

The Book in America: Economic Aspects of the Material Text  
Presentation Outline  
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Introduction:

**[PPT #1 – TITLE]**

- First, I want to thank Dan for his help in arranging this seminar and Jim Green for suggesting my participation.
- And Thanks to all of you for coming on this spooky, misty Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> (how many folks had a chance to read the paper?).

**(A) INTRODUCTION:**

- My job, as I understood it, was to provide a kind of overview....an outline of America's early economic setting in which book publications and sales occurred.
- I should probably admit that my own work is in early American trade, retail, and material culture...but not the print industry.
- I focus, instead, on coffee and what it tells us about economic, political and social connections between the West Indies and North America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.
- And if Jim's work tells us that relatively few books were published in North America, even fewer—despite Franklin's publishing apostles—were produced in the Caribbean.
- But I am keenly interested in Philadelphia as the leading coffee importer for my time period and, to bring us back to today's topic, the leading port city for North America for almost all imports in the pre-Revolutionary period.
- What I've chosen to do is to try to walk through the city and introduce you to the range of ways in which goods traveled. Where I could, I included examples of book sales, stores, and auctions....but not all of the commercial arteries I outline—such as Philadelphia's public markets—are as relevant to the book trade.
- I concluded with the non-importation debates of the 1760s and 1770s as they are a key chapter in the history of Philadelphia's mercantile world.
- By necessity, this paper is very broad—which leaves ample room for elaboration, discussion, and questions I hope at my brief presentation.

## **[PPT #2: Aitken's book notice]**

I start with a tale of two advertisements.

- In May 1772, Thomas Aitken began promoting the publication of William Guthrie's *New Geographical, Historical and Commercial Grammar and Present State of the Several Kingdoms of the World*.

## **[PPT #3: Rev. Charles Beatty Vendue]**

- A few months later, John Beatty, Henry Wynkoop, and Samuel Erwin advertised a very different sale of books—the collection of the deceased Rev. Charles Beatty, especially strong, as expected, on volumes about divinity.
- Aitken's and Beatty's advertisements describe two very different venues—a public store and private home, but they also represent two of the most common ways that books, among other goods, circulated in pre-revolutionary Philadelphia—retail and vendue, or public auction.
- I want to describe four broad commercial paths this afternoon: public markets, wholesaler warehouses, auctions, and retail establishments. These are not distinct categories. In fact, my paper argues that distinctions between the last three in particular became increasingly blurred after the mid-eighteenth century, but its probably best to start with basic outlines first.

## **(B) PUBLIC MARKETS (pass out ward maps)**

### **[PPT #4: High Street Market, William Birch, Philadelphia, c. 1800]**

- The first public market opened in Philadelphia in 1683 on Front Street, near the city's docks.
- Primarily sold meat and fresh produce.
- You can see from the image that it was a quasi-enclosed structure of row after row of stalls that would be rented by the quarter, the half-year or the year.
- Additional markets were added throughout the city as the population of Philadelphia grew (the second in 1745 on Second Street between Pine and Cedar, and a third on the Northern Liberties District a year later).
- The markets primarily served to provision the city with foodstuffs, though a several shops grew up around the markets that specialized in certain kinds of services. My paper mentions the “grocery warehouse” of Samuel Garrigues who advertised to ship merchants and captains and offered coffee, rum, spirits, powder, shot, and cargo boxes rather in addition to the perishable goods most often sold at market. I had a second

example of a confectioner who opened adjacent to the Front Street market and specifically advertised his beverages (coffee, teas, and chocolates) with pastries and other confections to customers conducting their daily food shopping.

### **(C) WHOLESALE**

#### **[PPT #5 –Philadelphia Wharf]**

- A second kind of business was located closer to the city’s docks. Two sets of warehouses lined the city’s wharves (you can see them here to the right).
- The customs office maintained warehouses to hold goods arriving with taxes or duty due (either because they were taxable in England or because they were imported outside the British empire and thus bore discriminatory taxes).
- In addition, most large, importing merchants maintained warehouses near the wharfs. There were three broad areas of trade: dry goods (British and other European manufactured goods), provision (West Indies and Southern Europe), and coastal (other colonies). Goods were just imported but, especially in the case of the coastal trade, imported into Philadelphia for re-export overseas.

#### **[PPT #6 –William Coats’ Warehouse]**

- This handbill advertising William Coat's warehouse provides a glimpse inside a wholesalers business.
- Generally sold in volume, but also “wholesale and retail” (bottom of first paragraph).
- The account book of Levi Hollingsworth, another merchant who focused on the flour industry and traded with the Caribbean, provides more detailed information. His ads are very similar to Coatsworth's, but when you look through his list of clients, small, individual customers make up almost half of his sales (though often at rates of up to 25% more, when not buying in bulk).

### **(D) AUCTIONS**

- Public auctions provided an alternative to wholesalers for discount prices, and these were often more accessible to individual buyers.

#### **[PPT #7 –book auction advertisement]**

- This is an ad from Nov. 1773 that included “new books to be put up at half price, and old books at what the company pleases.”

#### **[PPT #8 –Old London Coffee House]**

- From the 1760s on, the lot adjacent to the Old London Coffee House on Market and Front Streets stood vacant making it the ideal place for large public gatherings like auctions.
- Auctions are useful barometers of a city's fiscal behavior. Philadelphia's auctions, for example, included not only bulk, imported cargo and post-mortem sales (like Rev. Beatty's that opened the talk), but overstocks and used goods (such as the book auction just discussed).

### **[PPT #9 –Anonymous Gentleman's Auction]**

- They can also be used to measure financial health. Before 1775, most auctions were either public ventures—or Sheriff's auctions of land—but between 1776 and 1783 and increasing number of personal estates—not just after death—come on the auction block, such as this anonymous 1782 auction of a “gentleman's very valuable library.”
- They could also indicate political turbulence, as what happened to James Humphrey's printing press and stock when his loyalty to the king was questioned during British occupation of Philadelphia in 1777 and early 1778.
- In the paper, I discuss the increasing number of public auctions in the late eighteenth century and the emergence of the vendue store—an auction/wholesale warehouse hybrid of sorts. If you'd like me to go into more detail during the Q&A, please let me know.

### **(E) GROCERIES, STORES, AND SHOPS**

- The fourth and final branch of Philadelphia's commercial world that I would like to review is the retail sector. This is a later image—albeit 1849—of book, hardware, hat, and china stores side by side on North Fourth Street. I apologize for not being able to provide something earlier.

### **[PPT #10 –North Fourth Shops]**

- To give a very brief review of the city's commercial character by ward, High Street, Chestnut, and Walnut wards were closest to the port and predominantly commercial.
- North, Middle, and South wards were mixed use—commercial and residential.
- Upper and lower Delaware Wards were less prosperous. Upper Delaware Ward had a strong concentration of sailors and longshoremen.
- Mulberry and Dock Wards were the most marginal of all with the lowest income housing and highest percentages of both widows and free black residents.

- There is even more overlap between grocers, stores, and shops than there are between wholesale and retail vendors, but during the second half of the eighteenth century, retail operations do become increasingly specialized.
- 1775 tax lists: 18 grocers (non-perishable foods—coffee, spices, liquors, wines)
- 42 store owner or keeper, may include the above as well as textiles, wood products. Many of these designated a specialty such as “book,” “wine” or “dry goods” stores.
- 178 shops—stores of fashion and fancies (china, clothing, ribbons and laces, confectioners, toys, silver or pewter, etc.).

**(F) NON-IMPORTATION:**

- There were 3: 1765, 1769, 1774.
- First two targeted England and Ireland and thus affected the dry goods traders more; the last included all parts of the British empire, including the West Indies and were felt by dry goods, provisions, and coastal traders alike.
- Books were part of all three embargoes—in fact, the Stamp Act which kicked off non-importation as a protest tactic centered on paper goods (newspapers, receipts, invoices, account books, etc.).

In this sense, to invoke the seminar title, it really was the material nature of the object, rather than the text of the objects that became the focus of protestors’ hostility.