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Harper & Brothers' Family and School District Libraries, 1830-1846

Robert S. Freeman

Every where throughout America, on the wings of every wind are their publications disseminated. Who shall estimate the influence thus exerted for good or for evil? The refined lady of the world of fashion languidly peruses the last new novel from Cliff Street, in the retirement of her *boudoir*, and you shall find it in the hands of the passenger in the down steamer on the great Mississippi. The lawyer and the divine, the client and the parishioner, the physician and patient alike bend over the pages of their volumes. In the silence of the backwoods, you may see the pioneer with a well-thumbed number of the Family Library, and the volunteer in the interior of Mexico, beguiles the interim of camp duty with the feats and fortunes of James' heroes. How important is it, in view of this powerful influence over the public mind, that the energies of the *Harperian* press should be directed to proper ends? How vitally momentous to the morals of a great continent that good books alone should be sent forth under the sanction of their approval!

“A Day Among Bookmen and
Bibliopoles,” *Southern Literary
Messenger* (Jan 1848) ¹

Why should we leave it to Harper & Brothers and Redding & Co. to select our reading?”

Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden*²

Histories of library outreach usually concentrate on the ideas and actions of public librarians, teachers, religious and philanthropic societies, professional associations, or government agencies that have endeavored to bring library services to people who would otherwise not have them. In this essay, however, I focus on a commercial publishing enterprise that not only sold and distributed millions of books to a variety of people and institutions, including libraries, but also selected, published, printed, and marketed its own “libraries.”

In the early 1830s, at the dawn of mass-market publishing, J. & J. Harper of New York began publishing collections with names like Harper's

Library of Select Novels, Harper's Classical Library, and The Boy's and Girl's Library.³ A "library" in this sense is a series or set of uniformly bound and uniformly priced books issued by the same publisher. Two of the most popular and successful libraries produced by any publisher in this period were Harper's Family Library and Harper's School District Library.

Published from 1830 to 1842, the Family Library grew to 127 titles in 187 volumes. The School District Library, published from 1838 to 1846, grew to 210 titles in 295 volumes, but more than half of these were duplicates of titles in the Family Library (see Appendix A). Printed from stereotype plates, the libraries remained in print for more than twenty years after their completion.⁴ Over eighty percent of the titles were reprints of well-received British works. As the Family Library expanded and became profitable, an increasing number of untested American works such as Benjamin Thatcher's *Indian Biography* and Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s *Two Years Before the Mast* were introduced.⁵ The School District Library continued this trend toward a higher proportion of works by Americans. It also featured several works by women (see Appendix B). The books were pocketsize (18mo, 10cm x 16cm or 4" x 6¼"), a quality often highlighted in advertisements by Dr. Johnson's comment: "Books that you may carry to the fire, and hold readily in your hand, are the most useful after all."⁶ The books were also relatively cheap, selling for about forty-five cents each. In 1830 this was about one fourth of day's wage for an artisan, half of a day's wage for a manual laborer, and a full day's wage for an agricultural worker.⁷ Volumes could be purchased separately or in sets.

Each set had about fifty volumes and came in a hardwood box with built-in shelves and a hinged-door. Attached to the inside of the door was a catalog of the books and an introduction to the reading program.⁸ The program encompassed the principal branches of “useful knowledge:” history, voyages and travel, biography, natural history, physical sciences, agriculture, and the history of philosophy and religion. It was suggested that the intellectual value of any one book was enhanced by its being part of an approved system or “circle” of knowledge. The works in the Family Library were all non-fiction. The School District Library, however, contained a few moralistic novels and tales.

Before I describe and compare the contents of these two Harper libraries, I will discuss: 1) the role of reading for moral improvement in early nineteenth-century America and the perceived need for the sort of works featured in the libraries; 2) the Methodist background and connections of the Harpers; 3) advances in transportation and printing technologies that facilitated mass-market publishing; and 4) the economic and cultural advantages of mass-produced libraries as evidenced by several libraries, including some that appeared before the Harper’s.

Reading for Moral Improvement

Since colonial times, American printers and publishers have worked closely with society’s cultural authorities and reformers. In the early republic, after the Second Great Awakening had inspired a new zeal for social and moral reform, many printers and publishers became advocates and effective propagandists for an ideology of literacy that equated reading with the

development of public and private virtue.⁹ Their moral cause was to promote a reading-habit among the people as well as and to prescribe or select what the people read. In the new democracy with increasingly diverse suffrage and expanding boundaries, they thought it was crucial that as many citizens and families as possible be educated and have the means of improving themselves, their communities, and their nation. In the 1830s the white population of the United States reached twelve million and had an adult literacy rate of over eighty-percent, among the highest in the world.¹⁰ Although literacy rates were lower in some areas (especially the South and West), ministers commented that there was no shortage of people who could read. The problem was that these men and women were not reading the kinds of works that would improve them. Amidst an abundance of newspapers, lives of bandits, and novels of “a Gothic taste and overstrained morality,” social reformers and some publishers recognized a need for more books of useful knowledge and moral wisdom.¹¹

In the early nineteenth century, newspaper offices, general stores, book shops, circulating libraries, subscription libraries, and Sunday schools were sources of reading material, but most education and reading still took place in the family home, “the moral mainstay of the social order”—hence the appeal of a “Family Library.”¹² As the century advanced, common schools played an increasingly important role in education. By the 1840s several states, including New York and Massachusetts, had established free, tax-supported libraries in their school districts—hence the appeal of a “School District Library.” Selling in the tens of thousands to individuals, families, schools,

school districts, libraries, and even ships, the Family and School District Libraries represent an early, mass-market effort to influence and make a profit on the education of middle-class Americans.

Methodist Background and Connections of the Harpers

The Methodist environment in which the Harper brothers grew up had a positive influence on their individual decisions to become printers and on the success of their printing and publishing endeavors. Their father, a Long Island carpenter and farmer, was the son of a Methodist from Suffolk, England. Their mother, the daughter of a Lutheran Dutch family, became a Methodist soon after she was married. Methodist preachers with their saddlebags full of books were often guests at the Harper home. “The best room was reserved for them, and it was called ‘the Preacher’s bed-room’.”¹³

In his dissertation on *The Availability of Books and the Nature of Book Ownership on the Southern Indiana Frontier, 1800-1850*, Michael Harris shows that the act of distributing books was very important to the followers of John Wesley. Wesley believed that people would not “grow in grace unless they give themselves to reading.”¹⁴ He exhorted his brethren to “take care that every society be duly supplied with books.”¹⁵ The dissemination of good books, whether through giving, lending, or selling, was a glorious duty. Good books included the Bible, other religious works, and morally improving secular works. Wesley wrote to an Oxfordshire circuit rider in 1782:

You should take particular care that your circuit be never without an assortment of all the valuable books, especially the *Appeals*, the *Sermons*, Kempis, and the *Primitive Physick*, which no family should be without. [. . .] You are found to be remarkably diligent in spreading the books: let none rob you of this glory.¹⁶

In order to coordinate the publishing and selling of books and to share any profits, the Methodist Church in America established the Methodist Book Concern in 1789.¹⁷ The Concern hired a variety of printers to prepare the cheap books the ministers sold. Ministers were allowed to sell these books on the condition that they send the cash from the sale back to their presiding elders for redistribution. This system changed in 1800 when the preachers were simply allowed to keep between fifteen and twenty-five percent upon the wholesale price for all the books they sold.¹⁸

In their 1814 *Report of a Missionary Tour Through that part of the United States which lies West of the Allegany Mountains*, Samuel J. Mills and Daniel Smith wrote that the Concern

sends out an immense quantity of these books. We found them almost everywhere. In the possession of the obscurest families, we often found a number of volumes [. . .]. It puts to the blush all the other charitable institutions in the United States.¹⁹

It should be noted that Mills and Smith were not Methodists.

Based on their background, class, and education, the Harper boys might well have decided to become preachers like the men who visited their parents' home. Instead, they became printers and publishers, and yet, as such, they were able to make substantial, far-reaching contributions to the cause of reading for moral and social reform.

James Harper (1795-1869), the eldest of the four brothers, was inspired to become a printer while reading Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*. In 1811 he was apprenticed to a master printer in New York City, a Methodist friend of his father. Two years later John Harper (1797-1875) became an apprentice in another print shop in the city. In 1817 James and John acquired two old presses, rented a space, and started the firm of J. & J. Harper. Their younger brothers, Joseph Wesley (1801-1870) and Fletcher (1806-1877) soon joined them. The name of the firm, however, did not change to Harper & Brothers until 1833.

The brothers seemed to function as parts of a single, highly effective organism. James supervised mechanical operations, John handled financing and purchasing, Joseph Wesley read proof and conducted correspondence, and Fletcher set type and managed the literary department. All were known as devout Methodists. Years later, in 1844, when James ran for mayor of New York City on the Reform Party ticket, he was identified not only with the American Republican Party's nativist anti-Catholicism, but also with the

Bible—*Harper's Illuminated Bible*. As mayor he became famous for closing saloons on Sunday and requiring the police to wear uniforms.²⁰

In the early years of their printing business, the Harpers benefited greatly from their Methodist connections. These included the Rev. Dr. Nathan Bangs, the principal manager of the Methodist Book Concern, and his son, Lemuel, who would become one of the most important auctioneers at the New York book trade sales.²¹ Among the brothers' earliest printing jobs were two books, one for the Methodist Book Concern and one for friends of their "Methodist connexions": Caroline Matilda Thayer's *Religion Recommended to Youth* (1818) and an edition of the *Prayer Book of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, for which they manufactured their first stereotypes.²² Eight years later they printed and published the *Works* of John Wesley in ten volumes.

In 1826 they also began publishing the *National Preacher*, a monthly journal featuring one or two sermons written by ministers of various Protestant denominations. Fortunately, when faced with the challenge of selling and distributing the magazine around country, the Harpers already knew about agents and where to find them. "Some agents were established book sellers but the majority were clergymen and students who took to the road during their vacations."²³ By 1831 the Harpers had two hundred agents selling advance subscriptions "in all twenty-five states, The District of Columbia, Arkansaw (*sic*) Territory, Choctow (Indian) Nation, Canada, and South America."²⁴ Furthermore, the *National Preacher* was collected and sold as an annual volume. Eugene Exman remarks that this magazine "was important for

two reasons: it helped the brothers build up a list of agents and it demonstrated the value of a series, or library, of books.”²⁵ Many of the agents, additional wholesalers, and retailers in places like Richmond, Cincinnati, and St. Louis were ready and willing to sell the Harpers’ other publications as well.

Improvements in Transportation and Printing Technology

For many years agents traveled mostly on horseback or in horse-drawn wagons, and shipped their books by wagon. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, there was a transportation revolution. Ronald J. Zboray describes the two stages of this revolution and their effects on the distribution of book in his *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public*.²⁶ During the first stage, agents and books were able to travel by stagecoach on improved roads (such as the National Pike), by canal boat on the Erie Canal (which had just opened in 1825), and by steamboat on the Ohio River (the Age of Steam had just begun). Or they would travel by ship if going along the Atlantic seaboard to Charleston, Savannah, and around to New Orleans.²⁷ During the second stage of the transportation revolution, it was the railroad that finally “opened a national mass market for books and assured easy distribution of literature from publishers in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston.”²⁸ Zboray remarks:

Railroad development transformed the nature of community life for readers and oriented them outward to the national culture and away from local exigencies. Local institutions had to be ever more

aware of the national context of their existence and had to make peace with the emerging national mass culture.²⁹

The Harpers' success depended not only on Methodist connections, a network of agents, and improvements in transportation, but also on their ability to take advantage of the latest innovations in printing technology. New machines and techniques removed the physical barriers to mass production that had existed before. Foudrinier (1799) and Gilpin (1816) papermaking machines could produce paper on large continuous rolls instead of sheet by sheet. New cylindrical presses revolutionized the printing of newspapers. New steam-driven, flat bed presses proved much faster than the horse-powered and human-powered presses they replaced, and required no great strength to operate. The Harpers retired the horse that had powered the presses to the their Long Island farm and replaced many of their journeymen pressmen with "girls" and managers.³⁰

The innovation in printing technology that contributed most directly to the Harpers' ability to produce a great quantity of books year after year was stereotyping. This is the process by which a mold is made of a type set and then used to cast a permanent metal plate that could be stored away and used for subsequent printings. The "advantages of stereotyping are confined to works in very large demand and for which the demand is continued long after the first publication. This allows the printer to always ensure that the market shall be supplied, while the stock is kept low."³¹ Stereotyping also "encouraged

publishers to engage in in-depth, long-term advertising campaigns” to boost not only the sales of a particular work but of related works by the same author or in the same series.³² This technology was introduced to New York in 1813.³³ The Harpers made their first stereotypes in 1818 for the *Prayer Book of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, and were thus among the first publishers to do their own stereotyping.³⁴ By 1830 it had become a fairly regular procedure for them. Stereotyped series such as the Family Library and the School District Library were especially profitable and kept the firm alive through boom and bust cycles.³⁵ This technology also changed the character of the printing labor force by diminishing the work available for typographers and compositors.³⁶ The initial cost of making stereotypes was high, but publishers anticipated useful savings and progress for all:

The capital which is thus saved by the process of stereotyping, involving as it does all the savings of interest, of insurance, of warehouse-room, and all those other manifold charges which attach to a large stock, of necessity goes to the encouragement of other literary enterprises, and of various labour which they involve.³⁷

Improvements in printing technology have been given credit for the rapid development of the book trade, the lowering of prices, and the democratization of literature. However, they did not cause “such a drop in the price of books as

to make them widely available.”³⁸ While newspapers and religious tracts became affordable to the average worker earning \$1.00 a day, most books continued to cost between \$0.75 and \$1.25. Clearly, for those “who had neither access to nor means for the purchase of books, libraries were of major importance.”³⁹

The Economic and Cultural Advantages of Publishers’ Libraries

There were several economic advantages to publishing a library. Because of their physical uniformity, the books were cheaper to print, bind, and transport. Each book acquired additional value and appeal by virtue of its relation to other, often more desirable works in the series. Each book could be advertised at almost no extra cost wherever and whenever the series was mentioned. Demand for a book would continue as long as there was any desire for the series. With stereotyping it became simpler to print additional copies and maintain a constant supply of any title. It was also easier to offer customers more options, such as special groupings and different bindings. Harper repackaged the same title in several different libraries. They printed the name of the library and volume number only on the cover, not in the book or on its title page. Turning Family Library no. 11, Scott’s *Letters on Demonology*, into School District Library no. 179 was simply a matter of changing covers.

There were also intellectual and cultural advantages to publishing and marketing a library, especially if it was supposed to be educational and morally instructive. Education required a course of reading, and a person seeking

education was in the market for not one but several works, preferably works that were authoritative and part of an established system of knowledge. A person seeking moral improvement also found a library useful. If a man or woman knew that one work in the library had a certain general quality, such as moral authority, then he or she might think the other works possessed the same quality.

When advertising their libraries, publishers emphasized the uniform quality not only of the binding but also of the contents. The Harpers stressed that each work in the Family Library would be selected by a learned committee:

Several gentlemen of high literary acquirements and correct taste, having been engaged to examine all new works as they emanate from the English press [. . .] the public may rest assured that no works will be published by J. & J. H. but such as are interesting, instructive, and moral.⁴⁰

Even after the Family Library had gained a good reputation, they continued to reassure the public: “Great pains have been taken that all the works selected to compose this series should be of the highest order as to literary merit, of the most instructive and pleasing character and entirely unexceptionable in their moral tendency and design.”⁴¹ Such assurance was undoubtedly attractive to those Americans in the East or on the western frontier who felt insecure about their level of cultural sophistication or worried about their moral fitness.

When were the first "libraries" published? *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed.) gives early examples in its definition of "library" 2.b:

Often used in the titles given by publishers to a series or set of books uniform or similar in external appearance, and ostensibly suited for some particular class of readers or for students of a particular subject, as in 'The Library of Useful Knowledge' (1826-1856), 'The Parlour Library' (consisting of novels, 1847-1863), "Bohn's Standard Library", etc. Formerly also in the titles of bibliographical works, and of periodicals.

The earliest usage, from 1692, refers to the title of a monthly journal. Despite a few other examples of pre-nineteenth-century usage, it seems that one of the earliest publisher's libraries in the English speaking world was Constable's *Miscellany of Original and Selected Publications in the Various Departments of Literature, Science, & the Arts*. Archibald Constable began publishing his *Miscellany* in Edinburgh sometime in the period of 1825 to 1827.⁴² It cost 3s.6d (\$0.75) per volume and reached eighty-two volumes before ceasing in 1835.⁴³ The London publisher Charles Knight, in cooperation with the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, started the *Library of Useful Knowledge* in 1827 and the *Library of Entertaining Knowledge* in 1829, both at 4s.6d (\$1.00) per volume. Knight and the Society, a Whig organization founded by Lord Brougham, intended these libraries for the education of the laboring

classes. Their effort at social reform was soon matched in April 1829 when London's "most distinguished publisher," John Murray, created the Family Library, "the first Tory series of cheap books."⁴⁴ This Family Library consisted entirely of original copyrighted works intended for the common reader, selling at 5s (\$1.25) per volume. By 1834, the year in which he discontinued this "remarkable effort to publish across class lines," Murray had issued twenty-two titles.⁴⁵ Nearly all of the works in these useful libraries were non-fiction.

The Harpers took the name for their own Family Library from Murray. They also took several of his titles without permission. Such "piracy" was both common and legal before the recognition of international copyright.⁴⁶ Thirteen works in Harper's Family Library were originally Murray's (see Appendix A). Borrowing from other British publishers as well, the Harpers acknowledged the works in the "various Libraries and Miscellanies now preparing in Europe, particularly the 'National' and the 'Edinburgh Cabinet' Libraries," and announced their intention to submit these works to their "committee of literary gentlemen" for possible inclusion in Harper's Family Library.⁴⁷ The Edinburgh Cabinet Library (Edinburgh, London: Oliver & Boyd, 1832-1852?) proved to be an especially rich source of titles.

In America several libraries appeared at about the same time as Harper's. The American Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, with headquarters in Boston, began publishing the American Library of Useful Knowledge in 1831. By reprinting British works from the original Library of Useful Knowledge and by introducing a few American works, the Society hoped

to educate the masses and compete with the brash upstarts in New York.⁴⁸

They explained the need for the American Library of Useful Knowledge as follows:

Notwithstanding the apparent abundance of books, and the constant outcry about their rapid multiplication and wide circulation, it is a literal fact, that the best which appear are not accessible to the reading public, who, for want of them are compelled to the great detriment of their taste and morals, to take up with such as they can get. The effect of the present undertaking will be to apply a partial remedy to this evil; to place at the disposal of the community, in a cheap though at the same time very handsome form, a series of really valuable works on the several branches of learning, which, taken together will constitute of themselves a tolerably complete family library.⁴⁹

There is only one significant difference between this plan and the Harper plan: the absence of the idea that the works should be interesting. The American Library of Useful Knowledge did not succeed, in part, because the British works it reprinted were too scientific and dry to appeal to a mass audience.⁵⁰ The Harpers reprinted British works too, but made sure that the works had already proved entertaining and popular. The Harper editions were also “carefully prepared from the last English edition with the omission of such

parts as were deemed to be the least interesting, and some few verbal alterations in order to render it more useful and acceptable to the American reader.”⁵¹ Another reason for the failure of *The American Library of Useful Knowledge* was its cost of 62½ cents per volume. This was too expensive for the intended audience.

Also in the 1830s and 1840s, The American Sunday School Union, “the first national organization committed to universal basic literacy,” issued at least four cheap libraries.⁵² These included, by 1851, The Juvenile Library, A Child’s Cabinet Library, the Village and Family Library, and the popular Sunday School and Family Library, which had one hundred books and sold for only ten dollars.⁵³ Most of these were children’s books. There were also several publishers interested in promoting contemporary American authors. Wiley and Putnam’s *Library of American Books* (1845-47), edited by Evert Duyckinck, was noteworthy in this regard. It featured fiction, poetry, literary criticism, and travelogues by authors such as Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, Fuller, and Simms.⁵⁴

The Development and Contents of Harper’s Family Library

If we assume that a successful publishing firm like Harper & Brothers often managed to understand and cater to the interests of its customers, then a list of its publications ought to reflect the topics and genres that were particularly important to or popular among its customer population. The growth of the Harper’s Family Library and School District Library collections from 1830 to 1846 reflects several trends in American publishing, education,

and literature. The increase, for example, in the number of fictional works in the School District Library indicates the increased willingness of reformers and educators to acknowledge the usefulness and morality of some fiction.

During this period, Harper & Brothers was fast becoming the largest publisher in America and the world.⁵⁵ While high volume sales of fiction accounted for some of its success, sales of non-fiction and educational works from the Family and School District libraries were steady and profitable.⁵⁶ After discussing the extraordinary success of John Abercrombie's *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers* (1834), which had sold over twenty thousand volumes, an article in the September 1839 *Southern Literary Messenger* reported that the other volumes in the Family Library sold "excellent well," from seven to twelve thousand each.⁵⁷ It would be helpful to know the exact sales of each title and of whole libraries, but this information was lost in the fire that destroyed the Harper plant in 1853.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, it is possible using advertisements and reviewers' comments to identify especially popular or well-received titles. This survey encompasses titles in both libraries, beginning with the Family Library.

The Family Library was designed to appeal to individual readers and educational institutions such as churches, schools, libraries, and the family. In 1830 the family home was still "the moral mainstay of the society" and the principal setting for basic education. In their advertisements the Harpers portrayed the *paterfamilias* and his wife reading books by the fireplace or at the family-table, surrounded by their sons and daughters:

[. . .] the publishers flatter themselves that they shall be able to present to their fellow-citizens a work of unparalleled merit and cheapness, embracing subjects adapted to all classes of readers and forming a body of literature deserving the praise of having instructed many, and amused all; and above every other species of eulogy, of being fit to be introduced, without reserve or exception, by the father of the family to the domestic circle.⁵⁹

The Family Library offered a “collection of works in several departments of literature, forming a complete circle of useful, instructive and entertaining knowledge.”⁶⁰ Although the Harpers and their literary advisers chose to exclude several genres and subjects (fiction, drama, children’s stories, mathematics, and music), they succeeded in developing a collection that covered the world. More than half of the library consisted of history, voyages and travel, and biography.

The histories ranged from accounts of ancient cultures, such as J. Baillie Fraser’s *History of Mesopotamia* and Henry Hart Milman’s *History of the Jews*, to narratives of recent world events such as Philip de Segur’s *History of Napoleon’s Expedition to Russia*. Two or three works focused on Europe’s Middle Ages, and one, William Robertson’s *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V*, delved into the sixteenth century. Readers could learn more about these and other eras in the library’s national histories of Italy, Spain, Ireland,

England, Poland, and Russia. Studies of exotic lands, such as Sir John Francis Davis's *History of China* and Michael Russell's *History of Polynesia*, were balanced by Theodore Dwight's *History of Connecticut* and Charles Lanman's *History of Michigan*. Universal history was represented by Alexander Fraser Tytler's *Universal History* in five volumes, Sharon Turner's *The Sacred History of the World* in three volumes, and Jules Michelet's *Elements of Modern History*.

Voyages and travels were very popular in the early nineteenth-century.⁶¹ Europeans and Americans were still exploring many areas of the world: Africa, the Polar Regions, the Pacific, and the American West. Works on Africa included *The Life and Travels of Mungo Park*, Richard Lander's *Travels in Africa*, and Robert Jameson's *Narrative of Discovery and Adventure in Africa*. Sir John Leslie's *Narrative of Discovery in the Polar Seas* and William Parry's *Three Voyages for Discovery of a Northwest Passage* represented Arctic exploration. Works on the Pacific were John Barrow's *A Description of Pitcairn's Island and Its Inhabitants*, the first book to inform Americans of the mutiny on the ship *Bounty*, and Philipp Franz Siebold's *Manners and Customs of the Japanese in the Nineteenth Century*, a book that piqued readers' curiosity about a country that was still closed to foreigners. American readers were also pleased to have Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, and cheap editions of Lewis and Clark's *History of the Expedition* and Alexander von Humboldt's *Travels and Researches*, all of which provided descriptions of North America's Pacific coast.

Biographies of political and military leaders enhanced the Family Library's coverage of history. John Williams's *Life and Actions of Alexander the Great* told of events in the ancient world. J. G. Lockhart's *Life of Napoleon* and Robert Southey's *Life of Nelson* covered several decades of French and British military history. Biographies of important and exemplary Americans were especially recommended by reformers wanting to strengthen public virtue and national identity. James Paulding's *Life of Washington*, Jeremy Belknap's *American Biography*, and James Renwick's works on Jay, Hamilton, and De Witt Clinton contained much of the Library's information on American politics and government. Thatcher's *Indian Biography*, according to its subtitle, presented an "Historical account of those Individuals who have been distinguished among the North American Indians as Orators, Warriors, Statesmen, and other remarkable characters." Several biographies of explorers and travelers further strengthened the Library's already extensive coverage of the world.

Women were the subjects of only three biographical works: Henry Glassford Bell's *Life of Mary Queen of Scots*, Mrs. Anna Jameson's *Memoirs of Celebrated Female Sovereigns*, and John Memes's *Memoirs of the Empress Josephine*. Although not a biography, Mrs. A. J. Grave's *Woman in America: Being an Examination into the Moral and Intellectual Condition of American Female Society* was notable for expressing diverse opinions on the roles and identities of women.

Much of the science, natural history, religion, philosophy, and art in the Family Library was also found in biographies. David Brewster's *The Martyrs of Science; Or the Lives of Galileo, Tycho Brahe and Kepler* is representative of these. Science was itself the subject of Brewster's *Letters on Natural Magic Addressed to Sir Walter Scot* and Lord Brougham's *A Discourse on the Objects, Advantages, and Pleasures of Science*. Geology and natural history were represented by Charles A. Lee's *Elements of Geology*, W. Mullinger Higgins's *The Earth: Its Physical Condition*, James Rennie's *Natural History of Quadrupeds*, and Gilbert White's classic, *The Natural History of Selborne*. Andrew Combe's *Principles of Physiology* and John H. Griscom's *Animal Mechanism and Physiology* covered human anatomy. Mechanics and technology were represented only by Henry Moseley's *Illustrations of Mechanics* and Edward Hazen's *Popular Technology, or, Professions and Trades*, a work recommended for youth. Agriculture was represented by only one book, Edwin Lankester's *Vegetable Substances Used for the Food of Man*. This coverage of agriculture seems woefully inadequate when one considers that the country's economy and population were still predominantly agrarian.

There were several works in religion and philosophy. G. R. Gleig's *The History of the Bible* and William Paley's *Natural Theology* represented Judeo-Christian religion specifically, while several other works already mentioned, such as Turner's *Sacred History*, treated their subjects within a religious framework. *The Life of Mohammed* by George Bush, a professor of Hebrew at New York University, was the first original American work in the Family

Library. In philosophy there were Bacon's *Essays*, Locke's *The Conduct of Understanding*, Fenelon's *Lives of the Ancient Philosophers*, and the popular works of John Abercrombie, as much psychology as they were philosophy. C. S. Henry's *An Epitome of the History of Philosophy*, was a translation of a French work by Louis Bautain "adapted by the University of France for instruction in the colleges and high schools." A reviewer for the *Southern Literary Messenger* wrote that it was "too much epitomised to be of any practicable utility [. . .]." ⁶² A reviewer for *The Ladies Repository*, however, urged that this *Epitome* "be introduced immediately as a text-book in all our schools, academies, and colleges." ⁶³ Selected and edited for the common reader, such works inevitably received negative reviews from some scholars.

There were two works on economics: Francis Lieber's *Essays on Property and Labor* and Alonzo Potter's *Political Economy*. One book each was devoted to education and law, Henry I. Smith's *Education* and William A. Duer's *A Course of Lectures on the Constitutional Jurisprudence of the United States*.

The arts of painting and sculpture were treated in the biographical perspective of Allan Cunningham's *Lives of Eminent Painters and Sculptors*. Poetry was represented by two anthologies, both compiled by Americans: William Cullen Bryant's *Selections from American Poets* and Fitz-Greene Halleck's *Selections from the British Poets*. Finally, literature, especially poetry, was the subject of James Montgomery's *Lectures on General Literature, Poetry, &c.*

The Development and Contents of Harper's School District Library

Thus far we have dealt with Harper's Family Library, a collection developed for individuals, families, and the private institutions responsible for most of the educational activity in the United States prior to the rise of common schools. With the "major upsurge in common schooling after 1830" and the increased involvement of state governments in education, a number of social reformers and educators proposed the establishment of free, tax-supported libraries attached to school districts, "but intended for both adults and children."⁶⁴ In 1835 the New York legislature, acting on the proposals of James S. Wadsworth, "the father of the school-district libraries of New York," passed a law that permitted voters in any school district to tax themselves up to twenty dollars in the first year and ten dollars in any succeeding years for the purpose of purchasing a library for the district. For Wadsworth and other civic-minded reformers whose ideology of literacy emphasized nation-building as well as character-building, free tax-supported libraries were, in part, a means to help stabilize frontier communities and safeguard democracy: "[. . .] the stability of government and the security of property in all republics, depend, in great measure, upon the information of the common people."⁶⁵ Using political arguments, the advocates of school district libraries emphasized that the collections would contain "the history of nations, and especially that of our own country, the progress and triumph of the democratic principle in the governments on this continent."⁶⁶ Using economic arguments, they emphasized practical, scientific knowledge and recommended "instructive

treatises upon political economy and agriculture, which cannot be without their just influence.”⁶⁷

Education reformers in other states also persuaded their legislatures of the need for tax-supported libraries. Massachusetts and Michigan passed school district library legislation in 1837, Connecticut in 1839, Rhode Island and the Iowa Territory in 1840, and Indiana in 1841.⁶⁸ By 1876 at least nineteen states had authorized some form of tax-supported library in their school districts.

After passage of the 1835 legislation, it became clear that very few New Yorkers would vote to tax themselves for the full cost of a library. Therefore the legislature passed a more generous law in April 1838 that distributed \$55,000 annually for three years to the school districts on the condition that each district match its portion of the subsidy and spend the combined amount on a library.⁶⁹ The power over book selection, although vested in the districts' elected trustees, was now exercised by the superintendent of common schools. To guide the trustees, Superintendent John C. Spencer distributed a list of titles acceptable for purchase. He also urged consideration of the cheap libraries published by Harper & Brothers.⁷⁰ Despite complaints about the state's interference in what many thought a local responsibility, the new library program proved to be remarkably successful. In 1841 Governor William H. Seward reported

Of these school districts, there are very few which have not complied with the act providing for the establishment of School District Libraries, and there are at this time in these various district libraries about one million of volumes. Within the five years limited by the law, there will have been expended in the purchase of books, more than half a million of dollars.⁷¹

By 1846 there would be approximately 1,145,250 volumes in 10,812 New York school districts, an average of 106 volumes per district.⁷² Other states, too, would revise their permissive library laws and subsidize district libraries.

The Harpers had been planning a school district library of their own since 1836.⁷³ In 1839, when Governor Seward announced the state's plan to invest over half-a-million dollars over five years on school district libraries, Fletcher Harper saw a great opportunity and traveled to Albany to meet Superintendent Spencer, the official in charge of recommending books to the districts. Fletcher was introduced to him by Thurlow Weed, the influential editor of the *Albany Journal*, a leading Whig, and an old friend of James Harper. The superintendent was impressed by Fletcher and realized that the Harpers could help his office overcome many of the difficulties in supplying ten thousand districts with cheap editions of approved works. According to Exman, Fletcher "left Albany with a commission in his pocket," the first known "state adoption."⁷⁴

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts also turned to the Harpers at about the same time. In 1837 the Massachusetts School Commission under the leadership of Horace Mann appointed a committee to select titles for their own school district library, the Massachusetts School Library. They appointed the Boston publisher Marsh, Capen, Lyon & Webb to produce and package the libraries.⁷⁵ The publisher completed thirty-eight volumes by 1840 but then went out of business. Harper & Brothers immediately bought the rights and the plates and began publishing the Massachusetts School Library for the Commonwealth. They also sold many of their own Harper's School District Libraries to Massachusetts.⁷⁶

The Harpers' opportunism, although conspicuous, was not unique. Indeed, the sudden rise of tax-supported libraries in several states provided a "rich harvest" for publishers and booksellers.⁷⁷ In his *Foundations of the Public Library*, Jesse H. Shera reports:

Soon publisher participation in local politics became so prevalent and subject to so many abuses that the state of New York found it necessary to pass, in 1856, a law forbidding school commissioners to act as the agents of publishers in the awarding of contracts for book purchase.⁷⁸

Despite abuses and many shortcomings, the school district library system marked a significant advance in the development of American public libraries. Carleton Bruns Joeckel summarizes its contribution:

Of the three essentials for an efficient library—books, staff, and building—the school-district system provided only books, and those inadequately. Nevertheless, it did much to establish certain principles which form the basis of our present public library system. For one thing, it provided for taxation for free library service and also for state aid to libraries, both important milestones in library history. Even more significant, perhaps, it recognized the library as an educational agency, an extension of the system of public education beyond the formal instruction offered by the schools; in other words, it was a movement toward what we now call “adult education.”⁷⁹

What were the differences between the Family and School District Libraries' collections? Although the School District Library shared 110 of its 210 titles with the Family Library, it differed from its precursor in several ways. It featured a higher proportion of agricultural and scientific works, juvenile literature, works by women, and “safe” fiction (see Appendix B). Its collection expanded in this way to meet the expectations of a broader audience and to address the needs of public instruction. In addition to the individuals,

families, Sunday schools, and private institutions that had been purchasing the Family Library, the Harpers' audience now included more farmers, artisans, and trustees in the school districts, as well as legislators, superintendents of common schools, and governors in state capitals.

To meet the practical economic, technological, and scientific concerns of their new customers, the Harpers expanded their small selection of works on agriculture and science. They introduced editions of John Armstrong's *A Treatise on Agriculture*, Jesse Buel's *The Farmer's Instructor*, Jean-Antoine-Claude Chaptal's *Chemistry Applied to Agriculture*, and Micajah R. Cock's *American Poultry Book*. To those interested in mechanics and physics, they offered *Applications of the Science of Mechanics to Practical Purposes* by James Renwick and a theoretical overview of physics, *On the Connection of the Physical Sciences*, by Mary Somerville.

At least twelve women, seven of them American, contributed over twenty titles. Most of their works were moralistic, didactic fiction intended for young readers. Several had previously appeared in Harper's Boy's and Girl's Library. Maria J. McIntosh, an American who sometimes wrote under the name of Aunt Kitty, provided four works, including *Praise and Principles: Or, For What Shall I Live?* Another American, the popular Catherine M. Sedgwick, had five works, among them *The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man*. Other Americans with juvenile fiction were E. J. Cate's, Mrs. Mary S. B. Dana (no relation to Richard Henry Dana, Jr.), Madeline Leslie, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose *Mayflower: or, Sketches of Scenes and Characters among the Descendants of the*

Pilgrims was praised as a “series of beautiful and deeply-interesting tales, remarkable for a vigorous yet disciplined imagination.”⁸⁰

American women contributed a few works of non-fiction as well: *Life in Prairie Land* by Mrs. Eliza Farnham, *Tales from American History* by Eliza Robbins, and a work about women, *Sketches of the Lives of Distinguished Females [. . .] Written for Girls, with a View to their Mental and Moral Improvement*, by an American Lady [Ann Hasseltine Judson].

The Rev. Francis L. Hawks, a popular preacher in the City of New York, wrote seven of the children’s books in the library. His series “Uncle Philip’s Conversations with the Children” ranged over a variety of topics from whaling to forestry, but history was Hawks’s forte. The School District Library also included *Flowers of Fable*. Ever wary of their educational customers being shocked by fiction, the Harpers’ advertisement for *Flowers of Fable* stated: “We think the reader will be pleased to find no vulgarity, no low scurrilous expressions or allusions. The purest taste and the most delicate modesty will meet with nothing to offend on the pages of this elegant little volume.”⁸¹ The most famous children’s book in the library, a moralistic blend of fiction and natural history, was *The Swiss Family Robinson* by Johann David Wyss, translated from the German. “The purpose of this pleasing story is to convey instruction in the arts and Natural History, and, at the same time, to inculcate by example principles which tend to the promotion of social happiness.”⁸²

Although religious and educational reformers had come to acknowledge and appreciate the usefulness of some fiction in conveying moral lessons to

children, many were still reluctant to recommend fiction to adults. The Harpers decided, nevertheless, to include one safe work of adult fiction in the library, Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

Except for the fiction, children's literature, works by women, and the agricultural and scientific works, the collection profile of the School District Library remained similar to that of the Family Library. Works in history, voyages and travel, and biography continued to appear. Remarkably, the reader found two historical works by Friedrich Schiller covering "wars of religion" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *History of the Revolt of the Netherlands* and *History of the Thirty Years' War*. *The Orations of Demosthenes*, *Plutarch's Lives*, Xenophon's *The Cyropædia, or, Institution of Cyrus*, and Joseph Salkeld's *Classical Antiquities* demonstrated a stronger interest in ancient Greece and Rome. There was also a notable combination of voyages: Andrew Kippis's *Voyages Round the World from the Death of Captain Cook to the Present Time* and Charles Darwin's *Journal of Researches into the Natural History & Geology of the Countries Visited during the Voyage of H. M. S. Beagle*. The largest addition to biography and to the library as a whole was the nine-volume *American Biography*, "conducted by" Jared Sparks. Finally, the art of music was represented by Edward Holmes's *The Life of Mozart*.

Conclusion

From the 1830s through the 1850s the Harpers sold millions of books from the Family Library and School District Library to individuals, families, libraries, private and public institutions, including thousands of school

districts from Massachusetts and New York to Michigan and Indiana. The dissemination of so many good cheap books over so wide an area would have amazed and delighted the Methodist circuit riders who had visited the Harper home. In contrast to Thoreau, who found the ubiquitous influence of the Harpers and their “entirely unexceptionable” books disturbing, the unidentified author of “A Day Among the Bookmen and Bibliopoles,” the article excerpted at the beginning of this paper, expressed his approval of their influence:

How important is it, in view of this powerful influence over the public mind, that the energies of the *Harperian* press should be directed to proper ends? How vitally momentous to the morals of a great continent that good books alone should be sent forth under the sanction of their approval!

It was certainly important to many of their customers that the books had been approved and recommended as “interesting, instructive and moral.” The Harpers and their “gentlemen of high literary acquirements and correct taste,” in consultation with educators and state officials, spent more than sixteen years developing these collections. They also closely monitored the sales and reviews of each work after its release, which enabled them to reconsider subsequent selections. In an otherwise excellent commentary on the district libraries, Jesse H. Shera refers to Harper’s School District Library as an example of a “hastily assembled set of standard authors.”⁸³ My research

supports instead David Kaser's assertion that these libraries consisted of "carefully pre-selected titles" and made it possible for many communities lacking selection expertise to acquire "rather well-balanced regimens of reading."⁸⁴

Although Harper's Family and School District Libraries represent an effort to influence and make a profit on the education of the American masses, it was an effort welcomed by many, especially the social and educational reformers who agreed with the Harpers about the people's need for cheap books that provided useful information and moral instruction.

The accord that reigned between the publisher and leaders in education contributed to their mutual success. In their advertisements the Harpers used quotations from leading educators, who in their own speeches seemed to echo the rhetoric of the advertisements. Caleb Mills, the superintendent of public instruction for Indiana in 1854, and one of Harper's biggest customers, summarized the purposes and advantages of their libraries. He concluded that such well-selected libraries would improve the moral, intellectual, and economic condition of the people and the state:

[The books] should also be of the choicest character, both in sentiment, diction and design, for their perusal will modify, control and characterize, in no slight degree, the style, language and opinions of the rising generation; nor will they be without their influence on maturer years. [. . .] In this way important assistance

could be rendered the parent, the teacher, the mechanic, the farmer, the merchant and the devotee of science. Each might receive valuable hints and suggestions that would give new impulse to effort, fresh inspiration to hope, and materially modify all their subsequent course. [. . .] A library based on such principles of selection could not fail to prove an inestimable blessing, both to the rising and risen generation, an honor to the State, and a rich source of moral and intellectual elevation to the people of every township.⁸⁵

Appendix A

Harper's Family Library (FL). Works listed with volume numbers in both the Family Library and Harper's School District Library (SDL).

Harper's Family Library (1830-1842) has a total of 127 works in 187 volumes. One hundred and ten of these works were reissued in the SDL. The form of each title is based on its entry in *Harper's Illustrated Catalogue of Valuable Standard Works* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1847).

* = work previously published in Murray's *Family Library* (London: John Murray, 1829-1834).

| Titles | FL no. | SDL no. |
|---|--------------|---------|
| Abercrombie's Essay on the Intellectual Powers | 37 | 22 |
| Abercrombie's Philosophy of the Moral feelings | 58 | 40 |
| Bacon's Essays, and Locke on the Understanding | 171 | 170 |
| Barrow's Life of Peter the Great* | 65 | 35 |
| Barrow's Pitcairn's Island and the Mutiny | 31 | 186 |
| Belknap's American Biography | 161-163 | 146-148 |
| Bell's Life of Mary Queen of Scots | 21-22 | 285-286 |
| Brewster's Letters on Natural Magic* | 50 | 98 |
| Brewster's Life of Sir Isaac Newton* | 26 | 27 |
| Brewster's Lives of Galileo, Tycho Brahe, and Kepler | 130 | 152 |
| Brougham's Pleasures and Advantages of Science | 179 | 126 |
| Bryant's Selections from American Poets | 111 | 114 |
| Bucke's Beauties, Harmonies and Sublimities of Nature | 145 | 163 |
| Bucke's Ruins of Ancient Cities | 134-135 | 160-161 |
| Bunner's History of Louisiana | 176 | 180 |
| Bush's Life of Mohammed | 10 | |
| Camp on Democracy | 138 | |
| Circumnavigation of the Globe | 82 | 31 |
| Combe's (Andrew) Principles of Physiology | 71 | 15 |
| Court and Camp of Napoleon | 29 | 181 |
| Crichton's History of Arabia | 68-69 | |
| Croly's Life of George IV | 15 | |
| Cunningham's Lives of Celebrated Painters | 17-19, 66-67 | 229-231 |
| Dana's Two Years Before the Mast | 106 | 127 |
| Davenport's Perilous Adventures | 159 | 158 |
| Davis's China and the Chinese | 80-81 | 29-30 |
| Dick's Celestial Scenery | 83 | 24 |
| Dick's Improvement of Society | 59 | |

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| Dick's Sidereal Heavens | 99 | 135 |
| Dover's Life of Frederick the Great | 41-42 | |
| Duer's Constitutional Jurisprudence of the US | 160 | 232 |
| Dwight's History of Connecticut | 133 | 139 |
| Euler's Natural Philosophy | 55-56 | 33-34 |
| Fenelon's Lives of the Ancient Philosophers | 140 | 156 |
| Ferguson's History of the Roman Republics Abridged | 187 | 214 |
| Fletcher's History of Poland | 24 | 182 |
| Florian's Moors in Spain | 177 | 117 |
| Franklin Life and Writings of Franklin | 92-93 | 51-52 |
| Fraser's Historical and Descriptive Account of Persia | 70 | 187 |
| Fraser's History of Mesopotamia | 157 | 201 |
| Galt's Life of Lord Byron | 9 | |
| Gleig's History of the <i>Bible</i> | 12-13 | |
| Graves's (Mrs.) Woman in America | 166 | 184 |
| Griscom's Animal Mechanism | 85 | 57 |
| Hale's United States | 119-120 | 96-97 |
| Halleck's Selections from British Poets | 112-113 | 115-116 |
| Hazen's Popular Technology | 149-150 | 177-178 |
| Head's Life of Bruce, The African Traveler* | 128 | 121 |
| Henry's Epitome of the History of Philosophy | 143-144 | 174-175 |
| Higgin's Physical Condition of the Earth | 78 | 39 |
| History of Iceland, Greenland, and the Faroe Islands | 131 | 155 |
| History of Denmark, Sweden and Norway | 136-137 | 164-165 |
| Humboldt's Travels and Researches | 54 | 80 |
| Irving's Life and Writings of Oliver Goldsmith | 121-122 | 109-110 |
| James's History of Chivalry and the Crusades | 20 | 26 |
| James's History of Charlemagne | 60 | 176 |
| Jameson's (Mrs.) Discovery and Adventure in Africa | 16 | 18 |
| Jameson's (Mrs.) Lives of Celebrated Female Sovereigns | 33-34 | 41-42 |
| Keightley's History of England | 114-118 | 102-106 |
| Lander's Travels in Africa* | 35-36 | 171-172 |
| Lanman's History of Michigan | 139 | 159 |
| Lee's Elements of Geology | 178 | 86 |
| Leslie's Discovery in the Polar | 14 | 67 |
| Lewis and Clarke's Travels | 154-155 | 198-199 |
| Lieber's Essays on Property and Labor | 146 | 162 |
| Life of Dr. Johnson | 109-110 | 122-123 |
| Lives and Voyages of Drake, Cavendish, Dampier | 30 | 48 |
| Lives of Distinguished Men of Modern Times | 123-124 | 118-119 |
| Lockhart's Life of Napoleon* | 4-5 | 13-14 |
| Lossing's History of the Fine Arts | 103 | 157 |
| Mackenzie's Life of O. H. Perry | 126-127 | 107-108 |

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| Maury's Principles of Eloquence | 184 | 183 |
| Memes's Memoirs of the Empress Josephine | 28 | 173 |
| Michelet's Elements of Modern History | 170 | 241 |
| Milman's History of the Jews* | 1-3 | |
| Montgomery's Lectures on Literature | 64 | 23 |
| Moseley's Illustrations of Mechanics | 180 | 66 |
| Mudie's Guide to the Observation of Nature | 57 | 20 |
| Murray's British India | 47-49 | |
| Murray's Historical Account of British America | 101-102 | 111-112 |
| Murray's Travels of Marco Polo | 173 | 275 |
| Natural History of Insects* | 8, 74 | 67 |
| Natural History of the Elephant | 164 | 58 |
| Paley's Natural Theology | 96-97 | 68-69 |
| Park, Life and Travels of Mungo Park | 105 | 125 |
| Parry's Three Voyages to the North Pole | 107-108 | 100-101 |
| Paulding's Life of Washington | 75-76 | 1-2 |
| Potter's Hand-book for Reader's and Students | 165 | 242 |
| Potter's Political Economy | 183 | 124 |
| Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties | 94-95 | 55-56 |
| Rennie's Natural History of Birds | 98 | 82 |
| Rennie's Natural History of Quadrupeds | 104 | 89 |
| Renwick's Life of John Jay and Alexander Hamilton | 129 | |
| Renwick's life of De Witt Clinton | 125 | |
| Robertson's History of America Abridged | 185 | 213 |
| Robertson's History of Charles V Abridged | 186 | 219 |
| Russell's View of Ancient and Modern Egypt | 23 | |
| Russell's History of Palestine | 27 | 25 |
| Russell's History of Polynesia | 158 | 224 |
| Russell's History of the Barbary States | 73 | 137 |
| Russell's Life of Oliver Cromwell | 62-63 | 36-37 |
| Russell's Nubia and Abyssinia | 61 | 185 |
| Sargent's American Adventure by Land and Sea | 174-175 | 153-154 |
| Scott's Letters on Demonology* | 11 | 179 |
| Segur's History of Napoleon's Expedition to Russia | 141-142 | 150-151 |
| Selections from the Spectator | 181-182 | 84-85 |
| Sforzosi's History of Italy | 79 | |
| Siebold's Japan and the Japanese | 132 | 149 |
| Smedley's Sketches from Venetian History* | 43-44 | 233-234 |
| Smith's Festivals, Games | 25 | 277 |
| Smith's History of Education | 156 | 209 |
| Southey's Life of Lord Nelson* | 6 | 295 |
| Spalding's History of Italy | 151-153 | 203-205 |
| St. John's Lives of Celebrated Travelers | 38-40 | |
| Stone's Border Wars of the Revolution | 167-168 | |

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| Taylor's History of Ireland | 51-52 | |
| Thatcher's Indian Biography | 45-46 | 168-169 |
| Ticknor's Philosophy of Living | 77 | |
| Turner's Sacred History of the World | 32, 72, 84 | 238-240 |
| Tytler's Discovery in North America | 53 | 207 |
| Tytler's Universal History* | 86-89 | 60-65 |
| Upham on Imperfect and Disordered Mental Action | 100 | 113 |
| Vegetable Substances Used for the Food of Man | 169 | 59 |
| Voyages Around the World | 172 | 294 |
| White's Natural History of Selborne | 147 | 166 |
| William's Life of Alexander* | 7 | 32 |
| Wrangell's Expedition to Siberia | 148 | 167 |

Appendix B

Harper's School District Library (SDL) continued. Works listed are those not found in Harper's Family Library

The School District Library (1838-1846) had a total of 210 works. The 100 works listed below did not duplicate works in the Family Library. The other 110 works duplicated in the Family Library are indicated in Appendix A.

| Titles | SDL no. |
|--|----------------|
| Alden's Elizabeth Benton | 288 |
| Armstrong's Treatise on Agriculture | 88 |
| Barrow's Three Voyages within the Arctic Regions | 258 |
| Bell's Life of Rt. Hon. George Canning | 261 |
| Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans | 260 |
| Blake's Juvenile Companion | 283 |
| Buel's Farmer's Instructor | 53-54 |
| Butler's Analogy of Religion | 222 |
| Cate's (Miss E. J.) Year with the Franklins | 276 |
| Chaptal's Chemistry Applied to Agriculture | 90 |
| Cock's American Poultry-book | 228 |
| Combe's (George) The Constitution of Man | 220 |
| Cook's Voyages Around the World | 211 |
| Crowe's History of France | 141-143 |
| Dana's (Mrs.) Young Sailor | 287 |
| Darwin's Voyage of a Naturalist Round the World | 255-256 |
| Day's Sandford and Merton | 218 |
| Dendy's Philosophy of Mystery | 248 |
| Dick's Practical Astronomer | 250 |
| Dunham's History of Spain and Portugal | 191-195 |

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| Dunlap's History of New York | 49-50 |
| Dwight's Signers of the Declaration of Independence | 91 |
| Edgeworth's (Miss) Moral Tales | 244-245 |
| Edgeworth's (Miss) Rosamond | 243 |
| Ellis's (Mrs.) Temper and Temperament | 272 |
| Familiar Illustrations of Natural Philosophy | 83 |
| Family Instructor. By a Parent | 138 |
| Farnham's (Mrs.) Life in Prairie Land | 257 |
| Feuerbach's Remarkable German Criminal Trials | 254 |
| Flowers of Fable | 271 |
| Francis's Orators of the Age | 269 |
| Frost's Beauties of English History | 278 |
| Frost's Beauties of French History | 280 |
| Gaylord and Tucker's American Husbandry | 129-130 |
| Goldsmith's History of Greece | 81 |
| Goldsmith's History of Rome, abridged | 87 |
| Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield | 225 |
| History of Switzerland | 190 |
| History of the American Revolution | 282 |
| Hofland's (Mrs.) The Son of a Genius | 8 |
| Hofland's (Mrs.) Young Crusoe | 210 |
| Holmes's Life of Mozart | 249 |
| Horne's New Spirit of the Age | 273 |
| Howitt's (Mary) Who shall be the Greatest? | 235 |
| Hughes's (Mrs.) The Ornaments Discovered | 44 |
| Hutton's Book of Nature laid Open | 289 |
| Isabel, or, the Trials of the Heart | 281 |
| Johnson's Economy of Health | 217 |
| Keeping House and Housekeeping | 293 |
| Keppel's Expedition to Borneo | 263 |
| Leland's Demosthenes | 236-237 |
| M'Intosh's (Miss M. J.) Conquest and Self-Conquest | 200 |
| M'Intosh's (Miss M. J.) Woman of Enigma | 221 |
| M'Intosh's (Miss) Praise and Principle | 274 |
| M'Intosh's (Miss) The Cousins | 279 |
| Mackenzie's Life of Paul Jones | 251-252 |
| Moore's Power of the Soul Over the Body | 270 |
| Moore's Use of the Body in Relation to the Mind | 265 |
| Nott's Counsels to Young Men | 120 |
| Paley's Evidences of Christianity | 216 |
| Parental Instruction | 284 |
| Parrott's Ascent of Mount Ararat | 253 |
| Perils of the Sea | 21 |
| Plutarch's Lives | 92-95 |

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| Renwick's First Principles of Chemistry | 136 |
| Renwick's Natural Philosophy | 196 |
| Renwick's Practical Mechanics | 99 |
| Robbin's (Miss) Tales from American History | 9-11 |
| Salkeld's Grecian and Roman Antiquities | 290 |
| Salverte's Philosophy of Magic | 267-268 |
| Schiller's History of the Revolt of the Netherlands | 266 |
| Schiller's Thirty Years' War | 264 |
| Scott's History of Scotland | 144-145 |
| Seaward's Narrative of His Shipwreck | 206 |
| Sedgwick's (Miss C. M.) Means and Ends | 212 |
| Sedgwick's (Miss) Live and Let Live | 28 |
| Sedgwick's (Miss) Love Token | 215 |
| Sedgwick's (Miss) Stories for Young Persons | 140 |
| Sedgwick's (Miss) The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man | 3 |
| Sismondi's Italian Republics | 189 |
| Sketches of the Lives of Distinguished Females | 291 |
| Somerville (Mary) on the Physical Sciences | 259 |
| Sparks's American Biography | 70-79 |
| Stowe's (Mrs. H. B.) Mayflower | 197 |
| Swiss Family Robinson | 4-5 |
| Taylor's Modern British Plutarch | 262 |
| Thatcher's Indian Traits | 16-17 |
| Thatcher's Tales of the American Revolution | 12 |
| Twin Brothers (by Madeline Leslie) | 223 |
| Uncle Philip's American Forest | 19 |
| Uncle Philip's Conversations about the History of Virginia | 43 |
| Uncle Philip's History of Massachusetts | 131-132 |
| Uncle Philip's History of New Hampshire | 133-134 |
| Uncle Philip's History of the Lost Colony of Greenland | 128 |
| Uncle Philip's Natural History | 45 |
| Uncle Philip's Whale Fishery and the Polar Seas | 46-47 |
| Wealth and Worth | 208 |
| What's to be Done? | 202 |
| Whewell's Elements of Morality and Polity | 246-247 |
| Xenophon's History of the Expedition of Cyrus | 188 |

Endnotes

¹ "A Day Among Bookmen and Bibliopoles," *Southern Literary Messenger* 14.1 (Jan 1848): 58.

² Henry D. Thoreau, "Reading," *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) 109. Redding & Co. was a periodical depot in Boston.

³ Mass-market publishing in the US began in the 1820s and 1830s. According to John Tebbel, "Authorities are generally agreed that the movement toward literature for the masses began in England in 1827 with the establishment by Lord Brougham of the Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge;" see Tebbel, *The Creation of an Industry, 1630-1865*, vol. 1 of *A History of Book Publishing in the United States* (New York: Bowker, 1972) 240-41.

⁴ The Family Library was still being advertised as late as 1874 in *Harper & Brothers' Descriptive List of their Publications* (New York: 1874). The School District Library had been dropped from their inventory sometime in the late 1860s.

⁵ *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840) appeared in both Harper's Family Library and Harper's School District Library, and sold more than 175,000 copies (a number equal to one percent of the population) in the decade 1840-1850, thus becoming a "best seller." *Indian Biography* (1832) sold nearly 125,000 copies in the decade 1832-1842. It was runner-up to three best sellers of 1832: Jacob Abbot, *The Young Christian*; Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*; and Johann David Wyss, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, which appeared as Harper's Boy's and Girl's Library no. 2-3. In 1839 *The Swiss Family Robinson* appeared again as School District Library no. 4-5. See Frank Luther Mott,

Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United State (New York: Macmillan, 1947) 306, 318.

⁶ This quotation appears on the back cover or advertising inserts of nearly every volume of the Family Library. The source is “Apophthegms, Sentiments, Opinions, and Occasional Reflections,” in the *Collective Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, ed. Sir John Hawkins, vol. 11 (London: 1787) 196; rpt. in *Johnsoniana: Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson*, ed. Robina Napier (London: George Bell, 1884) 125.

⁷ “Average Daily Wage Rates of Artisans, Laborers and Agricultural Workers, in the Philadelphia Area: 1785 to 1830,” in US Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, Bicentennial Edition*, Part 1 (Washington: GPO, 1975) 163. Family Library volumes were originally priced at forty-five cents each and School District Library volumes at thirty-eight cents each.

⁸ For a full-page color photograph of a surviving Harper’s School District Library in its original wooden case with a catalogue on its door see Michael Olmert, *The Smithsonian Book of Books* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 1992) 212. The catalogue pictured was issued by the American Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and refers to the set as The American School Library. All of the books appear to be in very good condition, except for copies of *The Swiss Family Robinson*, J. G. Lockhart’s *Life of Napoleon*, Thatcher’s *Indian Traits*, and Mrs. Hughs’s *Ornaments Discovered*, a moralistic treatment of natural history for young people.

⁹ Lee Soltow and Edward Stevens discuss ideologies of literacy in *The Rise of Literacy and the Common School in the United States: A Socioeconomic Analysis to 1870* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1981) 18-22, 58-88.

¹⁰ Soltow and Stevens 155. Their estimate is based on the 1840 US Census.

¹¹ Henry S. Randall, quoted in New York Superintendent of Common Schools, *Annual Report, 1842-43*, 208-9; quoted in Sidney Ditzion, "The District-School Library," *Library Quarterly* 10 (1940): 568.

¹² Soltow and Stevens 65.

¹³ James C. Derby, *Fifty Years Among Authors, Books and Publishers* (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1884) 88. Another source that provides details of the Harper brothers' upbringing and early years in business is J. Henry Harper, *The House of Harper: A Century of Publishing in Franklin Square* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912) 1-36.

¹⁴ John Wesley, *The Letters of John Wesley*, 8 vols., ed. John Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931) 8: 247; quoted in Michael H. Harris, *The Availability of Books and the Nature of Book Ownership on the Southern Indiana Frontier, 1800-1850*, diss. Indiana U., 1971 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1971) 33.

¹⁵ John Wesley, quoted in James Penn Pilkington, *The Methodist Publishing House: A History* (Nashville: Abingdon House, 1968) 11; quoted in Harris 33.

¹⁶ Wesley, *Letters* 7: 138; quoted in Harris 33.

¹⁷ Tebbel 186-87, 190.

¹⁸ Harris 35.

¹⁹ Quoted in Harris 36.

²⁰ Eugene Exman, *The Brothers Harper: A Unique Publishing Partnership and its Impact Upon the Cultural Life of America from 1817 to 1853* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 187-90, 194-95. At the time of the mayoral campaign, some prominent Catholics had been fighting the Bible readings and the use of Protestant books in the city's public schools; see also Tebbel 277.

²¹ Exman 48; Tebbel 232-34.

²² Exman 5-6.

²³ Exman 16.

²⁴ Exman 16.

²⁵ Exman 17.

²⁶ Zboray 55.

²⁷ Among northeastern publishers, the Harpers had a reputation for extensive connections in the South and in the West; see Zboray 13, 60-65.

²⁸ Zboray 69.

²⁹ Zboray 13. Zboray explores "the deep cultural ramifications of the relationship of the book to the railroad" in his fifth chapter, "The Railroad, the Community and the Book," 69-82.

³⁰ "By 1833, the firm had installed a steam press [. . .] and the horse who had walked for years in circles around Daniel Treadwell's horsepower press was retired to the Harpers' Long Island farm, where he gave a classic demonstration of the conditioning process by walking around a tree in the

pasture from seven in the morning until six at night, his usual working hours. When the noon whistle blew at a neighboring factory, he took off his customary lunch hour;" Tebbel 275; see also Zboray 6; Harper 25-26.

³¹ "The Commercial History of a Penny Magazine, -- No III," *Monthly Supplement of the Penny Magazine of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* 107 (Nov. 1833): 470. This work appeared in four monthly supplements, Sept. - Dec. 1833. It offers a detailed account of contemporary printing operations and of the publishing ideas of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.

³² Zboray 10.

³³ Exman 6.

³⁴ Exman 5-6.

³⁵ Tebbel 276-77.

³⁶ Zboray 10.

³⁷ "The Commercial History of a Penny Magazine,--No III" 472.

³⁸ Zboray 11.

³⁹ Soltow and Stevens, 81.

⁴⁰ Harper advertisement (1830) quoted in Exman 22. Examiners included George Bush, Dr. James E. DeKay, and Dr. Sidney Doane; see Eugene Exman, *The House of Harper: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Publishing* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) 11.

⁴¹ “Publishers’ Advertisement” inserted in front of Thomas Upham, *Outlines of Imperfect and Disordered Mental Action*, Harpers Family Library, 100 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841) 2.

⁴² Sources disagree on the year in which Constable’s Miscellany first appeared. The year 1825 is given in “Literature for the People,” *The Times* [London] 8 Feb 1854, rpt. in *Littell’s Living Age* 543 (Oct. 1854): 119. The year 1826 is from OCLC catalog record 19880502. The year 1827 is from Scott Bennett, “John Murray’s Family Library and the Cheapening of Books in Early Nineteenth Century Britain,” *Studies in Bibliography* 29 (1976): 141.

⁴³ Prices of British volumes are given in “Literature for the People” 119. The equivalent US prices are based on conversions suggested by Jo McMurty, *Victorian Life and Victorian Fiction: A Companion for the American Reader* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1979) 47.

⁴⁴ Bennett 140; “The Family Library,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 26.2 (1829): 416.

⁴⁵ Bennett 141.

⁴⁶ Tebbel 558-61.

⁴⁷ Publisher’s advertisement on back cover of James A. St. John’s *Lives of Celebrated Travelers*, vol. 2, Harper’s Family Library 39 (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1832).

⁴⁸ Tebbel 241. When Tebbel wrote that the American Library of Useful Knowledge (1831) was “without much doubt, the first attempt in America to

reach the mass market with low-priced books,” he apparently forgot about Harper’s Family Library (1830).

⁴⁹ “Art. IX.—American Library of Useful Knowledge,” *North American Review* 33 (1831): 519.

⁵⁰ Tebbel 242.

⁵¹ “Advertisement by the American Publishers” inserted in front of [G. L. Craig], *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties: Its Pleasures and Rewards*, rev. ed. Rev. Dr. Wayland, vol. 1., Harper’s School District Library 94 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1843) i-ii. Craig’s work was originally compiled for the London Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.

⁵² Zboray 90.

⁵³ Alice B. Cushman, “A Nineteenth Century Plan for Reading: The American Sunday School Movement,” *The Hornbook Magazine* 33 (1957): 64-65; see also Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988) 49-51.

⁵⁴ Ezra Greenspan, “Evert Duyckinck and the History of Wiley and Putnam’s Library of American Books, 1845-1847,” *American Literature* 64 (1992): 678-93.

⁵⁵ Exman 348. Other publishers among the largest in the world at the time were Longmans of London, Chambers of Edinburgh, and Brockhaus of Leipzig.

⁵⁶ In 1853, according to an estimate of Henry J. Raymond, of the 1,549 works the Harpers had in print, 690 were general literature, 329 history and

biography, 156 educational, 130 travel and adventure, 120 theology and religion, 96 art-science-medicine, and 28 dictionaries and gazetteers; quoted in Exman 358.

⁵⁷ Probus [Park Benjamin], Letters from New York, No. II,” *Southern Literary Messenger* 5.9 (Sept. 1839): 630. According to Benjamin, sales of Abercrombie’s *Inquiries* exceeded those of Harper’s 50-cent edition of Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s bestseller *Rienzi* (1834); see Mott 306.

⁵⁸ The account books and sales records for the period 1817-1853 were all destroyed; see Christopher Feeney, comp., *Index to the Archives of Harper and Brothers, 1817-1914* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1982). For a detailed account of the fire and damage see Exman 353-62. J. Henry Harper reported that the stereotype plates “were stored in their vaults, and [. . .] were saved. The destruction of these would have been an incalculable loss, not only to the authors and publishers, but to American literature as well;” see Harper, *House of Harper* 97.

⁵⁹ Publisher’s advertisement on back cover of St. John’s *Lives of Celebrated Travelers*.

⁶⁰ *Harper’s Illustrated Catalogue of Valuable Standard Works* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1847) 140.

⁶¹ According to J. Henry Harper, the Lyceum movement and lecture bureaus stimulated the growing interest in biographies and works of travel and exploration; see Harper 63.

⁶² *Southern Literary Messenger* 8.5 (May 1842): 362-63.

⁶³ *The Ladies Repository* 2.4 (April 1842): 127.

⁶⁴ Soltow and Stevens 3; Joeckel 8.

⁶⁵ (Barnard's) *American Journal of Education* 5 (1858): 395; quoted in Ditzion 550.

⁶⁶ [William H. Seward, 1841], State of New York, *Messages From the Governors*, ed. Charles Z. Lincoln, 11 vols. (Albany: J.B. Lyon, 1909) 3: 858.

⁶⁷ [Seward, 1841], State of New York, *Messages* 3: 878.

⁶⁸ For an overview of "school library" legislation in the seven states mentioned and fourteen other states see "School and Asylum Libraries," chap. 2, US Bureau of Education, *Public Libraries in the United States of America: Their History, Condition, and Management: Special Report*, vol. 1 (Washington: GPO, 1876) 38-58. For discussions of school district libraries in the context of American library history see Carleton Bruns Joeckel, *The Government of the American Public Library* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1935) 8-14; David Kaser, *A Book for a Sixpence: The Circulating Library in America*, Beta Phi Mu Chapbook 14 (Pittsburgh: Beta Phi Mu, 1980) 86-88; and Jesse H. Shera, *Foundations of the Public Library: The Origins of the Public Library Movement in New England, 1629-1855* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1949) 181-84. For summaries of contemporary journal articles on school district libraries see Haynes McMullen, ed., *Libraries in American Periodicals Before 1876: A Bibliography with Abstracts and an Index* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1983) 54-59.

⁶⁹ Ditzion 553.

⁷⁰ Ditzion 565.

⁷¹ State of New York, *Messages* 3: 858.

⁷² [Silas Wright, 1846], State of New York, *Messages* 4: 264.

⁷³ Exman 106.

⁷⁴ Exman, *House of Harper* 23. The story of Fletcher Harper's meeting with Superintendent Spencer is related in Derby 101-04; Harper 55-57; and Exman 106-08.

⁷⁵ "Art. IX.—1. The School Library," *North American Review* 50 (April 1840): 505-15.

⁷⁶ Exman 231, 252.

⁷⁷ Joeckel 11-12.

⁷⁸ Shera 240-41.

⁷⁹ Joeckel 12.

⁸⁰ *Harper's Illustrated Catalogue* 133.

⁸¹ *Harper's Illustrated Catalogue* 128.

⁸² *Harper's Illustrated Catalogue* 133.

⁸³ Shera 240.

⁸⁴ Kaser 87.

⁸⁵ Caleb Mills, *Third Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction*, in *Documents of the General Assembly of Indiana at the Thirty-Eighth Session*, Second Part (Indianapolis: Austin H. Brown, 1855) 841.