

“THE ART OF PRINTING SHALL ENDURE”:  
JOURNALISM, COMMUNITY, AND IDENTITY IN NEW YORK CITY, 1800-1810

Steven C. Smith

Dr. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This thesis reconstructs the community of printers, booksellers, and bookbinders that existed in New York City in the first decade of the nineteenth-century. A close analysis of city directories published between 1800 and 1810 reveals that working-class artisans and merchants associated with the printing trade deliberately settled in Manhattan’s Old East Ward by consciously choosing to open shops on certain streets as a result of their shared social and economic identities. This community, consisting of an area geographically bound by William Street and the East River docks, has been heretofore ignored by historians. This thesis asserts that the association of printers, booksellers, and bookbinders should be considered as a central category of analysis, and demonstrates that this community had a direct influence on early printing trade unionization, printing and publishing specialization, and political rivalries between newspaper editors such as James Cheetham, Peter Irving, and William Coleman.

Thus, by utilizing sources such as directories, newspapers, pamphlets, speeches, journals, and letters, this thesis reinterprets the Habermasian public sphere as an actual public space—a community of like-minded artisans and merchants who shared common identities through their association with New York City’s printing trade, despite ideological barriers. Indeed, this thesis maintains that by looking at public discourse as part of an organic community—as opposed to a theoretical realm that exists only in conversation—a better understanding of print culture will emerge that will enrich the prevailing scholarly dialogue.