

PUBLISHING AND PRINTING IN WALPOLE

By Ray Boas – April 2009

What began as a talk on publishing in Walpole has become a combination of printing, publishing, and book selling history and what is most likely little known of their importance in Walpole. Bookselling and printing both have a long history here, and my challenge has been not what to include, but what to leave out because I firmly believe that both meetings and talks should be short to “wet the appetite” of the attendees. What I want to share hopefully will do just that.

I cannot get enough history, and in my travels I am always fascinated and curious as to why a town is where it is, why certain industries are there or left, and the same with its inhabitants. What you may not know is that Walpole at the end of the 18th century was one of the most important educational and literary centers in the infant United States outside Boston, Philadelphia, and possibly Worcester, Massachusetts. And it all happened at the site of the gas station and Rob Kasper’s law office.

The genesis of Walpole’s literary importance began when Isaiah Thomas, who founded the MASSACHUSETTS SPY in 1770, packed up his Boston printing presses and type and escaped to the relative safety of Worcester, Massachusetts on April 16, 1775, three days before the Battle of Concord. There he continued publishing and selling books. He built a paper mill and continued publishing the SPY. In addition, he established printing houses and bookshops around the country. At one time he had 16 presses at work for him and his various partners. They did a brisk business in Bibles and geographies (the most commonly printed books during this time period) along with religious lay books. In 1802 he gave the business to his son. His son published Isaiah’s seminal HISTORY OF PRINTING IN AMERICA in 1810, and in 1812 Isaiah founded the learned American Antiquarian Society.

David Carlisle, Jr., who was born in Walpole on August 23, 1771, served as an apprentice at Thomas’ press in Worcester. Thomas chose Walpole as one of the best sites for a branch bookstore and a weekly newspaper, and he offered Carlisle the opportunity to become manager of the printing press in Walpole, as well as the publication of the NEW HAMPSHIRE JOURNAL: OR FARMER’S WEEKLY (later simply FARMER’S WEEKLY MUSEUM). It was this newspaper that eventually would bring him and its contributors a place in American literary history. Publication of the FARMER’S WEEKLY MUSEUM began on April 11, 1793 at the press of Thomas & Carlisle.

At this time in our history, weekly newspapers were uncommon and the publishing of books was a “new art.” The MUSEUM was high class and immediately popular. It maintained its literary reputation of unusual merit thanks to its clever and witty contributors which included: Royall Tyler, the famous jurist from Brattleboro; David Everett; John C. Chamberlain; Rev. Thomas G. Fessenden; and most the famous of all was Joseph Dennie .

The paper was printed on a coarse sheet of paper measuring 18 by 11 inches. It initially borne the motto: “WHERE LIBERTY IS, THERE IS MY COUNTRY.” The high point of the paper was 1797 when it had subscribers in all states except Georgia, Kentucky and Tennessee. In eighteen months from January 1796 the paper gained 1,000 new subscribers, and by December 1797 the number of subscribers reached 2,000. This circulation was larger than any other village paper in the United States. In the seminars I used to give on printing and book history I liked to explain that there is a reason for everything. The size of a newspaper, and printed books, was originally determined by the size of the handmade paper which could be no larger than what a man could hold with outstretched hands. This folio sheet could be printed with several pages, and the number of pages printed on a side would determine how the sheets were folded, trimmed, and made up into signatures to be sewn into a book block to be bound. Printing of books

remained essentially unchanged from Gutenbergs' time into the 19th century. Often the signatures of the finished book would be gathered and sold that way or bound in printers or publisher's boards. The purchaser could then take this book to a binder to be bound to his or her own specifications. Typically, a printer/bookseller provided the book simply bound in full calf leather. Type was hand set for each page well into the 19th century, and the first real advance speeding the process was to then cast, or stereotype, the handset type into a plate. Soon type was set by linotype machines in a process called hot type, which was followed in the 20th century when cold type was created by special equipment and eventually computers. The cold type paste-ups would then be photographed and made into printing plates. The computer with the various digital processes has completely revolutionized the process right down to the most recent introduction of the Kindle.

Walpole, with its 1,400 inhabitants during the 1790s, was quite an intellectual center. A brilliant cadre of young Harvard lawyers and promising writers from the Upper Connecticut Valley would converge in Walpole in between court sessions, and indulge in gambling, excessive drinking and the like. This was particularly the case after Major Asa Bullard took over Crafts Tavern opposite the press of Thomas & Carlisle. By 1796 the tavern became the gathering place of The Literary Club of Walpole which besides Tyler and Dennie and Fessenden included Jeremiah Mason, Samuel Hunt, Roger Vose and Samuel West. Alice Morse Earle stated in her book *STAGE-COACH AND TAVERN DAYS*, published in 1900, that the club was "one of the most brilliant groups of writers ever engaged in a literary undertaking in this country."

Dennie became the leader of this group when he moved to Walpole in early fall of 1795. Born in 1768, he was 27 at the time. Prior to relocating to Walpole he studied law for a short time in Charlestown and filled in as a lay preacher. In Walpole, he gave Carlisle an essay titled "Wine and New Wine" which he called *The Lay Preacher*. It was published, and so well received that *A Lay Preacher* article appeared weekly beginning May 24, 1797. The column was soon reprinted in papers around the nation bringing him wide acclaim. Much of his writing was done at Craft's Tavern across the street from the print shop. During one evening meeting of the Literary Club, while playing whist, Dennie was completing one of his best articles piecemeal. To facilitate the typesetting, the "Printer's Devil" ran back and forth at least a dozen times to get segments to set in type. Dennie was not finishing fast enough to deliver the text to the apprentice, and he reportedly said to Tyler (according to Aldrich in *WALPOLE AS IT WAS AND AS IT IS*), "Here, play my hand while I give the Devil his due." I would like to also give Walpole the credit for the origin of this phrase, but the origin of the expression can be traced to 1597 from Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part 1*:

Constable: I will cap that proverb with 'There is flattery in friendship.'

Orleans: And I will take up that with 'Give the devil his due.'

As an aside, the term **Printer's devil** has been said to come from the fact printer's apprentices would inevitably have their skin stained black by printer's ink. Since black was associated with the "black arts," the apprentice came to be called a devil. Another origin is the fanciful belief among printers that a special devil haunted every print shop, performing mischief such as inverting type, misspelling words or removing entire lines of completed type. The apprentice became a substitute source of blame and thus came to be called a "printer's devil."

In April, 1796, Isaiah Thomas relinquished his partnership in the paper and handed it over to Carlisle (Thomas retained the bookstore, however). Dennie became editor of *THE FARMER'S MUSEUM* with a salary of 110 pounds payable annually. He still practiced law, but his earnings were much less in that endeavor. Under his management *THE FARMER'S MUSEUM* quickly became the best and most popular newspaper in New England as far as politics and literature were concerned. But by 1798 Dennie's efforts became sporadic and the paper went through several changes and periods of not being published, and its final suspension came in October 1810. Later it did come back in different forms.

Royall Tyler (1757-1826), in addition to being the distinguished chief justice of the Vermont Supreme Court, was one of the most significant figures in American literature right after the American Revolution. His poetry had been reprinted in THE FARMER'S MUSEUM, but in 1796 his original verse was being published in the paper. In August, 1797 an ad appeared in a Boston paper that the awaited book THE ALGERINE CAPTIVE; OR LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF DR. UPDIKE UNDERHILL will soon be available for sale in Joseph Nancrede's bookshop there. This two volume edition of 1,000 copies had been printed in early August by David Carlisle in Walpole. Reportedly a factual account of Algerian slavery by Dr. Updike Underhill it was actually the work of Royall Tyler (who knew nothing about Algerian slavery other than what he had read in books and newspapers). When Nancrede received his copies he immediately realized that it was the work of Tyler (the use of pseudonyms was very common in those days) and changed his advertisement to that affect to sell more copies based on Tyler's reputation. Originally printed here in Walpole, THE ALGERINE CAPTIVES became the first American novel ever to be republished in England. The book's popularity continued in part to the public's curiosity to the activity of the Barbary pirates at that time - one of the most difficult problems faced by the new United States. Another very important first I would like to mention is the publication of Samuel Stearns' THE AMERICAN HERBAL OR MATERIA MEDICA printed by David Carlisle here in 1801. This work is the first herbal both produced and printed in the United States, and can be worth \$4,000 to \$5,000 depending upon condition.

The books printed and published in Walpole were advertised in THE FARMER'S MUSEUM with notices of the upcoming publication and soliciting subscriptions. In preparing her Bibliography of Walpole Imprints, Ginny Putnam searched through the papers for these notices to gather the data she needed.

The publishing industry has always been and continues to be somewhat disorganized and the antithesis of good business practices, mainly due to the uncertainties of the buying public, and the whims of the publishers themselves (independent bookshops are pretty much the same reflecting the interests and whims of the proprietor). One way to prevent potential financial disaster is to sell the book by subscription prior to actually printing and publishing it. Often the names of the subscribers whose purchases supported the initial cost would be printed in the book as was done in THE SPIRIT OF THE FARMER'S MUSEUM published in 1801. In many instances the author would underwrite the printing costs, a procedure known as "vanity publishing" as it continues and is called today. Looking at the title pages of the books that carry the Walpole NH imprint (a term used to indicate where a work was published) you will see a number of names with terms such as printed by, printed for, work of, and so on. THE SPIRIT OF THE FARMER'S MUSEUM was printed for Thomas & Thomas by D. & T. Carlisle. My copy of THE AMERICAN READER published in 1807 was "Printed for Thomas & Thomas, Proprietors of the Work, by G. W. Nichols, and sold Wholesale and Retail at the Walpole Bookstore." I purchased my copy at an auction for about \$10, school books and religious works being the most common of titles, so the economic rule of supply and demand comes into play. I always remind people that "age does not equal value." It is content and condition that determine value. Title page information in the 18th and early 19th centuries bibliographically can be very confusing. For example I have found that, **The Morbid Anatomy of Some of the Most Important Parts of the Human Body**, was printed in 1808 by G. W. Nichols for W. Fessenden, Brattleborough, (sic) VT, but another issue that year states it was printed by Nichols for Thomas & Thomas. I assume that these issue point differences reflect who either paid for a certain number of copies or where they were to be sold. Basically, in the late 18th early 19th centuries anyone could publish a book by contracting with a printer. It is no different in today's world with the printing advances in the past 2 decades and especially in the past 10 years. It is even easier today, absolutely anyone can become a publisher and have his or her book produced for under \$100 with as few as 10 copies or less. A "mainstream publisher" will not even consider a project unless many thousands of copies can be sold to cover costs and return a 5 or 6 figure profit. Modern day publishers continually misjudge the market as seen on the remainder shelves in new book stores or the large

catalogues of book discounters. Small self-published works, however, can target niche markets without the overrun costs and waste so prevalent with the large publishing houses.

It is unusual for a village the size of Walpole to have such a proud bookselling background, and I am pleased to be part of this 215 year tradition. Isaiah Thomas opened his bookshop in 1793 eventually purchasing the building in 1798. Frizzell noted in A HISTORY OF WALPOLE that a tailor was over the “Walpole Book Store” at this location in 1818. Thomas sold the building in 1827. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, other than in large cities, antiquarian or used book stores were extremely uncommon. The Old Settler’s Bookshop (off today’s Route 12) was first opened in 1929 by Lee Byron Baker who sold his stock and house to Bob Kolvoord in 1943. At that time in the 1940s, The Old Settler’s Bookshop was one of just a handful of such used bookshops in all of New England. Friends of Bob, Eric and Vera Lundberg in 1945 bought the old Brick Tavern just north of The Old Settler’s where they specialized in scientific books. Shortly thereafter in 1959, Bob Kolvoord’s younger brother John purchased that property and opened his own bookshop. Back in the village in 1946 the Leaf and Lens shop opened as a bookstore and for photography needs. Not being totally provincial, I will mention that just over the line in Westmoreland, Henry Hurley opened his shop shortly after the Kolvoord’s. And, until the owner’s death a few years ago, a used bookstore was in the Old Major Leonard Keep Restaurant building. You may also recall that Ann LeMothe sold books on the honor system from a stall at her home on Main Street. To the best of my knowledge, Cathy and I were next in line when we closed our bookstore in Connecticut and relocated to Elm Street, where I can proudly say that I am carrying on the bookselling tradition in Walpole. Although I gave up “published shop hours” when we came here to focus on my internet business, which I started in 1996, I welcome visitors anytime to browse my over 13,000 books. In addition, however, there have been and still are many individuals who quietly have written, published and sold their own books from their Walpole homes. Notable among them are R. W. Nimke and his many books on Connecticut River and Vermont railroads, The Stillpoint Press, and Donald McNaughton, the owner of the Old Colony Inn, who wrote and published in 1954 with a vanity press THE MOON CHILDREN, a children’s book.

Another whole segment of book publishing which I chose to not address at this time is the writers of books who have lived in or had a connection to Walpole including: Louisa May Alcott; James Michener; Henry W. Bellows; Thomas Peck Bellows; George Aldrich; Frank T. Moss; Austin Stevens; and Jim Skofield.

As I started out I mentioned my fascination with how a town comes to be and its background or uniqueness with what we still see in the present, or what was in the past and is now unseen and forgotten. Stretching a point, if Isaiah Thomas did not escape from Boston with his presses, if David Carlisle did not apprentice to him, if the literary intellectuals did not congregate at Craft’s Tavern; and if their friends did not follow in their footsteps, Walpole could not boast of its impressive literary past.

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