early republic and their access to a wealth of printed materials enabled them to identify significant materials and accrue massive personal collections. These collections efforts led to the formation of archives in America. Isaiah Thomas, famed Massachusetts printer, developed a penchant for history later in life and created the American Antiquarian Society, a rich repository of historical sources. Peter Force, a printer in Washington D.C. in the mid nineteenth century, gathered materials that helped expand the Library of Congress into an archival repository.¹⁹ These printers not only shaped the events of their era, but also contributed to enriching the American historical record with their industrious collecting efforts.

Printing in colonial America and the early republic retained many aspects of the trade since its inception in the fifteenth century. Parents entrusted their young sons to master printers in order to learn the trade. Most boys entered an apprenticeship around the age of twelve or fourteen and remained with their master craftsmen until the age of twenty one. In return for their labor and their strict adherence to the rules established by the master craftsmen, the craftsmen agreed to teach them their craft and to meet their basic material needs.²⁰ Standard apprenticeship

¹⁹ Elliot B. Knowlton, "American Antiquarian Society," *Stirpes* 11, no. 2 (1971):53-4; Fred Shelley, "Manuscripts in the Library of Congress: 1800-1900," *American Archivist* 11, no. 1 (1948):6.

²⁰ Silver, *The American Printer, 1787-1825*, 1-3.

contracts bid that the young man “well and faithfully shall serve, his secrets keep, his lawful commands gladly do and obey; hurt to his said master he shall not do, nor willfully suffer it to be done by others.”²¹ The indenture also maintained that the apprentice “shall not embezzle...at cards, dice, or any other unlawful games he shall not play, taverns or ale-houses he shall not frequent; fornication he shall not commit, matrimony he shall not contract.”²² While the bulk of the indenture prescribed behaviors an apprentice must avoid, many also included benefits with which the master craftsmen agreed to furnish the apprentice. The indentures promised that the master “shall and will also find and allow unto his said apprentice, meat, drink, washing, lodging.”²³

Occasionally master craftsmen pledged to provide additional educational opportunities to their apprentices, but most apprentices could only expect their basic material needs to be met. While some masters were indifferent to the progress and needs of their apprentices, others provided them with as decent an education and lodging as they could manage.²⁴ For example, Isaiah Thomas, after establishing his own press, accepted apprentices but his circumstances as a young, upstart printer forbade lavish accommodations and meals. One apprentice of Thomas recalled the bare conditions in which they lived. A poor young printer at the time, his apprentices “slept in a garret over the printing-office, on the rags taken in for the paper-makers,”²⁵ and

²¹ Ibid., 3.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 3-4.

²⁵ Isaiah Thomas and Benjamin Thomas Hill, *The Diary of Isaiah Thomas, 1805-1828*, vol. 1 (Worcester, Mass: The Society, 1909), note 91.

shared meals of “bread and milk”²⁶ with their master printer.²⁷ Despite the absence of comfort, Thomas did not neglect his apprentices; his later business partnerships with many of his former apprentices testify to the professional care with which he guided their education. As his business expanded, the provisions promised apprentices increased. In a printing indenture, which engaged a James Hawkins as Thomas’ apprentice in 1785, Thomas agreed to provide his apprentice with “good hats, shoes and close bodied coats,” while under his care.²⁸ While some masters were severe with their apprentices, many more displayed a genuine concern for the future of their profession and the proper education of their apprentices.

An apprentice in any profession, printing not excluded, was assigned to the most menial and repulsive tasks. Master printers sent their apprentices on errands, to deliver papers to subscribers, and assigned them the most dreadful task of the trade, treading pelts. This intensive chore required sheepskin used for applying ink to type to be soaked in urine and then dried completely to keep the ink rollers clean and able to absorb ink.²⁹ Actually working a printing press was physically demanding; it required two men to operate a press. The amount of force needed tended to cause the right shoulder and right foot of pressmen to become disfigured and enlarged.³⁰ An apprenticeship required grueling hours without any monetary compensation.³¹

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Printing Indenture for James R. Hawkins, Isaiah Thomas Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

²⁹ Silver, *American Printer, 1787-1825*, 4.

³⁰ Ibid., 9-10.

Work began in the early morning around six o'clock and lasted until after dark, with an average of around ten hours a day.³² This trying schedule and difficult labor did not end upon an apprentice's promotion to journeyman. One printer bemoaned the "physical and mental toil by day and by night."³³

The tediousness and physically strenuous nature of the work, however, did not slow the spread of printing houses throughout the country. In the early republic, pioneer printers ventured into the remote regions of the country to establish printing shops and periodicals. While the lure of economic opportunity motivated the expansion of the press, these ambitious men also offered news, literature, and leadership to their communities.³⁴ Printers often served as postmasters; they were the locus of incoming news and central in disbursing information throughout a town. Printers, particularly during the colonial period, operated and personally edited a newspaper. Through the circulation of a newspaper, a printer could influence the political and public discourse of a community. By determining which articles to publish and which events to cover in depth, printers exerted a degree of influence unmatched by any other tradesman.³⁵ Indeed, many printers during the war for independence steadfastly believed that "the press, and particularly the

³¹ Some apprenticeship indentures stipulated that apprentices received a sum of money to start their own establishment upon the successful completion of their apprenticeship. Whether or not a printer received any payment at the end of his apprenticeship depended on the terms of his indenture. Many printers, however, did not complete their apprenticeship.

³² Silver, *American Printer, 1787-1825*, 8; "A Printer-Professor" in *Voices from the Press: a Collection of Sketches, Essays, and Poems*, ed. James J. Brenton (New-York: Charles B. Norton, 1850), 209.

³³ Buckingham, *Personal Memoirs and Recollections*, vol. 1, 31.

³⁴ Milton W. Hamilton, *The Country Printer, New York State, 1785-1830* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 50.

³⁵ Wroth, *The Colonial Printer, 187-88*.

newspapers to which it gave birth, had a powerful influence in producing the revolution.”³⁶

Printers, beginning in the colonial period and continuing through the early republic, exerted a considerable influence in shaping and disseminating public opinion. While other professions, such as politicians or clergymen, could similarly influence the general will of the people, printers were the only tradesmen with the ability to affect directly the public sphere.

Despite the difficulties of the trade, American printers proudly identified themselves as sons “of Faust, of Franklin, and of Freedom.”³⁷ Not only did they recognize their role in preserving liberty, but they also inherited the legacies of great printers, by virtue of their profession. Exhorting one another to “emulate...the examples of our great prototype, our American father, Franklin,”³⁸ printers quickly found a figurehead to unite their burgeoning trade. From Benjamin Franklin, early American printers allegedly received the admonition to “honor thy profession.”³⁹ His life, moreover, his subsequent commemorations exerted a lasting influence on nineteenth century printers.

Benjamin Franklin, the youngest son of a tallow-chandler became one of the most important men in early American printing. Printers after Benjamin Franklin viewed him as the model practitioner of their trade. In order to be successful, printers believed that they must imitate Franklin’s career as closely as possible. Printers found a natural kinship with Franklin, who rose from humble circumstances through his successful printing career. At printers’

³⁶ Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 1, 15.

³⁷ Ebenezer Mack, “*An Oration before the New York Typographical Society on the fifth of July, 1813, in celebration of the thirty-seventh anniversary of American Independence, and fourth of the society*” (New York: S. Woodward and Company, 1813), 15.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

meetings and gatherings, the life and legacy of Franklin became a popular subject with many printers as they invoked “the noble example of one endeared to us by the ties of a common profession.”⁴⁰ Printers praised and studied Franklin’s life because they believed that it served as a “living, practical and ever-enduring demonstration, of the moral, intellectual, and social eminence that may be attained in our profession.”⁴¹ As nineteenth-century printers paid tribute to the advances of American printing, Franklin became a symbol closely identified with their own art. Printers recognized the importance of Benjamin Franklin in the development and elevation of the printing profession, at times writing poetry to his memory. One ode simply titled *Franklin* by a printer began, “The thunders of a mighty age may drown the voices of the past, but Thou the Printer and the Sage, shalt speak thy wisdom til the last.”⁴²

For many printers, determined to follow the example that Franklin inaugurated, their profession provided more than a living wage. A printing shop was often their first and only classroom. Indeed, one printer referred to his printing shop as his “alma mater.”⁴³ Their education consisted primarily of practical matters, but success in the trade also required some literary skill. Printers exercised mental and physical agility at once. Most practitioners insisted on being able to compose an article or editorial while they stood at the compositor’s table. Instead of penning an article on paper and then type-setting it, printers aspired to directly

⁴⁰ John J. Jewett, "Franklin: his genius, life and character," in *Voices from the Press: a Collection of Sketches, Essays, and Poems*, ed. James J. Brenton (New York: Charles B. Norton, 1850), 188.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴² J. Bayard Taylor, "Franklin," in *Voices from the Press*, 119.

⁴³ James J. Brenton, "Notices of Contributors," in *Voices from the Press*, viii.

translate their thoughts into type.⁴⁴ They prided themselves on the cultural significance of their work. Although printers exerted long and difficult hours in producing printed works, they often found solace in the notion that their work disseminated ideas and promoted learning.⁴⁵ They were ink-stained intellectuals, many of whom first joined the profession because of the educational opportunities it offered.

Although printers primarily concentrated on the tasks of printing, many absorbed the texts that they handled. Joseph Buckingham, a printer and editor, lived and worked in Massachusetts in the early republic. An early project had a lasting impact on Buckingham. He recalled that “one of the most important works on which I was engaged, was the first edition of ‘Mathematics,’ a text book for Harvard College...no other person handled a single type used in this work. It was nearly a year in the press...Most of the little knowledge of Mathematics which I have acquired, was obtained when this work was in my hands.”⁴⁶ Even years after the event he remembered the specific text, how long it took in the press and most of all, what he learned by printing it. His brief anecdote demonstrates that printers learned about a myriad of subjects from their printing jobs.

Another printer, Joel Munsell decided to enter the trade of printing because of the many opportunities for learning it offered its practitioners. Although Munsell had already begun to learn his father’s trade of plough and wagon making, he yearned for something more. Around the age of seventeen, Munsell had resolutely decided to become a printer. His father initially

⁴⁴ Hamilton, *Country Printer*, 15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁶ Buckingham, *Personal Memoirs and Recollections*, vol.1, 50-51.

opposed it, citing numerous examples of printers' heavy drinking habits and tendency to wander from town to town, finding work where they could. Joel Munsell, however, saw that printing offered more than the possibility of a steady income. Munsell persisted in extolling "the advantages the profession must have over all others – the most weighty of which that it offered an opportunity of reading and acquiring a knowledge of the world that in my present situation I could not obtain."⁴⁷ Eventually Munsell became a successful printer and historian in Albany, New York, known for printing fine, limited editions of local history, and the genealogies of long-standing families.

After entering the trade, many printers exhibited a sense of pride in the execution of their craft. Other craftsmen doubtlessly took pride in their work, but printers believed that their daily work provided more than a temporal product, unlike the labors of cabinetmakers and blacksmiths.⁴⁸ They produced intellectual currency; words and ideas that could transcend borders and, when treated with care, even escape the ravages of time. While not every young man beginning his printing apprenticeship as a teenager or even master printer with his own shop dwelt on the cultural significance of his work, many printers first contemplated joining the profession because of an early love of books and learning. Certain printers, those who were authors and publishers in addition to printers, recounted an innate appreciation for books. Benjamin Franklin recalled his father's anxiety about finding him a suitable trade. Dissatisfied with his father's trade of candle making, Josiah Franklin, Benjamin's father, arranged for his son

⁴⁷ David Simeon Edelstein, *Joel Munsell: Printer and Antiquarian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 42-43.

⁴⁸ Silver, *American Printer, 1787-1825*, 26.

to explore other professions, bricklaying, cutlery, and carpentry.⁴⁹ Benjamin's "bookish inclination" convinced his father that printing could provide his son with a livelihood that fulfilled his curiosity and allowed him to demonstrate his natural talents.⁵⁰ Other printers chose the profession for similar reasons. Joseph Buckingham remembered that even from his "earliest recollection [he] was fond of books."⁵¹ Thurlow Weed, a printer in New York whose personal influence eventually extended beyond his paper and into the White House of President Lincoln, reminisced that as a young apprentice "nothing afforded [him] more happiness"⁵² than reading newspapers. Peter Force, a Washington printer, enthralled by his Revolutionary War veteran father's anecdotes and desirous of raising his station in life, naturally turned to printing as a means to print and preserve historical accounts.⁵³

Printers, dedicated not only to their art, but also to the edification of their profession, began producing printing manuals in the eighteenth century. Printed as an additional reference tool for a small printing house and an interested public, printers endeavored to improve the artisanship of their fellow professionals. Printers were concerned not only with their individual reputations but also with the standing of the profession at large. Manuals delineated current printing practices and prescribed proper behavior for apprentices. A number of manuals appeared in both England and America in the nineteenth century. Relatively early manuals focused on

⁴⁹ Benjamin Franklin, *Memoirs of Benjamin Franklin* (New-York: Harper & Brothers, 1839), 24-25.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵¹ Buckingham, *Personal Memoirs and Recollections*, vol. 1, 15.

⁵² Weed, *Life of Thurlow Weed*, 22.

⁵³ George W. Greene, "Col. Peter Force – American Annalist," *Magazine of American History* (January 1878): 223.

delineating grammatical rules and encouraged printers to pay more attention to their work than simply “follow the copy.”⁵⁴ Instead of mindlessly creating an exact replica of the manuscript in type, printers should engage with their work.⁵⁵ For example, as printers arranged the type for a work, they ought to read and understand the text.⁵⁶ If printers failed to interact with the text, they ran the risk of reducing their trade to merely mechanical exercises, “degrading [printing] below the meanest handicraft.”⁵⁷

Printers viewed the field as demanding a union of both intellect and industry. Their works were staples of literature and the basis of personal collections. As providers of books, printers readily acknowledged that “the general interest depend on the grammatical accuracy and typographical correctness of [printers’] labors.”⁵⁸ Printers’ respect for their work helped define their perception of their profession and of themselves. Printers invested in the education of apprentices because of a belief that they must keep the “typographic art from degenerating into one of those ordinary occupations that require only the mechanical operation of the fingers, to form a perfect and complete workman.”⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Cornelius S. Van Winkle, *The Printer's Guide, or, An introduction to the Art of Printing* (New-York: C.S. Van Winkle, 1818), viii.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁷ Ibid., viii.

⁵⁸ Thomas F. Adams, *Typographia or, the Printer's Instructor, a brief sketch of the origin, rise, and progress of the typographic art, with practical directions for conducting every department in an office, hints to authors, publishers &c.* (Philadelphia: L. Johnson & Co., 1864), 234.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

In many ways, printers were more mindful of diction, spelling, and grammar than most. Their vocation required a thorough knowledge of the written word, causing one printer to muse, “the printer is your true man of letters, though he may not be a literary man.”⁶⁰ A printer required a rather advanced basic education. While by no means fluent in classical languages, a printer had at least a basic understanding of Latin and Greek characters in order to prepare him for setting to type religious and classical works. Most printers’ manuals devoted several pages to introducing printers to classical languages, their alphabets, and a rudimentary lesson on their grammar. While a printer could not translate Hebrew or Greek, he knew more about those languages than most men lacking a college degree. One printers’ manual recommended that if possible, printers, specifically proof readers, should be acquainted with “Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian and German.”⁶¹ With a prodigious knowledge of languages, a printer could improve his repute and thereby increase his business.⁶²

Experienced printers advocated for increasing the educational opportunities of apprentices and journeymen. Apprentice libraries became a feature of typographical societies. Typographical societies emerged in the nineteenth century to establish camaraderie and collegiality among printers as well as to set prices for printing services and labor.⁶³ These societies offered members benefits, such as caring for sick workers, widowed wives and helping

⁶⁰ Charles Thomas Jacobi, *Gesta Typographia or a medley for printers and others: collected by Chas. T. Jacobi* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1897), 110. The *Gesta Typographia* is a book of anecdotes about famous printers and humorous tales and wordplay involving printers’ vocabulary.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, viii., 147.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ “Franklin Typographical Association,” *New York Daily Tribune*, April 15, 1844.

pay for funeral expenses.⁶⁴ Printers donated both printed volumes and generous funds towards the establishment of apprentice libraries. In 1826, an honorary member of the Franklin Typographical Society, Isaiah Thomas, furnished the society with books and helped spur their development of a library.⁶⁵ The New York Typographical Society established in 1823 a free library for the use of its members. The library opened its doors to any professional or apprentice involved in printing, engraving, book binding and type founding with the intention of encouraging the “intellectual and moral improvement of our profession” and resulting ultimately in the “elevation of our fraternity.”⁶⁶ While printers’ libraries solicited donations, printers themselves donated periodicals and books they published to the library.⁶⁷ When exhorting apprentices to avoid moral pitfalls, such as gambling, alcoholism, and loose women, and instead pursue an education, master printers encouraged apprentices to follow the example of Benjamin Franklin.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ "With stick and rule," *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), March 8, 1890.

⁶⁵ Franklin Typographical Society, *Proceedings of the Franklin Typographical Society: at the observance of the semi-centennial of its institution, January 17, 1874: with a brief historical sketch* (Boston: The Society, 1875), 8.

⁶⁶ Charles McDevitt, and Peter C. Baker, *Rooms of the Printers' Free Library, No. 3 Chambers Street. New York, February, 1854. Respected Sir:--Believing That You Feel an Interest in Any Thing Which Promises Well for the Intellectual and Moral Improvement of Our Profession, We Feel That We Shall Not Trespass Upon Your Time or Patience, in Soliciting Your Aid in Behalf of an Institution Every way Calculated to Answer the Design of Its Founders*, (New York: s.n, 1854).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Solomon Southwick, *Address, delivered by appointment, in the Episcopal Church, at the opening of the Apprentices' Library, in the city of Albany, January 1, 1821*(Albany: John O. Cole, 1821), 32.

Similar to published printers' manuals, apprentice libraries promised to enhance the quality of what issued from a printer's press. If a work issued from the press abounded in errors, even if those mistakes were the fault of the author, blame often fell on the printer. In order to preserve his reputation and produce a clean and correct manuscript, a printer would often "[sit] up till midnight, or till day-light, to correct [an author's] false grammar, bad orthography, and worse punctuation."⁶⁹ Printers received manuscripts in any number of conditions, with widely varying spelling and inconsistent application of grammatical rules. One printer in his memoirs recalled that he had the chore of setting to type "the manuscript of a sermon...which was entirely without [punctuation marks], and every line began with a capital letter, as if it had been poetry."⁷⁰ In a case such as this, the printer could not simply print the manuscript as he had received it without falling victim to the hasty accusation of being "an illiterate blockhead."⁷¹ Apprentice libraries served a practical purpose for printers as well as achieving their personal fulfillment. Without being well versed in grammar and reasonably well read, a printer could easily overlook the mistakes of an author. A printed work replete with mistakes not only reflected poorly on the individual printer but also on the profession overall.

Education and printing enjoyed close links since the fifteenth century. Printers not only encouraged education of their own through apprentice libraries, but also promoted learning to a literate public. The earliest printers acknowledged that the advent of the printing press transformed the information trade. They extolled the preservative powers of the printing press. Whereas manuscripts were few in number and only survived if carefully guarded, printing

⁶⁹ Buckingham, *Personal Memoirs and Recollections*, vol.1, 31.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

preserved information by making it public. The fixity of print in contrast to scribal errors, the reintroduction of classical texts to audiences, and proliferation of printed texts conveying information all contributed to the notion that the press had become necessary to preserving and disseminating knowledge in the early modern world.⁷²

The influence of the press in data exchange scarcely diminished in the subsequent centuries. In 1813 at an anniversary meeting of the New York Typographical Society, printers briefly considered the societal importance of their art. In order to emphasize the significance of printing, the keynote speaker envisaged a world before the invention of the printing press, in which books and education were available only to the wealthy.⁷³ In addition to education, the art and mystery of the trade has “assisted religion, civilization, and science” and proved “essential to the existence, of civil liberty.”⁷⁴ Preserving history for posterity was another invaluable benefit of the printing press. For printers noted that the “the art of printing furnishes us records of times which are no more!”⁷⁵ Printing, often lauded to as the Art Preservative, offered permanence and preservation by transforming a single, handwritten manuscript into hundreds or thousands of type copies. One nineteenth century printer captured the historical and cultural significance of printing in verse: “Recording Art! Historians love thy birth.”⁷⁶ Although not the only method of preserving historical materials, commissioning the printing of a manuscript increased its chances of circulation and survival. In addition to serving the contemporary needs of its audiences,

⁷² Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, 87-90.

⁷³ Mack, “*An Oration before the New York Typographical Society*,” 10.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁶ William O. Bourne, “The Reformer,” in *Voices from the Press*, 155.

printed matter contributed to preserving a record of past events and eras. Printed materials formed the basis of many early historical collections in the United States.⁷⁷

As operators of a machine commonly referred to as the “preserver of all arts,” printers were responsible for producing and disseminating enlightening, informative, and entertaining works. Not only were most interested in books and reading at a young age, but their chosen trade enabled them to enjoy greater access to books and periodicals than most individuals.⁷⁸ As a printer’s apprentice, Benjamin Franklin befriended apprentices of a bookbinder who permitted him to borrow books as well as a merchant who frequented the printing shop in order to acquire books for his library.⁷⁹ This merchant, impressed with the apprentice, opened his library to the young man.⁸⁰

Professional agreements among printers contributed to a printer’s accumulation of information. Newspaper printers had the benefit of newspaper exchanges. These networks between printers in a variety of cities shared their newspapers with each other. Aided by the Post Office Act of 1792, which called for more roads and permitted editors to mail newspapers to each other without paying postage, remote printers requested newspapers from large cities in exchange for their own periodical or by paying a reduced subscription fee.⁸¹ Papers located in large cities participated in extensive exchange networks. For example, the *National Aegis* of

⁷⁷ "Meetings of 1791," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, vol. 1, 13.

⁷⁸ Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 1, 203.

⁷⁹ Franklin, *Memoir*, 26.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁸¹ Hamilton, *Country Printer*, 163; Gross and Kelley, *An Extensive Republic*, 396; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 479.

Worcester received over one hundred newspapers each week.⁸² Printers often copied verbatim articles from other newspapers that might appeal to subscribers. A printing office existed as an informal archive for periodicals. Subscribers to a periodical would sometimes ask their local printer if he had a previous issue in his office or even ask to look at other periodicals received through the newspaper exchange.⁸³ Most newspaper offices retained the only complete archive of the newspapers and other periodicals published in house. A fire or other calamity in a print shop could compromise its holdings. For example, in 1876, fire engulfed a newspaper office in Virginia City, Nevada, destroying the only known complete record of the *Territorial Enterprise*.⁸⁴ Printers conscientiously preserved the works their office produced not only for their own reference but also for their patrons.

As a routine effect of printing, many printers amassed stores of newspapers, pamphlets, and other items their shop set to type.⁸⁵ Printers would occasionally be left with unsold copies of various works to disburse, and could even have an entire printing job to sell if the author defaulted on his payment.⁸⁶ With surplus copies on his hands, a printer could seek a market in either fellow printer-booksellers or perhaps a known private collector. Motivated by personal interests, whims, and passions, private collectors played a vital role in collecting and preserving

⁸² Christopher Columbus Baldwin and Nathaniel Paine, *Diary of Christopher Columbus Baldwin, librarian of the American Antiquarian Society 1829-1835* (Worcester, Mass: The Society, 1901), 15.

⁸³ Buckingham, *Personal Memoirs and Recollections*, vol. 1, 239-240.

⁸⁴ James E. Smalldon, *Early American Newspapers: A Guide to Collecting* (Alhambra, CA: Paper Americana, 1964), 55, 63.

⁸⁵ Edelstein, *Joel Munsell*, 303.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

information.⁸⁷ In the early American republic, there existed a scarcity of publicly accessible libraries and archives. Despite Franklin's efforts in forming a library network in Philadelphia to exchange books, public collections served relatively few patrons. Instead, private collections and libraries formed the early nation's intellectual nucleus. Private collectors amassed rare books and historical periodicals as well as archival manuscripts. The care collectors exercised in selecting and preserving materials was unmatched by public institutions.

The proliferation of printed matter and an overwhelming desire to collect and preserve objects coincided in the early republic. Printers and collectors approached written materials with an archival consciousness. Instead of simply discarding or recycling old papers, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Americans began to grow concerned with storing and preserving both old and current documents. Ordinary men and women refused to discard printed matter they acquired and began to save and preserve whatever suited their intellectual needs. These individuals stored and bound files of newspapers to preserve them in addition to filling notebooks with their favorite excerpts of literature to fashion their own private reference collections.⁸⁸

This archival consciousness,⁸⁹ or an abiding concern for the welfare of, accessibility to, and the long-term preservation of documents, extended beyond the United States.⁹⁰ Facetiously,

⁸⁷ Thomas Knoles, "An Equal Taste for Antiquities: Reverend William Bentley and the American Antiquarian Society," *Annual Proceedings of Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife* 29 (2004): 21.

⁸⁸ Gross and Kelley, *An Extensive Republic*, 536-537.

⁸⁹ Archival consciousness, a term which has occasionally cropped up in archival literature since 1940, lacks a clear and uniform definition. A perusal of leading journals yields less than fifteen uses of the phrase. For this thesis, the author uses the phrase archival consciousness to describe a concern for the collection, safety, security, long-term preservation of, and accessibility

Reverend Thomas Frognall Dibdin first wrote about an epidemic afflicting England in 1809, bibliomania, for which “no certain and correct remedies”⁹¹ existed. Sufferers of bibliomania appreciated a book for its rarity, its condition, and its quality of printing and often their love of collecting extended to manuscripts.⁹² Purchasing books was an essential component to bibliomania, but as the condition progressed bibliomaniacs often either copied or pasted in their books newspaper articles or any other notes on the book’s subject.⁹³ In this case, the collector not only admired the work, but created a truly unique and archival edition for his private library.

Other works composed in the nineteenth century explored this phenomenon of collecting.

While some authors believed the world to be in the throes of a veritable book-craze, others

to historical records. Bogomir Chokel, in his article, “The Archives of Bulgaria,” *American Archivist* 26, no. 4 (1963), uses the phrase similarly to the author. Chokel identifies an archival consciousness as the driving force in establishing the earliest archives in Bulgaria when nineteenth century intellectuals, desirous of saving and sharing Bulgarian history, formed a historical society.

Most often, the literature speaks of raising archival consciousness. In Karl L. Trever’s article, “The American Archivist: The Voice of a Profession,” *American Archivist* 15, no. 2 (1952): 150, archival consciousness describes the awareness of archives the American public had after the formation of the National Archives. Robert Schuster, in “‘Everyone Did What Was Right in His Own Eyes’: Nondenominational Fundamentalist/Evangelical/Pentecostal Archives in the United States,” *American Archivist* 52 published in 1989, uses the phrase to mean an awareness about the value of archives. Karen M. Mason and Tanya Zanish-Belcher apply the phrase slightly differently. In their article, “Raising the Archival Consciousness: How Women’s Archives Challenge Traditional Approaches to Collecting and Use, Or, What’s in a Name?” in *Library Trends* 56, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 344-359, they use the term to refer to establishing archival collections for previously overlooked groups.

⁹⁰ Nicholas A. Basbanes, *A Gentle madness: bibliophiles, bibliomanes, and the eternal passion for books* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 25.

⁹¹ Thomas Frognall Dibdin, *Bibliomania: Or Book-Madness; a Bibliographical Romance; Illustrated with Cuts* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1842), 548.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 487.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 499.

clearly distinguished between a book-collector and a scholar. Book collecting required “an appetite for collecting books...wholly unconnected with, nay absolutely repugnant to all idea of reading them.”⁹⁴ A student, on the other hand, endeavored to read, understand, and perhaps even memorize the books within his reach.⁹⁵ While the author doubted a collector’s pursuit of personal edification through his library, his zeal was unmatched, as he searched “from the shop to the garret – the garret to the cellar – the cellar to the stall”⁹⁶ to fill the shelves of his “ravenous [r]epository.”⁹⁷ His objects, once acquired, rested in the “safe custody of his shelves.”⁹⁸ While some collectors amassed books, only to jealously guard them from all threats of destruction, including researchers, others permitted students to reap the intellectual benefits of their collections.

Collectors, gripped by an overwhelming desire to amass materials, sought an explanation for their compulsions. Christopher Columbus Baldwin spent his relatively short life as a lawyer, newspaper editor, librarian, and above all, collector of books and manuscripts. Phrenology, a pseudo-science that gained popularity in the nineteenth century, offered at least an anatomical reason for collecting. After undergoing an examination, Baldwin discovered he possessed the “true developments of the antiquarian tastes, which consisted in the organs of veneration,

⁹⁴ James Beresford, *Bibliosophia; or, Book-Wisdom. Containing Some Account of the Pride, Pleasure, and Privileges, of That Glorious Vocation, Book-Collecting. By an Aspirant. II. The Twelve Labours of an Editor, Separately Pitted against Those of Hercules*, (London: Printed for William Miller, Albemarle-Street. By W. Bulmer and Co. Cleveland-Row, 1810), 4-5.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-9.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

benevolence and acquisitiveness. Veneration made me respect antiquity and acquisitiveness gave me a taste to gather and collect.”⁹⁹ Nineteenth century collectors recognized their craving to collect and sought explanations to rationalize their obsession. While some found answers in popular science, others found companionship in societies that centered on building their own collections.

As an archival consciousness became commensurate with the passion for collecting, concerns of both access and preservation appeared in the early republic. The first historical societies in the United States formed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with private collectors joining efforts to acquire and preserve historical resources. These collectors often turned to printers who had stores of newspapers and pamphlets in their warehouses. One collector in Boston relied on printers to help complete his collection of early American newspapers.¹⁰⁰

While many printers may have remained uninfluenced by the large volume of printed materials both coming into and being produced in their shop, others saw the opportunity to become collectors themselves. Trading duplicates allowed booksellers to add some diversity to their stock or to their own personal collection and offered books to cultural heritage institutions operating on limited budgets.¹⁰¹ Printers and booksellers established networks with libraries and historical societies as the nineteenth century progressed. Several early societies included printers as their primary members and eventually, the first national archival collection of the Library of

⁹⁹ Baldwin and Paine, *Diary of Christopher Columbus Baldwin*, 284.

¹⁰⁰ "Meetings of 1791," 13.

¹⁰¹ Edelstein, *Joel Munsell*, 308.

Congress began with the voracious collecting of a Washington printer. Trade sales for printers and booksellers presented the opportunity of acquiring materials at extremely reduced prices.¹⁰² Their access to books and other materials at low prices combined with many printers' interest in books since childhood formed, in part, an impetus to begin collecting. Printers and booksellers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth reaped the benefit of timing. Beginning in the eighteenth century, book collecting became a popular past time. Not only was it compatible with the increasing interest in antiquarianism, but it also permitted collectors to indulge in nostalgia during a period of social and political upheaval.¹⁰³ Printers not only helped meet the demands of new collectors, but also engaged in the activity themselves. Even as a young apprentice, one printer used papers received from newspaper exchanges as the basis for a personal collection. He "kept regular files of every exchange paper"¹⁰⁴ to serve as his private archives.

In addition to storing their own periodicals, printers also wrote books or shorter pieces dedicated to their art. Since the invention of printing, printers have lauded the actual and potential advantages wrought by the press. Early printers, motivated by profit, also boasted about the press' capacity to spread culture and learning. Even Pope Leo X in 1515 declared that the printing press was "invented for God's glory, for the exaltation of the faith and the diffusion of art and learning."¹⁰⁵ Prosper Marchand, French printer of the eighteenth century, compiled an

¹⁰² Ibid., 312.

¹⁰³ Kristian Jensen, *Revolution and the Antiquarian Book: Reshaping the Past, 1780-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 79, 80, 183.

¹⁰⁴ Weed, *Life of Thurlow Weed*, vol. 1, 23.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Eisenstein, *Divine Art, Infernal Machine: The Reception of Printing in the West from First Impressions to the Sense of an Ending* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 17.

early history of printing, commemorating the art. The notable frontispiece of his history portrayed the birth of the printing, as a large press accompanied by Athena and Hermes descended from heaven to earth.¹⁰⁶

The same exuberant tone appeared in nineteenth century America. Since the press helped spur independence from Britain, printers enjoyed a place of prominence. Their newspapers not only spread information, but also, in the public mind, became the bulwark of democracy. Indeed, the uninitiated viewed printing with wonder. Lyman Whiting, a nineteenth century New England clergyman, recalled that he and his friends routinely passed in “curious awe” of their local printing house.¹⁰⁷ Printers transformed from skilled craftsmen eking out a living printing newspapers, broadsides, and other works, to influential editors with a duty to impart their political views to their readers.¹⁰⁸ They grew increasingly enamored with their craft, so much so that they soon produced books specifically for the enjoyment of their fellow tradesmen.

Joseph T. Buckingham dedicated his book on newspapermen and printers to “all printers and conductors of the newspaper press who entertain a true regard for the dignity of their profession and a disposition to render it a blessing to humanity.”¹⁰⁹ In his brief dedication, Buckingham identified his main audience, printers. After a career of printing, he praised the art

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *Print Culture and Enlightenment Thought*, (Chapel Hill: Hanes Foundation, Rare Book Collection/University Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1986), 17, 21; Eisenstein, *Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, xi.

¹⁰⁷ Lyman Whiting, “A Bicentennial Oration made in West Brookfield, July 4, 1860 at the Celebration of the Two-Hundredth Anniversary of the Settlement of the Town of Brookfield,” (West Brookfield: printed by Thomas Morey, 1869), 64.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel, *Scandal and Civility*, 7; Humphrey, *The Press of the Young Republic*, 43.

¹⁰⁹ Joseph T. Buckingham, *Specimens of Newspaper Literature: with personal memoirs, anecdotes and reminiscences* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1850), dedication page.

and craft of printing for its ameliorating effects on the human mind. *Voices of the Press* compiled short stories and poetry written by printers. The volume paid tribute to the literary skill of printers and trumpeted the success of those “unaided by wealth and patronage.”¹¹⁰ Although their contributions were admittedly not labeled as “literary excellence”¹¹¹ they intended to demonstrate to apprentices that through an industrious career in printing, their circumstances could be greatly improved.¹¹² The volume subtly reinforced the authority of master printers as it celebrated their business acumen and intellectual achievements.

During the nineteenth century, successful printers recounted their early careers as printers’ apprentices and journeymen. The memoirs emphasized the printer’s place in American society, as the politicization of the press at the turn of the century endowed a printer-editor with a voice of his own through editorials. These printers’ memoirs, published by men such as Joseph Buckingham and Thurlow Weed, demonstrated their status as self-made men, recalled their character-building years as apprentices, and reflected nostalgia for a craft that had endured substantial innovations. By mid-century, printing practices had undergone noticeable changes. A proliferation of machine presses, female compositors, young men who failed to complete their apprenticeships, and an ever-increasing divide between printing and publishing altered the profession’s previous standards and practices.¹¹³ In light of these changes, memoirs of printers who recalled the early days of printing in the American republic appeared. Thurlow Weed, in a

¹¹⁰ James J. Brenton, preface to *Voices from the Press*, iii.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, iii-iv.

¹¹³ Gross and Kelley, *An Extensive Republic*, 166-68; Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital*, 94.

letter to the New York Typographical Society, penned in 1851, lamented the current trends in printing. He found “progress and mechanism” guilty of “vandalism which has robbed ‘press work’ of all its intellectuality.”¹¹⁴ In this new age of printing, machines eliminated the toilsome tasks that left such a deep impression on earlier printers. Weed questioned, “how can a boy make a good printer whose initiatory ‘steps’ were not taken in treading a ‘pelt?’”¹¹⁵ Master printers of the mid nineteenth century had lived to see the printing practices they learned become obsolete. The trade that defined them, equipped them with a living, strength, and intelligence, was becoming unrecognizable with the increasing mechanization of printing.

Even as the field changed over time, its impact on printers remained the same. Printing proved to be a profession that gripped the minds and imaginations of its practitioners. Printers attributed the invention of printing to many significant historical events. At a printers’ conference in the nineteenth century, one printer argued that the printing press demonstrated its cultural significance in helping bring about the Protestant Reformation, and in spreading and shaping literary values. He confidently asserted that the invention of the printing press “ranks third among the greatest events the world’s history records,” but failed to state for the readers’ edification the first two events.¹¹⁶ Many successful printers were not content to master their trade and dominate the markets. After engaging in trade, many printers devoted their time to uncovering the history of printing. Isaiah Thomas labored for years on his prodigious two volume *History of Printing*, tracing the beginning of the art through its establishment in the

¹¹⁴ Thurlow Weed Barnes, *Life of Thurlow Weed including his Autobiography and Memoir*, vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1884), 192.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ James R. Trumbull, "The Press," in *Voices from the Press*, 53.

American colonies. Around fifty years after the publication of Thomas' volumes, Joel Munsell wrote several short volumes on paper-making as well as on typography in the United States.¹¹⁷

The many trials of apprenticeship and challenges of earning a living through printing united the trade. All printers had learned the trade secrets and as young men been "initiated in the mystery of type-setting."¹¹⁸ Typographical societies promoted camaraderie in an otherwise competitive field. The profession inspired strong bonds between its practitioners; so much so that one printer referred to his colleagues as "brethren of the type."¹¹⁹ Printing influenced the mentality and self-perception of most printers. They viewed their field as an integral component of their personal identity. Even in jest, printers suggested that their profession not only influenced their working life, but also their legacy. Indulging in a play on words, one printer wrote about a printer's legacy by using the trade terminology: "Let us hope when he becomes dead matter an imposing stone may be erected to his memory."¹²⁰ Similarly, as a young man, perhaps basking in his early success as a precocious printer, Benjamin Franklin composed a possible epigraph for himself,

"THE BODY
OF
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN,
PRINTER,
(like the cover of an old book,

¹¹⁷ Joel Munsell, *The Typographical Miscellany* (New York: J. Munsell, 1850); Joel Munsell, *A Chronology of Paper and Paper-Making* (Albany: J. Munsell, 1865).

¹¹⁸ Buckingham, *Personal Memoirs and Recollections*, vol.1, 25.

¹¹⁹ Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 1, 11.

¹²⁰ Jacobi, *Gesta Typographia*, 121. An imposing stone was the table or other flat surface on which type was organized into pages to be printed, see Rummonds, *Nineteenth-Century Printing Practices*, 998.

its contents torn out,
and stripped of its lettering and gilding),
lies here food for worms ;
yet the work itself shall not be lost,
for it will (as he believed) appear once more
in a new and more elegant edition,
revised and corrected by
THE AUTHOR."¹²¹

Printing influenced many of its practitioners, but none more so than Isaiah Thomas.

Thomas, a printer and bookseller in New England, had been in a printing shop since he was six years old. In 1824, nearing his seventy sixth year, he received word of his honorary membership to the Franklin Typographical Society of Boston. By the early nineteenth century, Thomas had rallied his countrymen to pursue independence from Britain, established multiple printing shops in the northeast, and published some his period's most successful works.¹²² He had been printing for nearly seventy years, and yet he assured the typographical society that his "attachment to the art of which we are professors, is not diminished. Could I live my life over again, and choose my employment, it would be that of a Printer."¹²³ For Thomas and for many others, printing was not merely a career, but a vocation.

¹²¹ Franklin, *Memoirs*, 236.

¹²² Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 1, 379, 385; Thomas and Hill, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, x.

¹²³ Isaiah Thomas to the Franklin Typographical Society in 1825, Franklin Typographical Society, *Proceedings of the Franklin Typographical Society*, 7.

Chapter Two: Isaiah Thomas and the American Antiquarian Society

Printing removed the veil which obscured the reason of man; it broke the chain that bound him in superstition. By multiplying copies of the labors of the learned, and dispersing those copies over the earth, even to the remotest regions, he was enabled to search after truth in religion, in philosophy, in politics; and, improvement in the mechanic arts.

- Isaiah Thomas, *History of Printing*, 1810

On July 20, 1828, Isaiah Thomas, printer, historian, and founder of the American Antiquarian Society became something of a relic. On that day he reported in his diary that two young men, “being themselves printers and booksellers, politely introduced themselves to me, expressing a desire, as they said to pay their respects to me as the oldest printer and bookseller, etc. etc. perhaps in the United States.”¹ By 1828, Thomas had outlived a cherished wife, his only son, and numerous fellow printers. Like an object sitting in the American Antiquarian Society’s Cabinet Museum, Thomas could tell of past experiences and events, from his childhood in Boston in the 1750s, to his career as an eminent printer and publisher lasting into the nineteenth century. Before accruing the requisite years and experience to become a model for upstart printers and living vestige of years past, Thomas labored as a printer, publisher and historian.

This chapter will discuss the contributions that Isaiah Thomas made to developing archival institutions in the United States. A brief biography and synopsis of his printing career demonstrate the prodigious extent of printing and publishing enterprises. After retiring from a portion of his business endeavors, Thomas was not content to pass his years in repose. Instead, he compiled a thorough history of printing and printers in colonial America. He then founded the American Antiquarian Society, a historical and collecting organization that quickly accumulated

¹ Isaiah Thomas and Benjamin Thomas Hill, *The Diary of Isaiah Thomas, 1805-1828*, vol. 2 (Worcester, The Society, 1909), 302.

an impressive amount of artifacts and articles of the American press. Thomas operated the American Antiquarian Society differently than other historical societies of the time. His egalitarian views of membership and his particular inclusion of printers and publishers into the society helped increase the collecting efforts and overall success of the society.²

Although born into abject poverty, Thomas rose to become a profitable businessman and prominent community member of the small, intellectually vibrant town of Worcester, Massachusetts. In 1755, at only six years old, he entered the trade as an apprentice, receiving his printing instruction from Zechariah Fowle.³ Fowle, as the apprenticeship contract outlined, agreed to provide for his apprentice's material well-being and to teach him the "art and mystery of a printer also to read, write, and cypher."⁴ Although Thomas considered his printing master to be "very ignorant as a man and as a Printer"⁵ and far from ambitious, in his small printing shop

² Although Isaiah Thomas appears in other works, his work as a collector and early archivist has never been examined thoroughly. Gross and Kelley's *Extensive Republic* offers details of Thomas' business career and more briefly discussed in Pasley's *Tyranny of Printers*. Walter Muir Whitehill's *Independent Historical Societies* (Cambridge, MA: Boston Athenaeum, 1962) offers a historical sketch of the American Antiquarian Society from its founding in 1812 through 1960. While Whitehill's work is useful, and he mentions the role Thomas played in establishing the society, he does not relate it to his printing career or in-depth describe the early archival nature of the society. Similarly, Louis Leonard Tucker's chapter in *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic: The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and Collections, 1791-1861* (Chapel Hill: North Caroliniana Society and North Carolina Collection, 1995) provides a brief biographical sketch of Thomas and then of the American Antiquarian Society. These works listed above consider aspects of Thomas' life and career, however, they do not argue that Thomas' printing career influenced his later endeavors of collecting and maintaining a vast archives.

³ Untitled Autobiography, Isaiah Thomas Papers, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA.

⁴ Printing Indenture of Isaiah Thomas, July 7, 1756, Isaiah Thomas Papers, American Antiquarian Society. Original spelling maintained.

⁵ Untitled Autobiography, Isaiah Thomas Papers.

he managed to learn the trade.⁶ In fact, Fowle's listlessness towards his career provided his apprentices with increased responsibilities. By the time Thomas was twelve years of age he acted as overseer of the printing shop.⁷ By 1766, before he served the full term of his apprenticeship, Thomas endeavored to go to London, the center of printing at that time.⁸ While he managed to travel to Halifax, and eventually the Carolinas, London proved to be beyond his reach. Thomas returned once more to Fowle's printing shop in Boston in 1770 not as an apprentice, but as a partner. That same year they issued the first edition of the long-running *Massachusetts Spy*. Shortly thereafter, their partnership dissolved and Thomas purchased Fowle's printing equipment and continued to issue his newspaper.⁹

Thomas first wished for the *Massachusetts Spy* to remain neutral as tensions rose between Great Britain and the American colonies. Quickly however the *Spy*'s subscribers and its printer boldly and unequivocally advocated for the American cause.¹⁰ British forces had taken notice of the paper and to ensure the printer's and periodical's safety, several men, including Colonel Bigelow and General Warren, convinced Isaiah Thomas to move his printing office inland, to Worcester.¹¹ The citizens of Worcester, eager to have a press in their town, had already

⁶ Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 1, 341.

⁷ Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol.1, 2nd ed., xxi-xxv.

⁸ *Ibid.*, xxxi.

⁹ *Ibid.*, xlii-xliii; Zechariah Fowle to Isaiah Thomas, October 23, 1770, Isaiah Thomas Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

¹⁰ Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 1, 378-79.

¹¹ Caleb A. Wall, *Reminiscences of Worcester from the earliest period, historical and genealogical with notices of early settlers and prominent citizens, and descriptions of old landmarks and ancient dwellings, accompanied by a map and numerous illustrations.* (Worcester, MA: Tyler & Seagrave, 1877), 46.

invited Thomas to settle there but the accelerating aggression between the British troops and colonial rebels convinced Thomas to move earlier than expected. On May 3, 1775, his printing shop opened and began to issue the first printed matter originating in Worcester.¹² Until the Provincial Congress established a printing press at Watertown, it relied on the skills of Thomas.¹³

A keen businessman, he embraced the zeal of his countrymen. To capture the fervor of the rebellion, Thomas modified the title of his paper to *The Massachusetts Spy: Or, American Oracle Liberty!* Citizens of Worcester and its environs were furnished with news and bold editorials every Wednesday.¹⁴ Thomas also received a political appointment that most printers desired: postmaster of his local town. Newspapers circulated by way of the postal service and as postmaster, Thomas could browse news from around the country and add information to his own paper.¹⁵

The *Massachusetts Spy* quickly garnered a number of subscriptions and became one of the most popular newspapers in New England, attaining its highest numbers of subscribers during the war.¹⁶ Thomas, temporarily leasing his Worcester shop to other businessmen, travelled around New England establishing new printing shops and periodicals, taking his former

¹² Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 1, 401.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 384-85.

¹⁴ Isaiah Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 2 (Worcester: Isaiah Thomas Jr. , 1810), 253.

¹⁵ Richard C. Steele, *Isaiah Thomas* (Worcester: Worcester Telegram and Gazette, Inc. and Worcester Historical Museum, 1981), 21.

¹⁶ Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 2, 250; "Historical Circulations," *Rag Linen* (accessed January 9, 2013) <http://raglinen.com/education/circulations/>.

apprentices as business partners.¹⁷ The years following the Revolutionary War proved to be the peak of Thomas' career. He and former apprentice, Ebenezer T. Andrews, opened a printing firm in Boston. Next, Thomas established a printing shop and newspaper in Walpole, New Hampshire, followed by shops in Baltimore, Albany and Newburyport and Brookfield both in Massachusetts. Thomas primarily managed his printing business in Worcester, which soon grew to include a bookstore, paper-mill, book-bindery, and the publication of an almanac.¹⁸ Eventually each of his printing offices opened its own bookstore. With these additions, particularly the bookstores, he seamlessly "united the two branches of printing and bookselling."¹⁹ Besides printing and selling books in his own stores, Thomas also provided books to other sellers. For example, he had extensive business dealings with John West, a bookseller in Boston.²⁰ His printing enterprise had burgeoned from a single press with dilapidated typeface to sixteen presses and expanded from publishing one newspaper to producing several periodicals and engaging in the book trade.²¹ Thomas, along with Mathew Carey, separated the role of publisher from printer. In addition to assuming more financial risks and directly influencing the character of the press,

¹⁷ Wall, *Reminiscences of Worcester*, 306.

¹⁸ Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 1, 401; Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 2, 402-3; Benjamin Franklin Thomas, *Memoir of Isaiah Thomas* (Albany: Munsell, 1874), 61-62.

¹⁹ Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 1, 402.

²⁰ Isaiah Thomas to John West January 9, 1805, Isaiah Thomas Collection, Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection, Library of Congress; John West, *A Catalogue of Books Published in America and For Sale at the Bookstore of John West* (Boston: Samuel Etheridge, 1797).

²¹ Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 1, 403.

these early publishers exchanged works with other book-sellers, distributed and promoted their publications.²²

The number of presses Thomas had in his printing chain was impressive, but the popularity of the works he and his partners published earned them a comfortable fortune. They issued some of the most popular and influential books of their time. Noah Webster's *American Spelling Book* and *English Grammar* appeared in several of Thomas' book catalogues.²³ Thomas was one of the first printers in America to print folio Bibles, which had previously been imported from England.²⁴ Thomas' book catalogue from 1791, titled *The Friends of Literature, who wish to encourage the Art of Printing in America, are respectfully informed that American Editions of Books (all of which were printed in the United States) are now selling by Isaiah Thomas in Worcester, And by said Thomas and Company, in Boston, viz,* reflected not only his advertising finesse but also his genuine concern for the development and expansion of printing in America.²⁵

By 1802, Thomas was in his early fifties, and had reached a state of financial security that permitted him to leave his Worcester printing shop to his son, Isaiah Thomas Junior. Although retired from his primary locus of operation, Thomas remained involved in business affairs. His son's complete absence of business acumen and his interests in his numerous printing houses in

²² Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital*, 75, 79, 82-83; Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 2, 51.

²³ Isaiah Thomas, *The Friends of Literature, who wish to encourage the Art of Printing in America, are respectfully informed that American Editions of Books (all of which were printed in the United States) are now selling by Isaiah Thomas in Worcester, And by said Thomas and Company, in Boston, viz.* (Worcester ,MA: Isaiah Thomas, 1791).

²⁴ Edwin Wolf II, *The Book Culture of A Colonial American City* (Claredon Press: Oxford, 1988), 36.

²⁵ Thomas, *The Friends of Literature*.

the northeast continued to draw him into the professional sphere.²⁶ Correspondence between Isaiah Thomas and booksellers in Boston reveal that Thomas continued to sell paper and books to other printers and his diary shows that he kept in contact with E. T. Andrews, who managed the printing firm in Boston.²⁷

Instead of spending his semi-retirement in repose, Thomas commenced an extensive research and writing project on the history of printing, particularly in North America. He occasionally wrote in his diary about his exertions for his monograph. On December 1, 1805, the entry was simply, “wrote all day,”²⁸ presumably on his historical project. His diary entries of 1808 revealed a coalescing of his research and collecting interests; within one week he purchased ninety seven volumes of old New England newspapers.²⁹ In June 1809, Thomas assiduously scoured existing records for information about early printers in the British colonies. He wearily noted that he has been searching “old Records in the Secretary’s Office to find something respecting Day and Green first printers.”³⁰ By July 1810, he had completed writing and soon

²⁶ Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 2, 106.

²⁷ Isaiah Thomas to John West, January 9, 1805, Isaiah Thomas Collection; Isaiah Thomas to John West, August 1805, Isaiah Thomas Collection, Miscellaneous Papers Collection, Library of Congress; Isaiah Thomas to John West and Mr. Coy, July 16, 1808, Isaiah Thomas Collection, Miscellaneous Papers Collection, Library of Congress; Isaiah Thomas to Mr. West and Mr. Richardson, October 17, 1817 and January 27, 1818; Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas* vol. 2, 289.

²⁸ Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, 15.

²⁹ Charles L. Nichols, “Isaiah Thomas Diaries For 1782-1804 and 1808,” *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings*, 26 (1916): 75.

³⁰ Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, 69; original capitalization has been maintained.

afterwards published a book, not only as a printer, but also as an author.³¹ His work thoroughly covered the printers and publications up to the American Revolution and provided as detailed history of the period as he could glean.

When Thomas undertook the laborious charge of studying and recording the history of printing, he pursued it wholeheartedly. He acquired rare and costly periodicals printed by some of the earliest printers in the colonies.³² Thomas exhibited a genuine interest in the history of his profession and his inquiry into the history of his art continued even after the publication of his two volumes of the *History of Printing*. In October of 1819, Thomas recorded in his diary the receipt of several books from Germany delineating ancient printing practices.³³ His writing ambitions and interest in typography inspired him to begin collecting relevant materials. Thomas though had shown an interest in creating libraries as early as the 1790s. A catalogue he published in 1791 concluded with an advertisement for those trying to build a library, in which Thomas promised to procure any book not listed in his inventory that the customer sought “without any extra cost.”³⁴ Similarly, other contemporary booksellers offered to assist customers attempting to build private or social libraries with discounted rates and prompt service.³⁵ As printer and bookseller, Thomas encouraged the diffusion of knowledge and the promotion of arts and

³¹ Ibid., 90. In his diary, he noted that he “finished at press ‘History of Printing’” on August 14, 1810, on page 92 of volume 1.

³² Thomas, *History of Printing*, vol. 1, note 10.

³³ Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, 32.

³⁴ Isaiah Thomas, *Isaiah Thomas's Catalogue of English, Scotch, Irish and American Books For Sale at the Worcester Bookstore: Consisting of History, Voyages, Travels* (Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas, 1801), 41.

³⁵ William Pelham, *At Pelham's Book Store and Circulating Library* (Boston, 1796).

learning. His profession enabled him to reach these ends, and his retirement did not impede his attainment of such lofty goals.

Once he completed the *History of Printing*, he assumed another monumental task, that of establishing his own historical society and archives. He had collected books, newspapers, and pamphlets even before formally beginning his extensive historical project.³⁶ Thomas noted several times in his diary that he spent part or most of the day arranging his personal library; finally, after nearly six months he completed the catalogue.³⁷ In a more public spirited endeavor, Thomas served as director and librarian of Worcester's social library for several years and perhaps had a hand in the selection of books.³⁸ Before resigning from some of his business interests, he published a suggested catalogue of books for a social library, designed to edify the general reader, penned by a Harvard professor.³⁹ His experience as a printer, bookseller, and amateur librarian prepared him to establish, direct and support a historical organization replete with a library and manuscripts collection.

On January 13, 1812, Thomas first voiced his idea of creating a historical repository and society to several close friends.⁴⁰ By October of that same year, Thomas had composed and

³⁶ "Address of President Salisbury," *Antiquarian Papers* (Worcester, MA:Chas. Hamilton,1879), 70.

³⁷ Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, 79, 124, 137, 139, 156.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 79. The first time Thomas mentioned serving as a library director for the Worcester Social Library was in an entry dated December 23, 1807, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, 58.

³⁹ Thaddeus M. Harris, *Selected Catalogue of Some of the most Esteemed Publications in the English Language Proper to Form a Social Library* (Boston: Thomas and Andrews, 1796), iii-v; Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, 174.

⁴⁰ Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, 125.

submitted to the state legislature a petition to incorporate a learned group, the American Antiquarian Society. Thomas had assembled a supportive team who endeavored to create a society whose “immediate and peculiar design is to discover the antiquities of our own Continent, and by providing a fixed, and permanent place of deposit.”⁴¹

As a printer, Thomas had seen thousands of printed works be dispersed far and wide, read once or twice and then discarded. After completing his *History of Printing*, for which he sought early American newspapers to trace the history of the press in this country, Thomas realized how few early periodicals remained. He understood the ephemeral nature of most printed matter and attempted to permanently preserve as much of it as possible. While many people believed that the multitude of copies issues from the presses ensured their survival, Thomas knew “that of thousands of editions of printed books, not a copy of them is now to be found.”⁴² He aspired to create a society that would collect and preserve printed matter, historical materials and to “assist the researches of future historians of our country.”⁴³ This historical society did not merely seek to create a memorial to the past, but to serve as a living society, that gathered useful materials and made them available for critical inspection and analysis.⁴⁴

In 1813, Thomas and other founding members helped define the society’s mission and delineate its areas of collection. Although not as specific as modern collecting policies, the

⁴¹ Ibid., 161-2.

⁴² American Antiquarian Society, *Communication from the President of the American Antiquarian Society (I. Thomas) to the Members, Oct. 24, 1814. ... Together with the Laws of the Society, As Revised* (Worcester: William Manning, 1814), 6.

⁴³ American Antiquarian Society, *An Account of the American Antiquarian Society, Incorporated October 24, 1812* (Boston: Isaiah Thomas Jr., 1813), 11.

⁴⁴ Worthington C. Ford, “Historical Societies - Living and Dead,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 16, no. 3 (December 1929): 319.

American Antiquarian Society in its second year of existence considered which objects it would accept within its walls. While willing to embrace materials from all around the world, their primary focus remained to collect and preserve objects and publications originating in North America. The society desired books, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, maps, and manuscripts that offered “accounts of remarkable events or discoveries, or the description of any part of the continent, or the islands of the American seas.”⁴⁵ In addition to filling their library shelves, the society also sought materials for its museum, often referred to as a cabinet. Isaiah Thomas urged the collection of American artifacts, particularly “specimens” of “fossils, handicrafts of the Aborigines.”⁴⁶ They requested that “items of Indian fabrication”⁴⁷ include a statement of their original provenance, date of origin and description of the object’s original use and “any other matter which may elucidate their history.”⁴⁸ Instead of simply displaying the unknown, unfamiliar and bizarre, the society endeavored to showcase objects illustrative of American customs and history.

One of the unique aspects of the American Antiquarian Society’s collections was the emphasis on ephemera. The society sought a range of printed materials but particularly desired ephemera. Thomas, as a printer, publisher and historian of printing, appreciated the rarity of ephemeral matter and endeavored to preserve as much of it as possible. Beginning with his own paper, the *Massachusetts Spy*, he became a collector of ephemera. Printers appreciated the value

⁴⁵ American Antiquarian Society, *An Account*, 9.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Oliver Fiske, “Abstract of an Address to the Members of the American Antiquarian Society,” *Archaeologia Americana: Transactions and Collections of the American Antiquarian Society*, vol. 1 (The Society, 1820), 43.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

of ephemera more acutely than most. Newspapers in the early United States conveyed the prevailing attitudes and feelings of their times. Their articles reveal the news circulating at the time and the opinions of editors in power. Newspapers, as a composite of several authors, and intended for a large audience, were a social product. They displayed the work of many and represented the ideals of the subscribers' community.⁴⁹

Thomas' interest in ephemera expanded from periodicals and pamphlets to include printed ballads. In 1814 his bookkeeping in his diary revealed that he spent nearly five dollars to purchase ballads.⁵⁰ Few others during this period saw the value in collecting ephemera. Ephemera's historical value lies in their unassuming nature – intended only to have a brief lifespan, printers and authors produced these items without any pretense of historical importance. These materials accurately convey the milieu and events surrounding their creation.⁵¹ Thomas' personal quest to save ephemera gained support from the members of the society. As president, he beseeched members to desist from hastily "permitting this destruction"⁵² of periodicals. After members have enjoyed their newspapers and other printed items, Thomas invited them to save these materials and send them along to the society every year.⁵³

⁴⁹ Lucy Maynard Salmon, *The Newspaper and the Historian* (New York: Octagon Books, 1976), 17.

⁵⁰ Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, June 2, 1814, 232.

⁵¹ Maurice Rickards, *Collecting Printed Ephemera* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1988), 18.

⁵² *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 1812-1849* (Worcester, MA: The Society, 1912), 53.

⁵³ American Antiquarian Society, *Communication from the President*, October 24, 1814, 6.

Thomas, as president, vigorously followed his exhortation to collect and led the society in its collection efforts. William Bentley, a minister in the town of Salem, knew Thomas and became an early member of the society. In his diary, he noted a particular visit of Thomas on an errand for his society. On July 26, 1814, Isaiah Thomas and his son visited Salem “in search of stores for his Library and Cabinet.”⁵⁴ In addition to scouring surrounding towns for historical documents, Thomas purchased books and manuscripts collections whenever he could. The Mather Library, purchased in November of 1814 and donated to the society soon after, formed an impressive collection of both books and letters of Increase, Cotton and Samuel Mather.⁵⁵ Thomas’ personal library, valued at four thousand dollars, marked the first significant contribution to the society’s library.⁵⁶

In light of the society’s energetic collecting policy, the governing members deemed fit to establish a new official post, Librarian and Cabinet Keeper, in order to maintain, preserve, secure, and exhibit their accessions. The laws of the society outlined the responsibilities of the curator as to “arrange in classes”⁵⁷ the items received and “register [them] in a book, with proper description of each article.”⁵⁸ If the items were donations, the Librarian was to make a note of that in the society’s log of acquisitions. The museum items were available for display but the

⁵⁴ William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley, Pastor of the East Church, Salem, Massachusetts*, vol. 4 (Salem, Mass: Essex Institute, 1914), 270.

⁵⁵ Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, 253, note on pages 253-254; American Antiquarian Society, *Communication from the President*, 23.

⁵⁶ Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, 211; American Antiquarian Society, *Communication from the President*, 23.

⁵⁷ American Antiquarian Society, *An Account*, 20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

society did not permit loans of its artifacts. The society was similarly wary of loaning books to individuals, requiring a vote of the governing council. If the council approved, the librarian was to record meticulously the contents and terms of the loan.⁵⁹ A concern for the security of the books and artifacts led to the creation of a rule implemented in 1819 forbidding any person to browse the collection without the librarian or another officer of the society present.⁶⁰

A Librarian and Cabinet Keeper, established as a permanent position, quickly found work. By 1814, the society could boast of three thousand volumes, with books from the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth century, and even several books from the fifteenth century.⁶¹ Although the society quickly grew to need a librarian and cabinet keeper to constantly attend to their collection, their budget could not accommodate one until 1831 when Thomas furnished the society with a significant endowment to fund a permanent librarian.⁶² He outlined the responsibilities of the librarian and cabinet keeper to “constantly attend to the Library and Cabinet, and to keep the articles in good order, and in the best manner for preservation.”⁶³ The librarian and cabinet keeper could also make purchases of historical materials on behalf of the society.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ibid, 21.

⁶⁰ American Antiquarian Society, *Archaeologica Americana*, 55.

⁶¹ American Antiquarian Society, *Communication from the President*, 4.

⁶² William Lincoln, *An Address Delivered Before the American Antiquarian Society, at Their Annual Meeting, Oct. 23, 1835: In the Unitarian Meeting-House, Worcester, in Relation to the Character and Services of Their Late Librarian, Christopher C. Baldwin, Esq.* (Worcester: Printed for the Society by H.J. Howland, 1835), 10.

⁶³ "Dr. Thomas's Will," *Boston Masonic Mirror*, Vol. 2 (May 28, 1831), 380.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

The Library and Cabinet formed the intellectual center of the institution. While the weekly and large annual gatherings of the society brought members together, the holdings of the Library and Cabinet inspired reflection, study, as well admiration from visitors. Reverend Thomas Robbins, a member of the society recorded in his diary a visit with Isaiah Thomas in 1824. After meeting with the society's founder, he toured the library, which then possessed "more than five thousand volumes."⁶⁵ Similarly, his succinct description of the society's cabinet as being "very valuable"⁶⁶ delicately expressed the disparity between the collections in the library and the cabinet.⁶⁷

The American Antiquarian Society's inclusion of a library and cabinet reflected the prevailing ideas of scholarship in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Cabinets of curiosity began to form as early as the Renaissance when collectors viewed their tasks of gathering and imposing order on disarray as fulfilling a divine ordinance.⁶⁸ By the nineteenth century, cabinets represented a means of acquiring scientific knowledge and understanding the natural world.⁶⁹ During that era, the process for establishing a cabinet required "collecting, identifying,

⁶⁵ Thomas Robbins and Increase N. Tarbox, *Diary of Thomas Robbins, D.D., 1796-1854*, vol. 1 (Boston: Thomas Todd, printer, 1887), 973.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Claire Preston, "In the Wilderness of Forms: Ideas and Things in Thomas Browne's Cabinets of Curiosities," in *The Renaissance Computer* ed. Neil Rhodes and Jonathan Sawday (London: Routledge, 2000), 170-71.

⁶⁹ M. H. Dunlop, "Curiosities too Numerous to Mention: Early Regionalism and Cincinnati's Western Museum," *American Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (1984): 526.

organizing, preserving, and describing specimens.”⁷⁰ The development of an archives exactly mirrored the steps for building a cabinet, except documents replaced specimens as the desired objects. Each cabinet echoed the interests of its owner and its unique composition of artifacts required its own classification system.⁷¹ The unique, inimitable, and original construction of each cabinet resembled the composition of an archival collection, which also called for its own system of organization. Despite the difference in collected objects, the formation and organization of both cabinets and archives revolved around a unique system of collection and classification.

Historical and other learned societies in the early republic incorporated cabinets to display their materials illuminating natural philosophy, local ecology, and historical artifacts. The American Antiquarian Society’s cabinet stored relics from around the world, such as ancient coins, the country, such as Native American artifacts, and Massachusetts history, such as a whet stone used by the Mather family.⁷² The society’s diverse collections revealed an attempt to save and preserve any item of the past from present or future destruction. Despite the constant grouping of library and cabinet, Thomas seemed to distinguish between the two entities. His career spent as a printer led to his emphasis on collecting documents; he endeavored to preserve a record of documents issued from the nation’s presses. Thomas’ concentration on documents created a situation in which the library’s growth constantly outstripped that of the cabinet.⁷³

⁷⁰ Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, “Curiosities and Cabinets: Natural History Museums and Education on the Antebellum Campus,” *Isis* 79, no. 3 (1988): 407.

⁷¹ Preston, “In the Wilderness of Forms,” 173.

⁷² American Antiquarian Society, Librarian’s Report and Meeting June 1, 1814, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 1812-1849*, 43, 215.

⁷³ American Antiquarian Society, Address to the Members of the American Antiquarian Society, February 1, 1819 and Meeting of October 23, 1819, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 1812-1849*, 141, 147.

Although the society accepted contributions to its cabinet, its officers grew concerned that a cabinet filled with indiscriminately procured objects would tarnish the reputation of the society and obscure its focus on acquiring American printed matter. The governing council of the society reported in 1839 that the cabinet was neatly ordered, but composed of items “not particularly appropriate to the objects of the institution.”⁷⁴ The American Antiquarian Society satisfied the nineteenth century demand for a natural philosophy collection, but its founder and later librarians ensured that, foremost, the society cultivated a coherent archives of American publications.

While several librarians had assumed the charge of the collection, Thomas served as the society’s first librarian, Christopher Columbus Baldwin fulfilled the role from 1827 to 1830 and again from 1831 until his death in 1835.⁷⁵ Baldwin, a lawyer and newspaper editor, devoted himself to arranging, cataloguing and increasing the holdings of the society. He “labored very industriously in arranging books in the Library”⁷⁶ and relentlessly pursued “files of papers from all parts of the country.”⁷⁷ He recorded his many solicitations to potential donors of the society, from historical visitors who perused the society’s holdings to the British government.⁷⁸ His aggressive collecting sprang from his philosophy about what the society’s library ought to

⁷⁴ American Antiquarian Society, Meeting of May 29, 1839, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 1812-1849*, 375.

⁷⁵ *Catalogue of the Officers and Members of the American Antiquarian Society* (Worcester: T. W. and J. Butterfield, 1839), 5.

⁷⁶ Baldwin and Paine, *Diary of Christopher Columbus Baldwin*, 172, 189.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 350.

procure.⁷⁹ He believed that the society's mission was to collect "all the productions of American authors."⁸⁰ To achieve that end, he acquired every printed article he could since it is impossible to "tell how useful it may become two centuries hence."⁸¹ Instead of selecting particular works and appraising pieces for enduring value, this early librarian chose to collect everything, as the needs of future historians are unpredictable.

The society's vigorous collecting policy helped establish its extensive library. Although an ambitious man, Thomas keenly realized the difficulties of creating a large and worthwhile library. As president, Thomas implored each member to contribute annually to the collection of the society. He hoped that each member would procure an item for exhibition and a publication for preservation.⁸² With the help of its members, the society's collections and prominence grew.

Membership was granted relatively easily; all that was required was for an existing member to nominate the person of their choice. Once a committee of three had approved the nominee, the rest of the society would vote on each candidate.⁸³ Without any specified criteria, members could nominate anyone who shared and could contribute to the society's goals. Even in its infancy, the society included men with a variety of backgrounds. While former Presidents, such as Jefferson and Adams, and other well-known public figures, such as De Witt Clinton and Daniel Webster appeared on the earliest registers of members of the society, parsons and

⁷⁹ Ibid. 284.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 282.

⁸¹ Lincoln, *An Address Delivered*, 13.

⁸² American Antiquarian Society, *An Account*, "Communication," 5.

⁸³ American Antiquarian Society, *An Account*, 24. The process for electing new members was modified in January 1815. The law stated that each candidate must receive two thirds of the vote in order to be admitted to the society as explained in *Archaeologia Americana*, 56.

tradesmen also shared in the honor of election to the society.⁸⁴ Clergymen, particularly those in New England, generally received a classical education as well as extensive training in theology. Reverend William Bentley and Reverend Thomas Robbins, both members of the society attended Harvard and Yale respectively.⁸⁵ On the other hand, the society welcomed members who had received only vocational training. Membership in the American Antiquarian Society promoted intellectual discussions, fostered a concern for history, and introduced some of its members to collecting. Collecting, requiring ample amounts of time and money, was typically a hobby reserved for the wealthy.⁸⁶ Thomas helped open the gentlemanly pursuit of collecting to a broad range of men, including tradesmen.

The American Antiquarian Society was exceptional due to the number of printers involved. Benjamin Russell, an early apprentice to Thomas, Ebenezer T. Andrews, former apprentice and business partner of Thomas', William Goddard, a Boston printer, and the preeminent printer-publisher of Philadelphia, Matthew Carey all were elected to join the illustrious society.⁸⁷ Thomas understood the valuable contributions that printers and publishers could make to historical societies. Indeed, he firmly expected and anticipated some of the society's most valuable additions to come from printers, publishers, and booksellers. In his letter to members, he observed that "every author, every printer or publisher of a book or publick

⁸⁴American Antiquarian Society, List of Officers and Other Members of the American Antiquarian Society, October 24, 1814, *An Account*, 13-21.

⁸⁵ Benjamin F. Browne, notebook entry in *Diary of William Bentley*, 637; Increase N. Tarbox, introduction to *Diary of Thomas Robbins*, vol. 1, iv.

⁸⁶ Margaret Heilbrun, "NYork, NCentury, N-YHS," *New-York Journal of American History* 65, no. 1 (2003): 29.

⁸⁷American Antiquarian Society, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 1812-1849*, 21, 47.

journal, by sending a copy of each of the works they write, print or publish, to the Library of this Society”⁸⁸ will have their works permanently preserved for posterity.⁸⁹ Instead of relying only on the consumers of books, Thomas directly entreated the creators of published works to donate them. In order to encourage donations, he appealed to an idea of permanence to those who printed, published, and authored ephemera. The American Antiquarian Society, “not being a circulating library,”⁹⁰ promised to keep its collection secure and intact for centuries.⁹¹ Unlike private libraries, whose future beyond its present owner was uncertain, or circulating libraries, which loaned books out to patrons, meanwhile replacing, and discarding worn books, the society offered a unique chance for printed works to reach posterity.⁹² Considering how much printed matter was read only once and then discarded, permanence was a foreign concept. Thomas pioneered preservation with the promise of permanence, a fundamental concept to modern archivists.⁹³

Although the American Antiquarian Society was the first historical repository with a national scope, other societies in the United States preceded it.⁹⁴ Even in the society’s petition to the Massachusetts legislature in 1813, the authors acknowledged that other likeminded societies

⁸⁸ American Antiquarian Society, *Communication of the President*, 7.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ James M. O’Toole, “On the Idea of Permanence,” *American Archivist* 52 (Winter 1989):11.

⁹⁴ Knowlton, “American Antiquarian Society,” 51.

existed in the nascent nation.⁹⁵ Thomas knew first hand that similar historical societies had recently emerged. Thomas subscribed to the Boston Athenaeum in 1807.⁹⁶ In April of 1811, the Historical Society, later known as the Massachusetts Historical Society elected Thomas as a member.⁹⁷ By October 1813, he received yet another honor, election to the New York Historical Society.⁹⁸ As other learned societies continued to crop up, the potential for conflict increased as competition for members, donors and resources intensified.

The American Antiquarian Society, in Worcester, and the Historical Society, centered in Boston, became two of the most prominent historical institutions in the early nineteenth century. Resentment and envy occasionally threatened the general sense of collaboration. After the American Antiquarian Society first formed, some members of the Massachusetts Historical Society were “jealous of a competition”⁹⁹ with the new society. Despite the two societies’ proximity and their similar collecting endeavors, collegiality and cooperation largely prevailed. Loyalty to one particular society did not prohibit men from being active members in other societies. Thomas Wallcut, a leading member of the Historical Society, donated thousands of early American pamphlets to the American Antiquarian Society.¹⁰⁰ Thomas Robbins, a receiving secretary for the American Antiquarian Society, eventually became instrumental in establishing

⁹⁵ American Antiquarian Society, *An Account*, 11-12.

⁹⁶ Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, 41.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁹⁹ Bentley, *Diary of William Bentley*, vol. 4, 208.

¹⁰⁰ Baldwin and Paine, *Diary of Christopher Columbus Baldwin*, 323-33.

the Connecticut Historical Society in 1825.¹⁰¹ Isaiah Thomas, even after founding the American Antiquarian Society, sent publications and books to other budding societies. He donated thirteen volumes of the *Massachusetts Spy* to the New York Historical Society and fourteen volumes of his paper to the Massachusetts Historical Society.¹⁰²

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of an archival consciousness that manifested itself in the activities of historical societies in the United States. The Massachusetts Historical Society, formed in 1791 at the behest of Jeremy Belknap marked the first formal organization of men to actively collect historical matter, pursue research, and formally publish the results of their inquiries. The constitution of the burgeoning society described its collecting efforts as focusing on “books, manuscripts, and records, containing historical facts, biographical anecdotes, temporary projects, and beneficial speculations.”¹⁰³ Printed matter, particularly newspapers, formed a large basis of their initial collection. Thomas Wallcut, a founding member of the society and a famed collector of manuscripts and antiquities in Massachusetts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, noted that his further acquisition of periodicals depended on the “continuance of the kindness and generosity the printers have shown.”¹⁰⁴

While the American Antiquarian Society was perhaps the first to truly include printers as full members, printers and their publications figured prominently in early historical preservation

¹⁰¹ Robbins, *Diary of Thomas Robbins*, vol. 1, 774, 1004.

¹⁰² Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, 401.

¹⁰³ Massachusetts Historical Society, *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society 1791-1835*, vol. 1 (Boston: The Society, 1879), 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

societies. Nineteenth century observers regarded these societies as “consequences of the invention of the art of printing.”¹⁰⁵ The Massachusetts Historical Society, originally known simply as the Historical Society, sought to disseminate its records and findings to a broad readership. It looked to printers to publish the proceedings of its meetings and the studies undertaken by its members. Joseph Belknap, son of Jeremy Belknap, entered the printing profession and almost immediately engaged himself in the service of the Historical Society. The short-lived *American Apollo* operated from January until September 1792. During its existence, it appeared weekly, publishing articles, literary musings, and devoted four to eight pages to the society’s proceedings.¹⁰⁶

A host of printers and booksellers, Isaiah Thomas among them, stocked and sold the *American Apollo*.¹⁰⁷ The sale of the *American Apollo* at his Worcester bookstore was not the first interaction Thomas had with either Jeremy or Joseph Belknap. The elder Belknap turned to Thomas’ printing firm in 1791 to print the second volume of his *History of New Hampshire*, despite his son’s emergence in the trade.¹⁰⁸ In fact, Joseph Belknap’s first printing venture nearly turned disastrous when types he ordered were lost at sea. Instead of postponing the printing,

¹⁰⁵ Tobias Watkins, “Anniversary Discourse Delivered before the Columbian Institute on the 7th, January, 1826,” (Washington: Printed by Davis and Force, 1826), 20.

¹⁰⁶ Elisabeth Linscott, “Early Years of Our First Historical Society,” *New England Galaxy* (January 1968): 20.

¹⁰⁷ MHS, *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Fac-Similie of Title Page of *American Apollo*, located after page xxii.

¹⁰⁸ Jeremy Belknap, *History of New Hampshire*, vol. 2 (Boston: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, 1791), title page.

Thomas and Belknap reached a deal that permitted Belknap to utilize the equipment at Thomas' Boston office.¹⁰⁹

Historical societies each had their own publications in which they would communicate internal business to members and even share their proceedings with interested readers. Publishing their societies' findings increased recognition of a society and could perhaps earn them donations from collectors or historical enthusiasts. Societies helped advance knowledge by exchanging their journals as well as duplicate copies of an item with one another. The Massachusetts Historical Society adopted the policy of retaining any duplicates, but exchanging any third copy of a particular work.¹¹⁰ Christopher Columbus Baldwin, the tireless librarian of the American Antiquarian Society, actively traded journals and exchanged publications with other historical societies. He brokered a deal with the librarian of the Boston Athenaeum to give any duplicate matter to the society and even attempted to acquire a large collection of the "principal newspapers in the U.S."¹¹¹ held by a hotel in Boston.

Although both the Massachusetts Historical Society and the American Antiquarian Society endeavored to acquire and preserve historical materials, they pursued their mutual ends differently. In Isaiah Thomas' will, he briefly digressed from bequeathing his numerous assets to reflect on the unique aspects of his society. Membership was not granted on the basis of geography or political affiliation. He believed that its unrestricted membership helped the society

¹⁰⁹ Jeremy Belknap to Ebenezer Hazard, May 16, 1791; Ebenezer Hazard to Jeremy Belknap, June 6, 1791, Belknap Papers, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, vol. 3 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1877), 257.

¹¹⁰ MHS, *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 16.

¹¹¹ Baldwin and Paine, *Diary of Christopher Columbus Baldwin*, 152-53.

to become “a truly national institution,”¹¹² hindered by neither “local views nor private concerns.”¹¹³ The American Antiquarian Society sought to extend, not restrain, its membership. The laws governing membership only limited the number of executive and titled positions in the society – general membership was open to any nominee. One unique aspect of the American Antiquarian Society was the proposal to enlist members living in large cities around the country.¹¹⁴ This strategic proposal, later adopted, helped facilitate the receipt of items and publications from around the nation. It dispelled regionalism and helped ensure the success of its national collecting policy. The society maintained the inclusive views of Isaiah Thomas, allowing intellectual elites and interested tradesmen, particularly printers, to join. The election of printers to the society continued even after Thomas’ death; Peter Force, Washington printer and Joel Munsell, a printer in Albany both joined in the 1850s.¹¹⁵

Not all historical societies were as egalitarian as the American Antiquarian Society. The Massachusetts Historical Society strictly limited the number of members, keeping a relatively small and exclusive group of learned men. Residing members, reserved for those who lived in the commonwealth of Massachusetts, were limited to thirty. Corresponding members, similarly restricted to a maximum of thirty, lived outside Massachusetts and therefore were not expected

¹¹² American Antiquarian Society, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, vol. 30 (Worcester: The Society, 1921), 260.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ American Antiquarian Society, Communication of the President, *An Account*, 8.

¹¹⁵ Force was elected in 1851. American Antiquarian Society, <http://www.americanantiquarian.org/membersf.htm> (accessed January 8, 2013). Munsell was elected in 1854. American Antiquarian Society, <http://www.americanantiquarian.org/membersm.htm> (accessed January 8, 2013).

to participate fully in the events of the society.¹¹⁶ Although the stated missions of both the Massachusetts Historical Society and the American Antiquarian Society expressed an abiding desire to collect and preserve historical documents and artifacts, the particular approach to preservation differed. While the Historical Society acquired a physical space for its library and cabinet, it placed no trust in the safety and security of repositories. Indeed, in the introduction to the society's first published series, an unnamed author recounted the destruction of Massachusetts libraries, from Governor Hutchinson's private manuscript collection to Boston's courthouse in 1747. With these unfortunate antecedents in mind, the Historical Society insisted that the best available method for preserving historical materials was through "multiplying the copies."¹¹⁷ Structures were susceptible to fire and floods but "the art of printing affords a mode of preservation more effectual than Corinthian brass or Egyptian marble."¹¹⁸ Its founding members recognized that the printing press offered manuscripts multiple chances for survival.

While the American Antiquarian Society also published its proceedings, Thomas' years as a printer and work as a printing historian educated him on the limitations of preservative powers of the press.¹¹⁹ He observed that many valuable printed tracts or handwritten manuscripts haplessly stored in attics withered, "hastening towards destruction by means of weather and

¹¹⁶ MHS, *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 2-4.

¹¹⁷ MHS, "Introductory Address from the Historical Society to the Public," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society For the Year 1792* (Boston: reprinted by Munroe and Francis, 1806), 5.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ American Antiquarian Society, Communication of the President, *An Account*, 6.

vermin.”¹²⁰ He endeavored to preserve the society’s materials by creating a sound environment. Establishing the society in 1812, with hostilities between Britain rising, Thomas decided to keep his historical society inland in Worcester, just as the encroachment of British soldiers forced his move there nearly forty years earlier.¹²¹ He intended to build a repository that created a suitable environment for delicate materials. Unlike other institutions of the time, such as a circulating library, this repository did not permit its materials to leave the building. By creating a stable environment, impervious to weather and secure from pests, Thomas envisioned a repository that was designed to preserve historical materials since simply printing multiple copies left too much to chance.

When Thomas started the American Antiquarian Society, he had been involved in printing for fifty seven years. Over the course of those decades, he became aware of the vulnerabilities of paper and printed publications. Printers recognized the brief life span of newspapers and thus produced them as cheaply as possible. They utilized the lowest grade of ink and paper for newspapers, but reserved higher qualities of paper for books.¹²² Before the late nineteenth century when most printers relied on machine-made paper, the roughness of hand-made paper necessitated that it be wetted in order to smooth it before putting it to press.¹²³ If a

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Osterholm, *The Literary Career of Isaiah Thomas*, 376.

¹²² Theo. L. De Vinne, *Printers Price List: A Manual for the Use of Clerks, Book keepers in Job Printing Offices* (New York: Francis Hart and Company, 1871) , 19, 71.

¹²³ Richard-Gabriel Rummonds, *Nineteenth-Century Printing Practices and the Iron Handpress* (New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press and the British Library, 2004), 447, 456.

printer failed to dry wetted paper, he risked the appearance of mildew.¹²⁴ The process of properly drying paper after it had been printed utilized either wooden poles across the ceiling or lines strung across the room upon which sheets of paper were hung.¹²⁵ With large amounts of paper contained in a wooden shop illuminated by candlelight, fire posed a serious threat to printing establishments. Even if a printing shop strove to avoid fires, its location in town centers and business districts made it vulnerable to rapacious fire. In 1811, one of Thomas' bookshops was lost in a large fire in Newburyport, Massachusetts.¹²⁶

A rational fear of fire, an understanding of the public's indifference towards preserving ephemera, and a thorough knowledge of paper and its weaknesses gained from years of printing convinced Thomas of the need to have a permanent facility with an internal environment conducive to preservation. Beginning in 1817, he focused on building a permanent library and museum to house the holdings of the society. While his diary does not provide a lengthy description of the construction, he donated 150,000 bricks for the edifice. By utilizing bricks, he attempted to make the structure as safe from fire as possible.¹²⁷ Thomas' concern with

¹²⁴ Adams, *Typographia*, 264.

¹²⁵ Rummonds, *Nineteenth-Century Printing Practices*, vol. 2, 773.

¹²⁶ Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, 111. In 1824 a fire in Worcester destroyed Thomas' warehouse and narrowly missed reducing his home to ashes, described in the *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 2, 190-91.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 15. Thomas described multiple fires in his diaries. He often would add that a building which has just burned down was made of wood. Thomas, whenever he was involved in any personal or civic construction seemed to advocate brick as a fire deterrent. When building a small shed in his yard in 1823, Thomas emphasized that it was a fire proof brick structure. The entry referring to the small fire proof building appears in Thomas' *Diary*, vol. 2, 156.

preservation encompassed the entire structure, from its fireproof exterior to an interior that protected against adverse weather or indiscriminate vermin.

After the construction of the society's facility, Thomas oversaw the first efforts to catalogue its many acquisitions.¹²⁸ As the American Antiquarian Society continued to gain its foothold in the late 1820s and 1830s, Thomas' health began to fail. A friend and fellow antiquarian, Christopher C. Baldwin, recounted that he visited his ailing friend daily during a protracted illness.¹²⁹ On April 4, 1831, Baldwin recorded that Thomas, at eighty two years of age, had died earlier that morning.¹³⁰ By the time of his demise, the printer, historian, and collector had not only established a historical society, but also amply provided for it. He had served as the society's first librarian, and as president from its inception until his death. He constructed the society's first building to house its growing collections and he donated nearly all of his historical collections and items to the society's Library and Cabinet. Indeed, from 1812 onwards, much of Thomas' time, energy, and talents were invested into strengthening, developing, and shaping the historical society he founded.

The American Antiquarian Society mourned the loss of its founder and benefactor, but even without its leading collector and policy-maker, the society flourished. Its members continued to abide by the policies and procedures that Thomas originally implemented, as Thomas' successors shared the same conviction in preserving every article issued from the American press. They espoused the inherent significance of ephemera, asserting in an internal

¹²⁸ Baldwin and Paine, *Diary of Christopher Columbus Baldwin*, 37.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 102.

bulletin that “works of a fleeting and temporary character may often give the liveliest impression of the age.”¹³¹ The concern for collecting and preserving historical materials continued to be of paramount importance. By the late 1830s, the society had collected such an amount of printed matter and manuscripts that the task of arranging and cataloguing the materials was nearly overwhelming. Samuel Haven, the society’s librarian who held the position from 1838 until 1881, began to arrange systematically the vast holdings according to the standards established by librarians. He first organized the material around three categories: antiquities, general history, and local history. Each category had its own subcategories, and within these subcategories, he arranged individual items chronologically.¹³² Haven and the American Antiquarian Society pioneered the management of archival material in the United States; while archivists no longer follow these practices, the society was among the first to consider how to manage, maintain and arrange an archival collection in the United States.

Although Thomas expended the last nineteen years of his life establishing what became one of the premier archival repositories for early American publications, he did not explicitly state his motives for establishing his own historical society. While he gave an impressive amount of historical materials to the Historical Society, he never adopted the Historical Society as his own. Although Thomas and Belknap corresponded with and about each other, their acquaintance revolved around business and not personal matters. Thomas had access to a vast assortment of books as a printer and publisher whose efforts could have enhanced the collections of the

¹³¹ Meeting of May 30, 1849, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 1812-1849*, 557.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 378.

fledging Historical Society. Yet, his invitation to join did not arrive until the society had existed for twenty years.¹³³

Over time, Thomas developed a large collection with one distinctive focus. As a lifelong printer, Thomas became fascinated with his craft. His historical research and collecting reflected his preoccupation with printing. Instead of bestowing his unique collection to another society that did not specialize in the same area, Thomas had the means to create his own. His society served then and now as a monument to the American press. The collection not only included as complete a collection of American publications as possible, but also owed its very existence to the patronage of Isaiah Thomas, whose career as a printer and publisher supplied him with the necessary wealth to found and operate a society. By establishing a society, Thomas not only helped ensure that invaluable works were preserved, but also solidified his own status as a scholarly man of leisure who had risen to this position through the art of printing. When the American Antiquarian Society first appeared, William Bentley doubted its ability to endure for any length of time. He and his contemporaries speculated about the reasons for Thomas beginning his own society. The prospect of securing a personal legacy and enduring reputation could have motivated his efforts, at least in part. Bentley mused in his diary that with the founding of his society, “Thomas will have the honor he wishes and the institute will fall back to the Hist. Society which can embrace all its objects.”¹³⁴ The American Antiquarian Society, however, did not fade into the background with the diffusion of historical societies. With the early leadership and financial support of its fervent founder, the society was set to thrive.

¹³³ Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 1, 108; Jeremy Belknap, *Belknap Papers, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 238, 249, 278, 328, 344, 348.

¹³⁴ Bentley, *Diary of William Bentley*, vol. 4, 270.

Thomas' long career as a printer qualified him to understand and appreciate the importance of printed materials in relating events, either mundane or dramatic, that shape the historical record. He recognized not only that printed materials needed preservation, but also that their creators yearn for permanence. His personal experiences taught him that skilled printers "receive more pleasure in viewing and examining the labors of those of their professions who have preceded them, than is common to those who practice other arts."¹³⁵ Indeed, an abiding belief held by most printers that their labors belonged not only to their contemporaries but also to posterity likely motivated Thomas to preserve printed matter. His society introduced the possibility of permanence to periodicals that were otherwise destined for deterioration.

Isaiah Thomas opened historical research and collecting to his contemporaries. His generosity towards other historical societies furnished them with collections of newspapers and books. Thomas' personal passion for collecting ephemera helped preserve a record of past events, written and read by public figures and ordinary people alike. The work of printers, their newspapers, pamphlets and broadsides, dispersed information to any subscriber regardless of his social standing; these printed materials preserve the worlds of individuals who likely did not write a diary or otherwise create records that became part of an archive. Thomas' collection of ephemera democratized the existing records from the colonial period to the early republic.

Since its establishment, the American Antiquarian Society served as a haven for records and as a permanent monument to the American press. By collecting, organizing, and making records available to researchers, the American Antiquarian Society served as an early archival and historical society that promoted the preservation and study of history. On October 8, 1833, the American Antiquarian Society opened its facility to the curious eye of a man with the

¹³⁵ American Antiquarian Society, Communication of the President, *An Account*, 7.

“appearance of a laborious student.”¹³⁶ Peter Force, the dedicated scholar who visited the society to survey its collection of newspapers, labored as a printer and newspaper editor himself. The collection that Thomas sought tirelessly fulfilled its purpose of aiding future researchers, including another printer whose historical inquiries and collecting would shape archival history.

¹³⁶ Baldwin and Paine, *Diary of Christopher Columbus Baldwin*, 238.

Chapter Three: Peter Force and his Library

The life of such a man as Peter Force... was worth more to American letters and to human history than the lives of a score of military generals and other notables whose names are so generally blazoned abroad.

-Ainsworth Spofford, *Atlantic Monthly*, 1898

Before the golden anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1826, the Marquis de Lafayette and his son took an honorific tour through the country which the elder had helped wrestle away from British control. The general visited the sites of Revolutionary War battlefields and the homes of former presidents, all of whom had played some role in the conflict. The former colonial printer and dedicated diarist, Isaiah Thomas wrote, for example, that he “had the pleasure of taking him and his son by the hand,” and that the two French visitors received “a very great and handsome parade – the best in Worcester ever.”¹ Newspapers across the country similarly documented the occasion of a visit from General Lafayette and his son.²

During the 1820s, Americans reflected on the significance and legacy of the Revolution fifty years prior.³ The historic events of that decade inspired civic celebrations, but they also motivated others to question the vitality of historical memory in the young republic. Edward Livingston, the Secretary of State in the early 1830s, lamented that a lasting memory of American history eluded the greater populace: “Fifty years have not yet elapsed since the

¹ Thomas, *Diary of Isaiah Thomas*, vol. 2, 180.

² Andrew Burstein, *America's Jubilee* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 3-8, 56-60.

³ *Ibid.*, 56-60.

formation of our National Government,” he wrote, “and already the great principles on which it was founded are forgotten, or misrepresented, or unknown.”⁴

Peter Force was an exception. As early as 1822, Peter Force, a young printer in Washington, was already preoccupied with preserving the nation’s historical records. Force, aided by his career as a printer, decided to publish compilations of letters, speeches, and community records relating to America’s realization of independence from Britain. Even after his historical publishing ended in the mid-nineteenth century, he continued his efforts to preserve history by acquiring and maintaining a massive historical library. Ainsworth Spofford, an ambitious Librarian of Congress, likewise contributed to the formation of American archival institutions by ensuring that Force’s library and legacy endured.⁵

Peter Force, as a printer, historical publisher and later as a collector, contributed to the development of archives in early America. A biographical account of his life and a description of his historical publishing endeavors demonstrate Force’s commitment to making rare sources available to the interested public. His publishing projects inspired an extensive personal collection dedicated to Americana that over decades became the largest private collection of its kind in the United States. Force’s collecting outstripped his income, and realizing he could not care indefinitely for his large library, he sold it to the Library of Congress in 1867. Ainsworth Spofford, the Librarian of Congress who brokered the deal incorporating the large manuscript

⁴ Edward Livingston to Matthew St. Clair Clarke and Peter Force, April 9, 1833, in M. St. Clair Clarke and Force, *Report Made to the Hon. John Forsyth, Secretary of State of the United States, On the Subject of the Documentary History of the United States* (Washington: n.p., 1834), 34.

⁵ A letter from Mathew St. Clair Clarke to Secretary of State in 1834 recounts how he and Force began their endeavor to publish records dating to the revolution twelve years earlier in Clarke and Force, *Report to the Hon. John Forsyth*, 27.

collection with the library's existing holdings, helped transform the Library of Congress from strictly a government library to a cultural institution. His efforts as chief librarian not only expanded the library's collecting interests to include archival materials, but also ensured that the building was equipped as thoroughly as possible to meet the preservation needs of its growing collection.⁶

The life and experiences of Peter Force provide insight into his motivations for collecting, preserving, and eventually publishing the nation's earliest records. Born in 1790 in Passaic Falls, New Jersey, to yeomen parents, he did not receive the benefit of a formal education. Force's father, a soldier in the Revolutionary War, often spoke of his wartime service. Frequently during his youth, the family home became a center for reunions with William Force's fellow patriots. These informal gatherings were his primary lessons in history. The young boy received the opportunity to become a skilled tradesman and entered a printing apprenticeship with William Davis at the age of twelve. Under the supervision of a master printer, he learned the trade and thrived as a printer's apprentice. After four years of training, when Force was only sixteen years old, he became the overseer of the printing shop.⁷

⁶ Peter Force's name appears briefly in histories of historical societies in the United States, such as Whitehill's *Independent Historical Societies* and H. G. Jones' *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic*, in which he is cited as a collector and historical editor. Carolyn Hoover Sung's dissertation on Peter Force includes a biography and an explanation of the *American Archives* project. Ainsworth Spofford has also been studied; John Young Cole's *Ainsworth Rand Spofford, Bookman and Librarian* and articles include a biography of the Librarian and how he shaped the Library of Congress. This thesis examines how Force's experiences as a printer helped him become a collector and early archivist. The important role of Spofford, as his purchase of Force's library ushered in an extensive manuscript collection, is also explored.

⁷ Newman F. McGirr, "The Activities of Peter Force," *Records of the Columbia Historical Society* 42/43 (1940/1941): 37. Directing a printing shop required the overseer to ensure a smooth and flawless transition from setting up the type to printing the text, according to

In 1812, Force's printing abilities earned him the support of his peers and the position of president of the New York Typographical Society. The War of 1812 briefly interrupted his printing career, as Force served in the New York militia and spent several months on a campaign. His military service during the War of 1812 likely influenced his future decision to crusade for the safeguarding of American records. The British destruction of the Capitol in 1814 decimated the nation's holdings of printed works and manuscripts. If the fragility of records, even ones of national import, was not already apparent to Peter Force, the news of the destruction of the Capitol must have impressed that fact upon him.⁸

William Davis, Force's longtime employer, received several government printing contracts, including printing the proceedings from Congressional sessions and laws in 1815. Force relocated to Washington, the city that would remain his home for the rest of his life, to establish their new printing enterprise and commence the arduous labor of Congressional printing. There they operated a bookstore and circulating library in addition to their print shop. In 1820 Force began publishing a city directory containing contemporary and historical information, *The National Calendar and Annuals of the United States*. In addition to listing the names and duties of government officials and providing an account of presidential and congressional messages, some editions offered readers a calendar that referenced significant historical events. The structure and content varied dramatically between editions, but often the

Richard-Gabriel Rummonds work: *Nineteenth-Century Printing Practices and the Iron Handpress*, vol. 1, 59.

⁸ "Peter Force," *The American Historical Record*, January 1874, 2; Greene, "Col. Peter Force," 222-223.

amount of historical information presented in these volumes exceeded the amount expected in an annual directory.⁹

At roughly the same time, Force also started his own periodical, the *National Journal*, which promulgated the policies of John Quincy Adams. The newspaper operated from 1823, when Adams first emerged as a presidential possibility, until around 1830. Despite his personal approbation of Whig policies, he remained objective in the eyes of his contemporaries.¹⁰ His contemporaries discovered that the compelling force behind his newspaper was not a political party, but its own editor.¹¹ In the *National Journal*, which he financed personally, Force aspired to provide readers with “a full and connected view of the proceedings of Congress; the most important State Papers; the Laws of the United States passed at each session, and all the Public Treaties.”¹² He designed his newspaper in other words to serve as a complete record of national events and Congressional reports. Even before its inception, he also hoped that it would satisfy

⁹ Ibid., 47. A review of several of Force’s *National Calendar* publications reveals the variety of information an individual work in this series could contain. In every volume there is a certain amount of historical information provided, but the years in which these volumes overlapped with his work on the *American Archives* seem to contain even more historical data. Force printed this publication for the following years: 1820, 1821, 1822, 1823, 1824, 1828, 1829, 1830, 1831, 1832, 1833, 1834, 1835, and 1836.

¹⁰ *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, ed. Clyde N. Wilson, vol. 30: American Historians, 1607-1865 (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1984), 90; Ainsworth R. Spofford, “The Life and Labors of Peter Force, Mayor of Washington,” *Records of the Columbian Historical Society, Washington D. C.* 2 (1899): 2-3; “27th Congress, 1st session,” *The Middlebury People’s Press*, June 22, 1841.

¹¹ *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society at the semi-annual meeting at the Hall of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, in Boston, April 29, 1868* (Worcester: Printed by Tyler and Seagrave, 1868), 18.

¹² Peter Force, “Prospectus of the *National Journal*,” August 1823.

the intellectual and collecting needs of “those who wish to preserve such papers for reference.”¹³ Force recognized that private collectors amassed papers and newspapers as a personal library and archives. Force similarly kept at least one copy of the works he printed.¹⁴

Force earned his living as a printer, but his interests were not limited to producing printed ephemera. American history and its preservation proved to be his greatest passion. Historical publishing offered him a means to preserve history, while applying the abilities he had acquired as a youthful apprentice. In 1833, eleven years after he had first taken on the cause of American records as his own, Force won Congressional approval and funding for a project that would consume much of the remainder of his life. Matthew St. Clair Clarke, the Clerk of the House of Representatives, became Force’s partner in publishing, and they officially began working on *The Documentary History of the Revolution*, commonly known as the *American Archives*. Their project hoped to revive the ill-fated endeavor of Ebenezer Hazard, a colonial bookseller whose promotion to Postmaster General prohibited the completion of his work. In 1778 Hazard first petitioned Congress to help fund an assemblage of papers detailing the history of the country. After publishing two volumes, Hazard’s official duties occupied most of his attention, and the project languished, incomplete, and forgotten for over fifty years.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Baldwin and Paine, *Diary of Christopher Columbus Baldwin*, October 8, 1833, 238. Also in this entry, Baldwin mentioned that Force ran the *National Journal* until 1830. In 1833 Force promised to donate to the American Antiquarian Society a complete collection of his newspaper the *National Journal*. Today visitors can access all of Force’s newspapers at the American Antiquarian Society.

¹⁵ *Documentary History of the Revolution*, 23rd Cong., 2d sess., 1834, H. Doc. 36, 8.

This new invocation of Hazard's project sought to cover a broad swath of history. The *American Archives* proposed to treat the period of history from the founding of the colonies to the formation of the government of the United States. In order to portray fully and accurately the entirety of American history, Force and Clarke required government support to defray the costs of sending their materials to the press. While Force and Clarke had rediscovered a worthy historical project, there were other historical publishers working in the 1830s. Jared Sparks, Joseph Gales, and William Seaton all turned to Congress to fund their various projects. Sparks collected and edited significant letter exchanges during the Revolutionary War in a series known as the *Diplomatic Correspondence*. Gales and Seaton secured the contract for the continuation of the *American State Papers*, which reprinted official documents spanning from the adoption of the Constitution to the nineteenth century, eventually ending with the year 1838. The *American Archives* represented a unique departure from earlier projects because Force resolved to incorporate known manuscripts and also to procure new records, not already existing in the hands of the federal government that elucidated the history of the nascent nation. He sought to explore the records held by the federal government within the State Department, state and local archives and even the British archives. Despite the best efforts of Force, Clarke and Obadiah Rich, an American bookseller living in London, British authorities refused to allow Americans unimpeded access to their records of the conflict between Britain and the rebelling colonies. Undaunted by this refusal, the project continued to accumulate valuable sources throughout the United States.¹⁶

¹⁶ Clarke and Force, *Report to the Hon. John Forsyth*, 1-2, 10, 12-13, 27-28, 32; "American State Papers," Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwabout.html> (accessed November 19, 2012); *Report from the Secretary of State*, S. 313, 25th Cong, 2d sess., 1838, 9-12.

Peter Force and Matthew St. Clair Clarke forged a partnership sometime prior to 1831 when they submitted their memorial to Congress. Within two years they had received Congressional approval for their historical publishing endeavor and had already begun searching for primary sources. Correspondence between the two men indicates the dynamics of the partnership. In September of 1833, Clarke visited Boston to survey the historical collections within that city. He wrote Force that Boston was so replete in historical records, so much so that its “extent horrifies me.”¹⁷ In his reply to Clarke, Force did not bemoan the wealth of records he discovered, but he did express a clear concern for adhering to their schedule. Upon learning that Clarke might be delayed, he responded that if there was to be a change in plans Clarke must not “fail to write” him.¹⁸ During their partnership, Clarke dutifully sifted through old records, but Force dedicated the rest of his life to the pursuit of disappearing historical materials.¹⁹

In October of 1833, the partners arrived at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts. Christopher Baldwin, the librarian for the historical society, recorded his impressions of the pair. Force, who studied the society’s collection of newspapers, impressed Baldwin. “I have never found any one who was so familiar with the events of our Revolutionary

¹⁷ Clarke to Force, September 12, 1833, Peter Force Library, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸ Force to Clarke, September 14, 1833, Peter Force Library, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁹ Force and Clarke may have first met each other when Force was involved in printing the proceedings and laws of Congress. Clarke, as Clerk of the House of Representatives, oversaw the printing of Congressional records. A complaint between John Rives and F. P. Blair, a printing partnership that also became involved in printing for Congress, reveals the relationship between Congressional printers and the Clerk of the House of Representatives. In their case, the relationship was a difficult one. It also helps establish the character of John Rives. He was foremost a businessman. The complaint referred to above was presented in, *Printing and Binding Public Documents*, 26th Cong., 2d sess., 1841, H. Rep. 101, 1-2.

war as he...He is now about forty and has the habits and appearance of a laborious student.”²⁰ His interaction with Clarke proved to be rather different. Baldwin never mentioned seeing Clarke perusing the society’s collections. Rather he noted Clarke’s convivial personality. “Clarke is a prodigy at story telling...he called for a cigar and a tumbler of brandy and Good God! How his tongue went! He kept me up till near four in the morning.”²¹ Both men participated in the search for historical materials, but only Force wholly invested himself into this project. Clarke predominately handled their dealings with Congress and financial matters, whereas Force mainly concentrated on procuring and printing historical materials.

Despite their personal differences, their partnership lasted until 1842. But in 1843, Force had a new partner, printer John C. Rives. Rives and F. P. Blair produced the *Globe*, a Washington newspaper, with Rives handling the financial aspects of the business. In addition to their newspaper, Blair and Rives printed the proceedings of Congress from 1833 to 1873. As a businessman, Rives may have joined Force in publishing the *American Archives* expecting to reap a fair profit, based on the financial success of other publishing projects. Their partnership, however, faltered as debts from travel and research mounted up more quickly than Congressional reimbursements. In 1853, when government funding for the work ceased, so did the partnership.

The final decision on the merit of the work and its warrant of Congressional funds resided with the Secretary of State. Force presented the Secretary of State, William L. Marcy, with a copy of the tenth volume of the *American Archives* for his inspection and approval. Marcy, however, never deigned to examine the work. A request from an assistant of the

²⁰ Baldwin and Paine, *Diary of Christopher Columbus Baldwin*, 238.

²¹ Ibid.

Secretary to be reimbursed for time spent perusing Force's latest installment, submitted two years after Force left his documents with the Department of State, indicates the low priority Marcy assigned to the *American Archives*. Rives, a longtime personal and political ally of Marcy, perhaps could have convinced him of the importance of the work. Instead, it seems that Rives remained silent and the *American Archives* publication came to an end. Force persisted in trying to persuade each new Secretary of State of the value of his work, but his tenth volume remained unpublished.²² In 1879, there was another attempt to publish a tenth volume of the *American Archives*. The Librarian of Congress evaluated the merit of Force's work against the cost of completing it. While he acknowledged that such a work would be of "inestimable value," the vast papers Force had collected required extensive editorship.²³ Ultimately, Force's tenth volume never made it to the press.

Contemporaries of Peter Force who wrote biographical sketches of the printer after his death often commented on how the premature termination of his *American Archives* project left him, a man now in his early sixties, forlorn. When Force spoke of the untimely end of his endeavor, it was impossible but to notice "an indescribable sadness upon his face."²⁴ Although the *American Archives* did not provide a comprehensive account of the American Revolution and national development, it succeeded in preserving thousands of records for posterity. The nine published volumes influenced the next generation of scholars and collectors. Force's meticulous work as a historical publisher, his impressive personal archive, and keen knowledge of American

²² *Louis Fitzgerald Tasistro*, H. Report 547, 35th Cong., 1 sess., 1858, 1-2; Greene, "Col. Peter Force," 232.

²³ *Report of the Librarian of Congress Upon the American Archives, or the Documentary History of the Revolution*, S. Misc. 34, 46th Cong., 1 sess., 1879, 3.

²⁴ Greene, "Col. Peter Force," 233.

history caused young historians to seek him out as a mentor. Emerging historians such as George Bancroft, Lyman Draper, Henry Onderdonk, and John Wheeler, looked to Force as an example and for counsel. The *American Archives* inspired the next generation of historians and continued to serve current scholars of the American Revolution.²⁵

Force's tenure as a printer helped him to become a skilled historical publisher. Similarly, his stint as a newspaperman helped him launch into a broader career. Publishing newspapers helped the printer establish himself in a city and attain a consistent base of subscribers. It also offered a glimpse of the quality of the printer's work. As the political atmosphere became increasingly partisan during the 1820s, publically supporting a candidate could deliver either a political promotion or personal ruin for newspaper editors. Force, however, seemed unwilling to bow to the influences of politicians, not always vigorously defending or promoting John Quincy Adams.²⁶ He may have hoped that his subtle sponsorship would sow favor that he could later reap, such as unwavering support for his *American Archives* project. Adams heartily endorsed that endeavor, offering his "thanks for engaging in the enterprise," but only in 1831, as a former president.²⁷

In addition to offering political and entrepreneurial connections, printing afforded Force the necessary skills to thrive as a publisher and amateur historian. A printer's apprentice in the

²⁵ Peter Force to Henry Stevens, December 29, 1843, Henry Stevens Papers, University of Vermont; Sung, "Peter Force," 223.

²⁶ Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital*, 20; Jeffrey L. Pasley, "Minnows, Spies and Aristocrats: The Social Crisis of Congress in the Age of Martin Van Buren," *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (2007): 616; Greene, "Col. Peter Force," 225.

²⁷ John Quincy Adams to Matthew St. Clair Clarke, in Clarke and Force, *Report to the Hon. John Forsyth*, 36.

early nineteenth century had to possess particular attributes in order to succeed. Printing manuals from that century outline the responsibilities demanded by the profession and the demeanor best suited to continued employment. Apprentices often worked as compositors, setting out the type for printing jobs. Line by line, word for word, and letter by letter, they arranged type into words. They worked directly from the authors' manuscripts. Young men, and occasionally women, employed as compositors were expected to decipher handwriting and perhaps make corrections when the author's spelling or grammar erred. Their overarching goal was to recreate quickly and faithfully the author's original written words with lines of type letters, ready for the press. Many years spent with a manuscript copy set before him and a composing stick in hand instilled in him an unwavering commitment to copying verbatim the original sources. Unlike other historical editors of his day, Force printed sources in their entirety and without modifying the text. His contemporaries, such as historian Jared Sparks, had a propensity to sanitize or otherwise refine the words of famous men. Force, however, strictly copied the original text, without offering changes or interpretation. His early training as a compositor in a printer's shop contributed to the accuracy and value of his published works.²⁸

Historical publishing provided work for printers whose presses might otherwise sit inert. While economic opportunity drove other printers to lobby for government funded publications, Peter Force recognized the preservative powers of the press. His years as a newspaperman instilled in him the historical character of ephemera. Indeed, the American Historical Society of Washington, in which Force served as a prominent member, valued the accounts provided by contemporary newspapers as having historical merit. "Publications of the day" wrote Lewis

²⁸ Rummonds, *Nineteenth-Century Printing Practices*, 256; Sung, "Peter Force," 208; John Spencer Bassett, *The Middle Group of American Historians* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1917), 108, 113.

Cass, president of the historical society, “will be history itself – a history of the thoughts, words, and actions of men.”²⁹ Force, in his spare time and with money out of his own pocket, initiated another historical publication designed to preserve printed ephemera. Beginning in 1836, as the *American Archives* were underway, he and his son, William, printed *Tracts and Other Papers, Related Principally to the Origin, Settlement, and Progress of the Colonies in North America, from the Discovery of the Country to the Year 1776*, sometimes simply referred to as *Historical Tracts*. He spent years searching for, purchasing or copying these disappearing forms of American ephemera. In four volumes, Force printed and thereby preserved hundreds of rare pamphlets that might otherwise have deteriorated into permanent oblivion. This project did not bring him fame or fortune; in fact, he funded it himself. His *Historical Tracts* did not bolster his purse strings but further preserved pieces of American history, which Force had assumed as his personal and constant pursuit. His reasons for historical publishing were not merely economical, but personal, inspired by a genuine appreciation for American history.³⁰

Force’s *American Archives* and *Historical Tracts* preserved a significant portion of history from the looming threat of oblivion. He did not simply rely on the letters, diaries and journals of famous characters, but also on printed sources. Some congressmen questioned his inclusion of materials that already existed in printed form. They objected to federal funds allotted to establishing a redundant project. Force defended his editorial decisions. To his detractors he

²⁹ Lewis Cass, “A Discourse Pronounced at the Capitol of the United States, in the Hall of Representatives, Before the American Historical Society, January 30, 1836,” in *Transactions of the American Historical Society: Instituted at the City of Washington*, vol. 1 (Washington: Printed by Jacob Gideon Jr., 1839), 26. Cass served as the Secretary of War under President Jackson and endorsed Force and Clarke’s proposal to print *American Archives* as seen in their *Report to the Hon. John Forsyth*.

³⁰ Clarence E. Carter, “The United States and Documentary History Publication,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 25 (1938): 7-8; Spofford, “Washington Reminisces,” 675.

posed the question, “Who will say, that because it was printed sixty five years ago, it is not now entitled to a place in the Archives of the Country?”³¹ Certain information could be pieced together only through printed sources, such as when the United States captured its first British ship. Perhaps attributable to Force’s many years spent as a printer, he knew the wealth of knowledge found in printed matter. He also understood the fragility of both paper and ink. Paper, whether marked by handwriting or type, disintegrated over time. Printers knew the durability and quality of paper perhaps better than any other. As a newspaperman, Force also must have appreciated the amount of time, work and information required to produce a quality periodical. He decided to procure every source possible, and often sought out colonial newspapers. He purchased the only known complete copies of Massachusetts newspapers from the American Revolution and even outbid the Library of Congress for a collection of pamphlets.³²

Force’s use of printed sources not only preserved rare materials, but also democratized the historical record. Predecessors such as Jeremy Belknap and even Jared Sparks often narrowed their historical inquiries to the lives of great men. Instead of concentrating the volumes on illustrious generals and bold civilians, Force embraced a more comprehensive approach. He found community records, such as those of Committees of Safety, instead of simply recounting the lives and deeds of great men. His incorporation of printed materials recorded the prevailing attitudes of the time and continues to provide insight into the lives of regular people who might have lacked both the time and inclination to keep a written journal of their personal experiences. His approach incorporated printed sources to reveal how the American people felt about the

³¹ Force to James McKay, June 26, 1840, Peter Force Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

³² Ibid.; Spofford, “Washington Reminisces,” 676-77.

revolution and demonstrated how it was a national movement that “drew active and living nourishment from every family fountain.”³³ He came to believe that the resolve of the patriots stemmed from public meetings, with the “moral lever” rooted in the Continental Congress, and the Committees of Correspondence, Safety and Observation.³⁴ The *American Archives* were perhaps the first attempts of providing an inclusive historical narrative. Ordinary people entered the archival record. Force deemed expressions of popular opinion, as they appeared in printed ephemera, equally worthy of a permanent place in American history as the sophisticated utterances of leaders.³⁵

The abrupt suspension of *American Archives* ended Force’s historical publishing endeavors. After the Civil War began, he stopped trying to persuade the Secretary of State to reconsider the fate of his undertaking of nearly three decades. His ambitious project had taken him more than twenty years and all over the eastern United States. In order to compose an inclusive historical account of the events leading to the Revolutionary War, Force had to form his own collection. An archive of such a diverse nature did not exist. His work as a historical publisher had left him with a massive library on which he now focused most of his attention. To build his own archive, Force sent representatives to rare book auctions, cultivated relationships with booksellers and collectors and, whenever permitted, rummaged through attics for

³³ Clarke and Force, preface to *American Archives: Consisting of a Collection of Authentick Records, State Papers, Debates, and Letters and Other Notices of Publick Affairs*, vol. 1, 4th ser. (Washington: M. St. Clair Clarke and Peter Force, 1837).

³⁴ Force to James McKay, June 26, 1840, Peter Force Library, Library of Congress.

³⁵ Bassett, *Middle Group*, 35.

noteworthy manuscripts and printed matter. Some of his greatest finds resulted from a thorough perusal of papers thrown out by various government departments.³⁶

Surveying the conditions of records in various eastern states impressed Force with the grave conditions most records of the country endured. Record keeping in early America, even into the early twentieth century, was often abysmal. In Virginia, South Carolina and North Carolina, crucial records from the eighteenth century were missing. The case of Virginia is perhaps most troubling, as the state's "whole legislative history prior to 1776 is lost."³⁷ Force sought to prevent further destruction by providing a personal haven for records in his library and restoring national records to the people by his historical publishing.

While Force collected out of necessity for his *American Archives* publication, his holdings expanded from what was necessary to the passion that dominated the last years of his life. His preoccupation with garnering materials reveals the nature of a voracious collector. His collecting soon bordered on obsession; he mortgaged his property in order to add to his library. Force employed the help of book-dealers to expand his collection, Henry Stevens being foremost among them. Directing Stevens how to proceed at an auction, Force wrote, "I am willing to go for all you can collect and send me, if furnished at reasonable prices – all I ask is, that the best

³⁶ Greene, "Col. Peter Force," 232; Basset, *Middle Group*, 90. Basset notes that other historical collectors, such as Jared Sparks, similarly had to acquire collections in order to write historical works; Spofford, "Washington Reminiscences," 676; *Mohave County Miner*, November 9, 1884.

³⁷ Clarke and Force, *Report to the Hon. John Forsyth*, 28.

may not be first taken for others, and the refuse sent me.”³⁸ Force’s desire for the best items created a constant tension between his limited budget and his unbounded passion for collecting.

Force’s primary motivation for gathering and preserving records resonated with most other nineteenth century collectors, whose collections often functioned as personal reference libraries. Public libraries offered few resources to scholars, so he and other collectors built their own personal repositories of information. Collecting books also provided the personal satisfaction of owning a rare, often expensive, piece of history. A personal library contained on its shelves both the tangible object, about which the collector may revel in owning, and an intangible part of the collector himself. Each piece might inspire personal memories within the collector’s mind, recollections of when, where, and how he acquired a particular item. The books and manuscripts preserved American history and stirred personal memories for Force. A repeated visitor to his library noticed the evocative powers the books had on their collector, writing that Force “had frequent incidents to tell how he had picked up many a gem on neglected and dust-laden shelves.”³⁹ Perhaps the truest biography of Peter Force lived within the walls of his extensive library, where each volume awakened memories of his own life.⁴⁰

He generously offered research advice to whoever requested it and opened his collection to intellectual pursuits. Some collectors, such as James Lenox, became so consumed with

³⁸ Force to Stevens, December 29, 1843, Henry Stevens Papers, University of Vermont.

³⁹ Spofford, “Life and Labors of Peter Force,” 9.

⁴⁰ G. Ellis Burcaw, *Introduction to Museum Work*, 3rd ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1997), 25; “Well Deserved,” *National Republican*, October 18, 1869; Carl L. Cannon, *American Book Collectors and Collecting from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: H. H. Wilson Company, 1941), 362; Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 60, 67.

maintaining their collection that they sealed their doors to outsiders. Instead of viewing researchers as threats to his collection, Force welcomed their inquiries. In some ways, he functioned as an early archivist, guiding visitors through his staggering volumes of tomes, pamphlets and manuscripts, and aiding others in their research and historical ventures. For example, he responded to an inquiry from Brantz Mayer, who would later found the Maryland Historical Society, regarding the constitutions of extant historical societies in the United States. Force had nearly all of them in his collection and enclosed in his reply a copy of the constitution for the American Historical Society, an organization in which he energetically participated. In many ways, Force's library functioned as an archives. He maintained some measure of intellectual control over his library; he had indexed the transcripts used in the making of the *American Archives* and often kept records of researchers who frequented his library and temporarily checked out books.⁴¹

In addition to researchers, wealthy collectors sought Force's expertise. James Lenox, a reclusive man of substantial means, applied his wealth and time to collecting valuable books, particularly rare Bibles. Force's first-hand knowledge of printing allowed him to assess the value of earlier printed editions. He observed several stylistic errors, such as misaligned words and extra spaces between letters, which an astute proofreader in a printing shop would have noticed. Lenox last wrote Force in 1861, asking his opinion regarding the authenticity of a seventeenth century Bible. Force's historical and printing knowledge about his collection and book-collecting in general received attention from the highest echelons of society, who could have contacted

⁴¹ *Dictionary of Literary Biography* ed. Joseph Rosenblum, vol. 140: American Book Collectors and Bibliographers, 1st ser. (Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1994), 109; McGirr, "The Activities of Peter Force," 42, 50; Force to Brantz Mayer, May 20, 1840, Peter Force Manuscript File, New York Public Library, New York, NY; Sung, "Peter Force," 203 and 252.

anyone in reference to their holdings. His background in printing aided his collecting efforts in several ways. He recognized the importance of printed sources, such as colonial newspapers. Printing and collected enabled him to notice typographical and printing errors in editions that affected their monetary value. His work in historical publishing transformed him into both an archivist and a historian, although professional historians in the modern sense did not emerge until the late nineteenth century. The absence of professional standards allowed men, such as Force, to apply their acumen to historical problems and the collection of records, subsequently laying the groundwork for methodical research into American history and the systematic preservation of archival materials.⁴²

Over his lifetime, his library grew to unparalleled proportions, until he owned the largest personal library of Americana of any private citizen in the country. Visitors to Force's home in Washington remarked on the vastness of his collection, one writing that it "filled his commodious house almost to overflowing."⁴³ At the culmination, Force could boast of a library with sixty thousand volumes, including thousands of pamphlets, maps, and sets of both bound and unbound newspapers. In his last years Force took refuge in the sanctuary of his library. He spent his days, beginning at eight in the morning, to peruse his collections and immerse himself in history.⁴⁴

⁴² Force to James Lenox, November 5, 1849, James Lenox Papers, New York Public Library; James Lenox to Peter Force, December 7, 1861, James Lenox Papers, New York Public Library.

⁴³ Spofford, "Washington Reminiscences," 676.

⁴⁴ A. R. Spofford, *Special Report of Congress to the Joint Committee on the Library Concerning the Historical Library of Peter Force, Esq.*, January 25, 1867, Library of Congress, 7; Spofford, "Life and Labors of Peter Force," 8.

By the late 1860s, he also had begun to consider the fate of his library after his death. While several parties were interested, he flatly refused to parcel out his collection at any price. The New York Public Library offered a bid of \$100,000 for the complete library but a final settlement eluded both parties. Ainsworth Spofford, an energetic and ambitious Librarian of Congress, knew of Force's collection, however, and on January 26, 1867, a formal and final agreement suited both parties. For the same price offered by the New York Historical Society, Force's collection would reside permanently in the Library of Congress.⁴⁵

As the Library of Congress embraced the stunning library in 1867, Peter Force wandered through stacks of empty fireproof shelves ready to bear the weight of his books, maps and manuscripts. A journalist assigned to report on the event retold his interaction with the aging printer. Force eagerly directed the reporter to highlights of his collection, including a newspaper printed by Benjamin Franklin and the diary of Nathaniel Greene, general in the Revolutionary War. In honor of his contribution, he received his own desk at the library, where he could continue to peruse his collection. He frequented the library, but never worked there as he had done in his private library. Force, later confined to his home by illness, would glance at his now empty shelves and comment, "it is done; it is done well."⁴⁶ At age seventy seven, he breathed his

⁴⁵ Ibid., 12; Spofford to Force, January 26, 1867, Peter Force Library, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁶ "Death and Funeral of Gen. Peter Force – Respect by the City Councils – Meeting of Columbia Typographical Society – Tributes of Respect by the Oldest Inhabitants - Washington National Monument Association – The Large Funeral Cortège – The Prominent Persons Present – Last Sad Rites – Demise of Other Citizens – The Funeral Services," *National Republican*, January 27, 1868.

last in January of 1868, only several months after parting with his beloved collection.⁴⁷

While the purchase of Force's library was not the first time Congressional funds were summoned to secure valuable and rare manuscripts, it was an impressive feat. The leading proponent for the absorption of Peter Force's library into the public realm was Spofford, the Librarian of Congress. In order to assess the value of the collection, he spent hours with Force every day reviewing the works he had accrued slowly and steadily. His amazement at Force's library resonates through the report he submitted to Congress. Spofford compared the richness of Force's collection with the paltry holdings of the nation's legislative, and in his mind, national library. Force had at his disposal approximately 40,000 pamphlets, over 900 volumes of newspapers, over 400 manuscripts and roughly 22,000 books. The Library of Congress in contrast retained fewer than 6,000 pamphlets, "not even a fragment of a file of any revolutionary or ante-revolutionary newspaper," and virtually no manuscripts.⁴⁸

Unlike his contemporaries, Spofford along with Force recognized, the informative powers of newspapers and pamphlets. Others dismissed newspapers as "prejudiced, superficial, unfair," but the librarian appreciated their ability to replicate for contemporary researchers "the spirit, prejudices and personalities of a time which has passed."⁴⁹ Pamphlets, although brittle and difficult to store, "are also the storehouses of facts."⁵⁰ Force's slow and steady accumulation of

⁴⁷ "Peter Force and His Library," *Nashville Union and Dispatch*, January 12, 1868; Spofford, "Life and Labors of Peter Force," 12-13.

⁴⁸ Spofford, *Special Report of Congress*, 7.

⁴⁹ Ainsworth Rand Spofford, *A Book for All Readers Designed as an Aid to the Collection, Use, and Preservation of Books and the Formation of Public and Private Libraries* (New York: G. P. Putnam's and Sons, 1900), 301.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 148.

pamphlets represented the most complete collection of such ephemera in the nation. In Spofford's own estimation, the addition of the Force library increased "more than ten times" the amount of Americana previously residing in the Library.⁵¹ After submission of the Librarian's report to the Joint Committee on the Library, the vote to purchase the historical library was unanimous. Force determined to leave his collection intact; Spofford made Force's resolution a reality.⁵²

While Force was printing, collecting, and beseeching Congress for funding, Spofford was receiving lessons from his childhood tutors. Born in 1825 in New Hampshire, the intellectually gifted Spofford suffered from infirmities that prevented his attending college. His ailments, weak eyes and lungs, did not prevent him from enjoying success in his professions. As a young man, Spofford sought an apprenticeship with a book-binder, but ultimately he chose a different course. He settled in Cincinnati, Ohio and became a bookseller and publisher. Publishing required a keen sense of what types of books would sell. His experience in book-dealing and publishing aided Spofford in locating the best book prices available. In 1859, Spofford's publishing enterprise had failed, but he found employment as a writer and editor for the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial*.⁵³ His career in bookselling, publishing, and journalism strengthened his love of the written word, while his commitment to preserving printed matter contributed to his later success as Librarian of

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ainsworth Spofford to Force, January 26, 1867, Peter Force Library, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁵³ John Y. Cole, "Ainsworth Rand Spofford: The Valiant and Persistent Librarian of Congress," *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress* 33 (1976): 94-95; Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital*, 111; Cole, "Ainsworth Rand Spofford," 103-104.

Congress. In that office, he labored to include “a nearly complete representation of the product of the American press, for permanent preservation in a fire-proof national library.”⁵⁴

The Library of Congress subsisted on meager allotments from Congress to purchase books. Occasionally, congressmen might donate their private holdings and authors offer a copy of their books to the Library. Appointed by President Abraham Lincoln, Spofford assumed the role of Librarian of Congress on December 31, 1864. He embarked on an ambitious plan to increase the holdings and the significance of the Library of Congress. The mainstays of his plan were the cultivation of private collections and the passage of the Copyright Act of 1870, which stipulated that two copies of every book published in the United States had to be stored in the Library of Congress. After only several years as Librarian of Congress, he had increased the institution’s holdings by such a vast number that the library’s new collections filled the structure beyond its capacity.⁵⁵ As early as 1871, with several impressive acquisitions to his credit, Spofford reported that the library was “nearly filled up by the almost simultaneous acquisition of the Smithsonian Library as a deposit, and the Force Historical Library by purchase.”⁵⁶

Spofford envisioned the Library of Congress as a vast reserve of American books, maps, pamphlets, and manuscripts. His convictions concerning what a public library ought to possess guided his rapid procurement of materials. First and foremost, a library should have an

⁵⁴ Ainsworth R. Spofford, *Report of the Librarian of Congress, Exhibiting the Progress of the Library during the Year Ended December 1, 1872* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 3.

⁵⁵ William Dawson Johnston, *History of the Library of Congress*, vol. 1 1800-1864 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 48; Cole, “Ainsworth Rand Spofford,” 94, 102, 107.

⁵⁶ Ainsworth Spofford, *Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress for the Year 1871* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1871), 4.

impressive assortment of reference books. After the reference section, a complete and thorough historical collection ought to be a library's next acquisition. Force's impressive historic collection established the Library as one of national significance and as a repository for archival materials. The absorption of Force's library smoothed the path for other private collectors to consider transferring their holdings to the national library. For example, Joseph Toner, a physician in Washington, donated his vast private historical collection to the Library of Congress in 1882. Toner had sought materials relating to the development of the capital city and medical history in America among a multiplicity of other collecting interests. The *American Archives* figured prominently into the collection and the research of Dr. Toner, who studied doctors during the American Revolution.⁵⁷

While collecting valuable book and archival collections helped establish the Library of Congress as a seminal repository, Spofford recognized that he must do more than simply garner materials. In order for them to actually be used they must be accessible and managed by a system of intellectual control. He designed a system of classification with the user in mind, known as the dictionary catalogue. Libraries lacked a universal cataloguing method, each one developing its own peculiar method of organization. The Boston Athenaeum relied on a topical catalogue of its collections, and other institutions arranged materials chronologically. Spofford, in contrast, championed an alphabetical catalogue, arranged by author's last names and a topical catalogue, organized according to subject matter. To accommodate his patrons, he developed two separate methods of cataloguing the library's volumes. In 1867, per Spofford's directions, the Library published catalogues with more bibliographic information than had previously been included.

⁵⁷ Spofford, *A Book for All Readers*, 16-17; Daniel Y. Gilham and Patrick Doyle, "Joseph M. Toner Papers: A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress, 2011," Library of Congress.

These new catalogues detailed the number of pages, maps, and names of publishers and printers, and even some annotation. His genius at collecting soon became a curse, for new collections piled up at a pace he and his assistants could not maintain. Marked for cataloguing in 1867, most of the printed matter in Force's collection was processed, but many of the unbound volumes remained in a chaotic state of disarray nearly ten years after the Library of Congress assumed ownership.⁵⁸

Physically, the building soon reached and exceeded its maximum capacity. As collections increased, the staff's intellectual control over the Library diminished. The Library accepted new collections before staff could make adequate catalogues to manage longstanding holdings. Many collections were relegated to undesirable locations within the Capitol building, before the Library of Congress had its own edifice. In his annual reports, Spofford expressed concern about the lack of sufficient room at the library, or in his words, the "evil and inconvenience now experienced of contracting a great library into a space too crowded."⁵⁹ Even Force's collection, the cornerstone of the Library's historical collection, suffered because of the severe overcrowding and backlog of the Library, by having its items stacked on the floor. More damage came to the Force collection in 1897 when two employees of the Library stole correspondence from George Washington and Thomas Paine, among other items, and attempted to sell them to private dealers. The approached book dealers quickly grew suspicious about how these two men

⁵⁸ Spofford, *A Book for All Readers*, 373, 383, 388; *Belmont Chronicle*, November 28, 1872; Ainsworth Spofford, *Report of the Librarian of Congress, 1867* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1867), 3-4 ; Ainsworth Spofford, *Report of the Librarian of Congress, 1868* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1868), 2 ; Ainsworth Spofford, *Report, Library of Congress, 1876* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), 6.

⁵⁹ Ainsworth Spofford, *Report of the Librarian of Congress, Exhibiting the Progress of the Library during the year ended 1872* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872).

acquired these letters and made inquiries to see if any institution was missing these letters. After some searching, the Library discovered its loss. The honesty of these book dealers ensured the returned the documents to the Library, so the Force Collection persists to this day in its entirety.⁶⁰

Despite the overcrowding and backlog to which his zealous collecting policies subjected the library, Spofford immensely increased the holdings of the Library. He secured numerous private collections that enriched the nation's collection and his initial efforts to catalogue the Library's growing resources helped make documents accessible to the public. Spofford pushed for a new library building that could properly house its expanding holdings. After the Library integrated such valuable collections as the Peter Force library and Joseph Turner collection into its holdings, he acknowledged that the Congressional Library had a duty to protect and preserve these materials. Securing the building and its holdings from fire was a priority. Spofford recognized that a severe fire could inflict "total destruction" in a matter of minutes. To mitigate the constant threat of fire, he campaigned tirelessly for a larger library with fireproof, iron shelves. He also advocated for adequate ventilation and keeping materials at a consistent temperature – seventy degrees Fahrenheit, if possible. His unrelenting efforts to improve the conditions at the Library of Congress finally spurred legislators to approve a new and separate building for the Library. The Library of Congress opened at its new location across from the

⁶⁰ "Many New Indictments," *The Morning Times*, April 6, 189; Shelley, "Manuscripts in the Library of Congress: 1800-1900," 12.

Capitol in 1897. Spofford did everything in his power to ensure that the Library's unique collections and impressive collection of books reached posterity.⁶¹

Spofford devoted forty-six years of his life to transforming the Congressional Library into one of national prestige and significance. During his career as Librarian of Congress he turned his attention to the nation's records in a variety of ways. In 1897, he attempted to reform the way in which the government dispersed its public official documents. Various agencies distributed documents, resulting in certain departments receiving multiple copies of the same document. Joining forces with the Superintendent of Documents in the Department of the Interior and the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, he developed a new approach to distributing government documents, particularly Congressional records. Creating a single agency to oversee the distribution of documents, while maintaining the same amount of copies currently printed by the Government Printing Office, would allow any duplicates to be placed in the custodianship of libraries. By depositing government publications in public and university libraries, public documents were, at last, available to the public. Placing records in a variety of repositories also reduced the risk of destruction by the most common threat, fire. Spofford, in his capacity as Librarian of Congress, constantly sought the public good. He acquired a complete representation of American literature with the Copyright Act of 1870 and amassed archival collections relating to American history, beginning with Peter Force's library. He instituted policy reforms that made resources available to his patrons. Although his magnificent ability to

⁶¹ Spofford, *A Book for All Readers*, 105-106. Most modern archivists would agree with Spofford that collections ought to be kept at a consistent temperature, preferably within a range of 68-72 degrees Fahrenheit; Ainsworth Spofford, *Report of the Librarian of Congress, 1872*, 9; Cole, "Ainsworth Rand Spofford," 107.

obtain collections outstripped his staff's abilities to process and store them, Spofford eventually earned a commodious building, large enough to safely house the nation's records.⁶²

Peter Force and Ainsworth Spofford lived and worked in a contradictory age. Historical memory and records received coverage in the press and seemed to weigh heavily on the American mindset. Nevertheless, any formal and systemic record-keeping procedures eluded most public institutions until the twentieth century. The nineteenth century marked the high-tide of wealthy American collectors but also a bleak period for records in the stewardship of public institutions. One State Department worker confided in Alexis de Tocqueville that "perhaps nowhere else is it so difficult to collect documents bearing on past events."⁶³ Public offices failed to protect the nation's records, but individuals endeavored to amend the lacunae in American historical records.

A study in one of the nation's most expansive collections shows the necessary efforts that historically-minded men with an archival consciousness expended to preserve history. A brief summary of Peter Force's life illustrates the character of the man who helped shape American archival memory, and the history of his library illuminates the development of archives in the United States. Where many state and public offices had failed to gather, organize and preserve government records, Force strove to succeed. His training as a printer permeated his later careers as a historical publisher and collector and equipped him to handle archival collections. Printing offered him a thorough understanding of the vulnerabilities of paper sources as well as a means

⁶² *Publication and Distribution of Public Documents*, 47th Cong., 2nd sess., H. Mis. Doc. No. 12, 3, 5; Ernst Posner, *American State Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 7.

⁶³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Journey to America*, ed. J. P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), 116.

for their preservation. While his printer's salary limited his collecting efforts, he succeeded in including a variety of sources and a democratization of voices incorporated into the archives. Force's transactions with Ainsworth Spofford similarly underscore the necessity of collaboration in the development of archives in America. While he acquired an impressive collection on his own, he could not care for his library indefinitely. As Librarian of Congress, Spofford offered a permanent solution for the secure housing of his great collection. The sale of the Force library to a federally operated institution introduced the concept of the American government maintaining, on a large scale, records of historical, cultural, and national significance.

Both Force and Spofford pursued their careers in preservation with posterity in mind. Peter Force sought items of permanent value before they were consumed by fire, discarded as rubbish or simply faded away. Spofford ensured that Force's library and other collections were accessible to the public and permanently resided in a properly outfitted structure. As they contemplated the nation's future needs, both Force and Spofford influenced the next generation. Force's experience and expertise allowed him to mentor younger historians and guide fellow collectors. His published works and library provided historians with original source materials to consider and interpret, and his transferal of his private library to a public institution inspired other collectors to do the same. Spofford's role as Librarian of Congress enabled him to affect lasting changes on the historical landscape. A talent for securing valuable collections, erecting a fire-proof building for the Library, and reforming cataloguing all established the Library of Congress as the preeminent repository in the United States. Spofford's long and illustrious career influenced many, including Thomas Owen, the creator of the first state archival repository in the

United States.⁶⁴ Spofford's acquisition and successful absorption of the Force library in 1867 began his career in archives. His influence extended into the twentieth century as states and the federal government began carving out permanent archival repositories.

Combining their efforts, Force and Spofford preserved a substantial portion of America's archives from incunabula to mid-nineteenth century newspapers. By harnessing available technologies and personal capabilities they made tremendous strides in selecting, procuring, preserving, and making archival materials accessible. If an archivist's mission can be accurately simplified to three actions, "to identify records and papers of enduring value, to preserve them, to them available to patrons," Force and Spofford deserve the appellation.⁶⁵ Their ingenuity, dedication, sacrifice, and lifelong labors shaped the course of archives in America.

⁶⁴ R. D. W. Connor, "Dedication of the Archival Section of the Alabama World War Memorial Building," *American Archivist* 4 (1941): 78.

⁶⁵ Hunter, *Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives*, 3.

Conclusion

In 1791 former postmaster general Ebenezer Hazard finally decided to print his vast *Historical Collections* in which he published documents relating to the colonial history of America. Hazard penned a letter to his friend and frequent correspondent, Jeremy Belknap, notifying him that he was preparing his historical work for the press and requesting Belknap's public endorsement concerning the "utility and importance of the collection"¹ in a newspaper or magazine.² While Hazard worried about the sale of his historical labors, his collections captured the attention of Thomas Jefferson. The same year of Hazard's publication, Jefferson wrote to him,

"I learn with great satisfaction that you are about committing to the press the valuable historical and State papers you have been so long collecting. Time and accident are committing daily havoc on the originals deposited in our public offices. The late war has done the work of centuries in this business. The last cannot be recovered, but let us save what remains; not by vaults and locks which fence them from the public eye and use in consigning them to the waste of time, but by such a multiplication of copies, as shall place them beyond the reach of accident."³

Concerned citizens and printers were the among the first Americans to respond to the rapid loss of historical materials. Following in the tradition of Hazard, Peter Force's *American Archives* utilized the power of the press to preserve rare resources. Historical publication offered

¹ Ebenezer Hazard to Jeremy Belknap, March 1, 1791, Belknap Papers in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, vol. 3 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1877), 246.

² Ibid.

³ Thomas Jefferson to Ebenezer Hazard, February 18, 1791, University of Groningen, accessed April 11, 2012, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/thomas-jefferson/letters-of-thomas-jefferson/jefl88.php>.

a means of preservation for fragile, irreplaceable documents. Multiple copies, while not a guarantee of preservation, helped ensure the survival of records. The printing press and its operators were the means of preserving records for posterity. After enduring a laborious apprenticeship and acquiring the art and mystery of printing, printers served as creators and distributors of information. A printing shop, while primarily a place of business, also functioned as the locus of local and national news.

As a growing archival consciousness permeated the early republic, printers participated in archiving activities since they were among the earliest members of society whose livelihood revolved around documents. The nature of printing and the vast newspaper networks throughout the early republic encouraged printers to collect periodicals for gathering news and producing their own newspapers. The realities of the printing trade meant that printers depended on receiving news through the postal service and distributing their papers to subscribers.⁴ The exchange networks also promoted preservation; by distributing copies across a wide geographic base helped reduce the risk of losing all extant copies in a calamity. A modern archival acronym, LOCKSS, lots of copies keeps stuff safe, encourages digital archives to store items across several institutions.⁵ The common habit of printers to store copies of works printed in their shops resulted in some of the earliest archives in the country, for an archives is essentially formed when information is “systematically gathered and maintained.”⁶

⁴ Buckingham, *Personal Memoirs and Recollections*, vol. 1, 239-240.

⁵ The author is indebted to Dr. Grimsley for this insight. Pearce-Moses, “A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology,” Society of American Archivists Glossary, <http://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/a/archives> (accessed July 27, 2013).

⁶ Carol Courture and Jean-Yves Rousseau, *The Life of a Document* (Montreal: Vehicule Press, 1987), 21.

Nineteenth century printers had a general sense that as the “art preservative” printing offered preservation through multiple copies. Certain printers however, such as Isaiah Thomas and Peter Force, reflected more seriously on the preservative power of the press. They recognized the historical value of printed sources and their potential for study by future generations. Thomas noted the effect time has on materials; “[t]ime will make those which are modern more precious – they will become antique.”⁷ Thomas and other printers acknowledged that records produced during their century would retain their significance and suit the needs of later generations.

The valuable contributions made by printers to the developing field of archives become apparent when their nineteenth century practices coincide with current archival theory. Current archival literature suggests that attaining an archival mindset distinguishes archivists from historians and librarians. Archivists have an uncommon awareness of organizations or institutions that create records.⁸ Printers in the nineteenth century, by virtue of their profession, knew and often worked with individuals and organizations responsible for creating records. Whether they contracted with the houses of Congress, state legislatures or individuals, printers worked with entities creating records, or they themselves created records through their periodicals. Modern archivists are expected to have a general comprehension for records, including how they are made and an appreciation for the medium on which a record is produced.⁹ As the ones producing the majority of records, handling manuscript materials before

⁷ American Antiquarian Society, Communication from the President, *An Account*, 4.

⁸ F. Gerald Ham, Frank Boles, Gregory S. Hunter and James O’Toole, “Historians and Archivists: Educating the Next Generation,” *American Archivist* 56 (1993): 721.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 721-722.

transforming them into printed matter, printers knew how to make records and became closely acquainted with ancillary materials, such as paper and ink. Particularly during the colonial period when printing supplies were often scarce or had to be imported from Britain, printers began making their own paper and ink.¹⁰ They understood how paper mills produced paper, paper's vast range in quality, and its durability.

While a printing apprenticeship in no way mirrors current archival training, archival techniques and practices did not exist in the form of standardized manuals until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the absence of archival training, printers were trained in their master printer's record-keeping procedures for the daily activities of a printing house and book-keeping.¹¹ The organized arrangement developed by printers, however, influenced recordkeeping. Peter Force's vast personal library formed the basis of the Library of Congress' manuscript collection. To impose order on his collection, he organized it based primarily on chronology and then allowed for subgroups of geography and subject matter. While modern archivists would not utilize this classification, Force's system became the basis for the Library of Congress' archival arrangement until the mid-twentieth century.¹²

Despite the collecting and organizing of historical materials that began in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, archival histories are silent on the efforts of those during the early republic. Most of the scholarly work tracing the history of archives in America mention

¹⁰ Wroth, *Colonial Printer*, 115, 126.

¹¹ John Southward and Arthur Powell, *Practical Printing. A Handbook of the Art of Typography* (London: J. M. Powell and Son, 1884), 632-654.

¹² Richard C. Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983) 13.

briefly the formation of the Massachusetts Historical Society and then pass over nearly one hundred years before the next milestone in 1884 with the formation of the American Historical Association.¹³ Even before the American Historical Association crusaded for archives, a plea for a safe, permanent repository for valuable but non-current government records by the War Department appeared from the Quartermaster General M. C. Meigs in 1878. While Meigs did not use the term “archives,” his proposition for a facility for non-current official records was exactly that. By the 1870s, decades of neglect combined with an increase in paper work resulting from the Civil War forced government officials to reconsider the virtually non-existent records policy of the United States. The War Department particularly suffered an acute lack of storage, so much so that its Quartermaster General proposed a new fireproof brick building to act as a “hall of records.”¹⁴ Such a facility would house “records not in daily use”¹⁵ and operate under the supervision of “competent superintendents and watchmen, to be properly filed and easy of access.”¹⁶ Although a hall of records as first proposed by Meigs never appeared, the National Archives Act, passed in 1934, established the National Archives and Records Administration to fulfill necessary role of appraising and maintaining the nation’s official records.¹⁷

¹³ Mattie U. Russell, “The Influence of Historians on the Archival Profession in the United States,” *American Archivist* 46, no. 3 (1983): 279-280; Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice*, 1-14; James M. O’Toole and Richard J. Cox, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990), 55-61.

¹⁴ *Erection of a Hall of Records in the City of Washington*, 47th Cong., 1st sess., H. Report No. 778.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Richard J. Cox, Charles Dollar, Rebecca Hirsch, and Peter J. Wosh, “Founding Brothers: Leland, Buck, and Cappon and the Formation of the Archives Profession,” *American Archivist* 74 (2011/Supplement): 12.

Archival literature readily recognizes the contributions of early historians to the field of archives in the United States; however, these histories of archives typically concentrate on public archives. Archival history, however, is richer and more complicated than the current literature suggests. The pivotal role played by private collectors and printers in shaping the later development of archives is absent from the literature. William F. Birdsall identified the difficulty in clearly defining an archives, even in the late twentieth century, as stemming from the diversity of individuals and societies involved in collecting historical documents. Historical societies, state libraries, and local governments each began collecting historical resources in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁸

The genesis of collections in the early American republic did not meet the formal constraints placed on archives by archivists as the field professionalized in the twentieth century. An additional barrier to incorporating early collectors into archival history was the rarity of the term “archives” in nineteenth century vernacular.¹⁹ Nevertheless, collections formed during this early period form the basis for future archival holdings and their collectors acquired and preserved materials with similar motives to later archivists. Printers, who enjoyed access to a wide array of periodicals, formed their own collections or assisted avid collectors in procuring difficult to find resources. While criticisms leveled against early collectors include their inability to keep a collection together often proved the rule, the earliest founders of historical societies

¹⁸ William Birdsall, “Archivists, Librarians and Issues during the Pioneering Era of the American Archival Movement,” *Journal of Library History* 14, no. 4 (1979): 457-467.

¹⁹ Arthur H. Leavitt, “What Are Archives?” *American Archivist* 24 (1961): 177-178.

helped absorb personal libraries that had previously been dispersed through auctions.²⁰ Even before archivists had formally articulated and accepted the idea of provenance, the American Antiquarian Society asked that its donations be accompanied by as much information regarding their previous owner, location and any other known history as possible.²¹ Early historical societies helped establish collecting policies, incorporate complete private collections, and make resources available. Among the most prominent historical collections in the nineteenth century were the holdings of the American Antiquarian Society and Force's private library.

The earliest form of records curation in the United States centered on collecting and preserving historical manuscripts. The historical manuscript tradition utilized the existing principles of librarianship to arrange, catalogue and care for items. Instead of forming collections, curators handled items individually.²² Printers and early collectors fell under this approach to records. The collections of Isaiah Thomas and Peter Force depart from typical historical manuscripts collections because of their printed ephemera and attempts to democratize the historical record. Most early collectors centered on accumulating the papers of great leaders and politicians, ignoring the records of ordinary citizens.²³ By incorporating printed works, Thomas and Force expanded their collections, included information regarding everyday life, and

²⁰ "Book Sales in Boston: Two Hundred Years Since They Began – Books that Have Brought \$200 or More - A History Never Before Narrated," *New York Times* May 7, 1898.

²¹ American Antiquarian Society, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 1812-1849*, 140-41.

²² *Ibid.*, 1-2.

²³ Adrian Cunningham, "Archival Institutions," in *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society* eds. Sue McKemmish, Michael Piggot, Barbara Reed and Frank Upward (Wagga Wagga, New South Wales: Centre for Information Studies, 2005), 33.

distinguished themselves from the prevailing bias to collect only the papers and autographs of famous men.²⁴

Modern archival practices underwent a tremendous evolution in the twentieth century. It was not until 1956 that archivists began to encourage the merger of historical manuscript and public archives collections.²⁵ Although manuscripts and personal papers were replete with personal musings and perhaps created without the structure of an organization, archivists in the mid twentieth century began to recognize the archival character of manuscripts. With minor modifications, curators applied the same archival principles developed for official records with success to personal manuscripts.²⁶ In this respect, the philosophies of early collectors preceded that of modern archivists. Early collectors, including Thomas and Force, permitted historical resources, both public archives and historical manuscripts, into their collections.²⁷

The decades of disciplined and persistent searching through attics and basements for historical documents vividly demonstrated to Isaiah Thomas and Peter Force that archival collections did not simply materialize, but were painstakingly created.²⁸ Modern historians and archivists, such as Peter Fritzsche and Elisabeth Kaplan, recognize that an archival collection

²⁴ O'Toole and Cox, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts*, 57-58; Hunter, *Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives*, 15.

²⁵ Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice*, 47-48.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

²⁷ Both Thomas and Force incorporated public documents into their collections. See *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 1812-1849*, 55, and Spofford, "Washington Reminisces," 678.

²⁸ Thomas and Force collected vigorously, as is seen in Bentley, *Diary of William Bentley*, vol. 4, 270 and Clarke and Force, *Report to the Hon. John Forsyth*, 7, 27-28.

“doesn’t just happen.”²⁹ Archives are intentionally created by “heirs who must work to find connections from one generation to the next and thereby acknowledge the ongoing disintegration of the past.”³⁰ Fritzsche observed that heirs, whether biological or cultural, are responsible for the development of an archives. In the cases of Thomas and Force, their collections of American documents, records, and ephemera position themselves as heirs to the burgeoning American republic. In addition to their status as cultural heirs to the nation, both Thomas and Force were professional heirs of the earliest European printers. Just as earlier printers viewed the printing press as an invention receiving divine approbation, nineteenth century printers viewed their profession as integral to upholding civilization and perpetuating historical records.³¹ Whereas Fritzsche viewed the development of an archive as prompted by an inherently negative view of the deterioration of past objects and records, Thomas and Force actively collected and preserved materials. Thomas’ network of collecting through the American Antiquarian Society’s nationwide membership and his construction of a permanent facility as well as Force’s utilization of printing and collecting to preserve records began with a recognition that the past was disappearing quickly. Their actions, however, prohibited further destruction and proffered an archive for posterity. By archiving historical materials they transformed a sobering awareness of loss into an active recovery of their predecessors. Thomas and Force spent their lives “among

²⁹ Elisabeth Kaplan, “We Are What We Collect, We Collect What We Are: Archives and the Construction of Identity,” *American Archivist* 63 (Spring/Summer 2000): 147.

³⁰ Peter Fritzsche, “The Archive,” *History and Memory* 17, no.1/2 (2005):16.

³¹ Eisenstein, *Print Culture and Enlightenment Thought*, 21.

scattered and forgotten papers,” and through their efforts, they managed to rescue documents, impose order, and preserve for posterity records threatened with near certain oblivion.³²

If, as one modern philosopher has powerfully argued, the contents of an archives dictate “what can be said,”³³ then the efforts of collectors and early archivists merit notice for their contributions to the American archival record. Most histories of archives begin in the twentieth century, with only brief references to the “backwards” practices of their predecessors.

Antiquarians, devoted collectors, and amateur historians of the nineteenth century receive severe criticism and are besmirched and derided as foolish and irrational in certain archival histories.³⁴

While the archival practices of the nineteenth century often failed to maintain original order or fully respect provenance, certain individuals smoothed the path for future progress. Printers in particular were equipped to handle records because of the vast training and experience their vocation offered them in creating and disseminating printed records. The endeavors of Isaiah Thomas and Peter Force reflect the permanence which both printing and archival repositories promised historical materials.

This is a Printing Office a poem, composed by printer Beatrice L. Warde, expresses her views on the cultural significance of a printing office:

“This is a printing office
Crossroads of civilization
Refuge of all the arts against the ravages of time

³² Peter Force to James McKay, June 26, 1840, Peter Force Library, Library of Congress.

³³ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), 129.

³⁴ Cox, Dollar, Hirsch, and Wosh, “Founding Brothers: Leland, Buck, and Cappon,” 8.

Armory of fearless truth against whispering rumor

Incessant trumpet of trade

From this place words may fly abroad

Not to perish on waves of sound

Not to vary with the writer's hand

But fixed in time

Having been verified by proof

Friend, you stand on sacred ground

This is a printing office.”³⁵

Published in 1932, this poem captures the respect that printers have for their profession. Nineteenth century printers exhibited similar sentiments of pride in the timelessness of the works they produce. This poem, while dedicated to printing, articulates the values and missions of an archives. Without drastically altering Warde's poem, one might apply the same concepts of exploration, permanence, and truth to an archives. The author humbly submits her modification of *This Is a Printing Office* to emphasize the profound parallels between the noble aspirations printing and archiving.

This Is an Archives

This is an archives

Crossroads of civilization

Refuge of all the arts against the ravages of time

Armory of fearless truth against whispering rumor

Quiet citadel of study

³⁵ Beatrice L. Warde, "This is a Printing Office," reproduced by Rebecca W. Davidson, "Unseen Hands: Women Printers, Binders and Book Designers," *Rare Books and Special Collections Princeton University Libraries*, February 18, 2004, <http://libweb2.princeton.edu/rbsc2/ga/unseenhands/printers/warde.html>.

Reminder of things passed
From this place words may fly abroad
Not to perish on waves of sound
Not to vary with the writer's hand
But fixed in time
Having been verified by proof
Friend, you stand on sacred ground
This is an archives.³⁶

³⁶ Author's modification of Beatrice L. Warde's, "This is a Printing Office."

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