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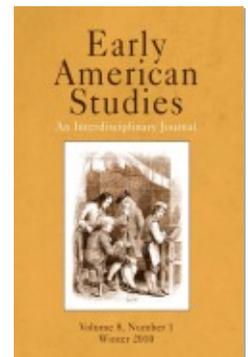
The Revolution in Popular Publications: The Almanac and *New England Primer*, 1750-1800

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# The Revolution in Popular Publications

The Almanac and *New England Primer*, 1750–1800

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**ABSTRACT** This article explores the almanac and *The New England Primer*, two of the most popular publications in the British Atlantic world during the era of the American Revolution. It looks first at the print history of the almanac to show how almanacs were shaped by local print traditions and conditions and then demonstrates how location affected the politicization of the almanac's content in Philadelphia and Boston during the Revolution. The article ends with an examination of *The New England Primer*, with a particular focus on changes to its content in the early republic. The print histories of these two publications reveal the fragmented nature of the British Atlantic world of print, and how this fragmentation continued to inform print in the new nation.

A generation ago historians viewed the Atlantic Ocean as a barrier that shaped national histories and explained American exceptionalism. Now historians treat this ocean as a conductor of goods, people, and ideas, a highway that unified a cultural milieu bound rather than separated by the Atlantic. In this connected Atlantic world, as historians of print have shown, traders from Scotland and England sent tons of books and other printed matter to the colonies, drawing colonists into a trans-Atlantic world of reading, correspondence, and trade. The almanac and primer were two of the most popular genres on both sides of the Atlantic, as generations in both England and the colonies learned literacy through a primer and then, as adults, became regular consumers of almanacs. Yet the print histories of the annual almanacs and *The New England Primer* in the two largest provincial printing centers—Boston and Philadelphia—challenge the idea of a coherent Atlantic world of print and suggest that local print cultures may have played a more prominent

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role in the lives of most colonists than any transnational or quasi-national culture.<sup>1</sup>

Generally, when historians have analyzed either of these publications, they have treated them as uniform, assuming that there were no differences between editions of *The New England Primer* and that variations in almanacs resulted from the individual personalities of their authors. More recently, historians have explored how almanacs influenced and reflected a variety of wide-ranging cultural practices and beliefs. Few, however, have placed almanacs within a regional framework, instead treating almanacs as a single genre with little variation among printing centers. Moreover, even as scholars have paid increasing attention to almanacs' cultural significance, few have explored the ways almanacs could be adapted for more traditional political uses, especially in the midst of the imperial crisis. Indeed, some political historians have

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1. *The Primer* sold millions of copies throughout its print history, and countless generations learned the alphabet using the rote memorization techniques contained in what was styled as "milk for babes." John Tebbel estimated that 6–8 million copies of *The New England Primer* were printed and cited Charles F. Heartman, *The New England Primer Issued Prior to 1830* (1922), who believed that only 1,500 copies survived; John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States*, vol. 1, *The Creation of an Industry, 1630–1865* (New York, 1972), 49. David Hall estimated there were 450 editions published by 1830; David Hall, "The Uses of Literacy in New England, 1600–1850," in William Joyce, David Hall, Richard Brown, and John B. Hench, eds., *Printing and Society in Early America* (Worcester, 1983), 41–43. John Faragher estimated "well over 5,000,000" copies were sold; John Faragher, *An Encyclopedia of Colonial and Revolutionary America* (New York, 1990), 289. Isaiah Thomas reported that the 1759 *New England Primer* printed by Benjamin Mecom had a print run of 30,000 copies; Hugh Amory, "Reinventing the Colonial Book," in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, eds., *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Worcester, 2000), 50–53. As adults, these same people became regular consumers of almanacs, making this genre the single largest seller in the British Atlantic. The almanac was not intended only for the literate. One compiler complained that his publication found its way into "solitary dwellings of the poor and illiterate, where the studied ingenuity of the Learned Writer never comes." Daniel George, *George's Almanac for 1776* (Salem, Mass., 1775). Marion Stowell concluded that "almanac publication during the seventeenth and eighteenth century actually outnumbered all other books combined—religious included." On the almanac, see Marion Barber Stowell, *Early American Almanacs: The Colonial Weekday Bible* (New York, 1977), x, 273. British almanacs annually sold more than 400,000 copies by the middle of the eighteenth century. Cyprian Blagden has done the best work on the circulation of almanacs in England. His essays are "Distribution of Almanacs in the Seventeenth Century," *Studies in Bibliography* 11 (1958): 107–16, and "Thomas Carnan and the Almanack Monopoly," *Studies in Bibliography* 14 (1961): 23–43.

dismissed the almanac outright as simply “edifying pabulum” or “of little value.” The politics of *The New England Primer*, for its part, has largely been bound by discussions of how primers entered religious controversies. Yet a glance at almanacs and *The New England Primer* during the Revolutionary era shows that they were anything but static, unimportant, or apolitical, and that the distinct local print cultures of Boston and Philadelphia were more important in determining their content than the whimsies of individuals. Indeed, the print histories of these two publications between 1750 and 1800 reveal how fragmented the Atlantic world of print could be and how this segmentation impeded the ability of printers to create a coherent sense of nation.<sup>2</sup>

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2. Most studies of almanacs tend to focus on the almanacs’ astrological content. For this emphasis on the persistence of astrology, see Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), esp. 79–81. Butler argues that the persistence of occult belief conveyed through the almanac shows the syncretism present in popular religious belief. An alternative view can be found in Peter Eisenstadt, “Almanacs and the Disenchantment of America,” *Pennsylvania History* 65, 2 (1998): 143–69, which argues that the man of signs (a diagram that had astrological significance, often displayed on one of the almanac’s first pages) was an expendable piece of the almanac that was increasingly erased in an age when scientific reason was growing. Carolyn Merchant has explored the almanac and how its content influenced farmers’ perceptions of the natural world and their place in it. Discussing how almanacs served as a “symbol system,” Merchant argues that the almanac could encourage continuity in Old World beliefs about farming even as new innovations challenged those traditional ways. Eventually, however, almanac-makers began to fill their almanacs with new modes of farming and views of land. As Merchant notes, “By the late eighteenth century the advice columns of almanacs were already encouraging farmers to become rich and prosperous.” Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill, 1989), esp. 153–74, 212. The political uses of the almanac can be found in William Pencak, “Politics and Ideology in *Poor Richard’s Almanack*,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 116, 2 (1992): 183–211. For an analysis of the rhymes and prefaces in New England almanacs, see Allan Raymond, “‘To Reach Men’s Minds’: Almanacs and the American Revolution, 1760–1777,” *New England Quarterly* 51, 3 (1978): 370–95. Most recently, David Waldstreicher analyzed almanac calendars in *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill, 1997), 45–50. In his study of print during the imperial crisis, Philip Davidson concluded that the almanac “was of little value to the propagandist, and the scattered bits on timely questions are more the efforts of the editor to make a popular almanac than to influence thought.” Philip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution, 1763–1783* (Chapel Hill, 1941), 223. Arthur Schlesinger Sr. similarly concluded that though almanacs “found their way into practically every household” and “furnished edifying pabulum throughout the year,” their importance to historians is limited because



In an era when books were imported from Britain and Scotland in huge quantities and many printers relied on government contracts, subsidized religious sermons, or political essays for their income, the almanac was one of the few local publications in colonial North America produced regularly and solely for market. Indeed, the nature of the almanac's content made it so. At its core, every almanac was a utilitarian text that conveyed such useful information as tidal predictions, lunar calculations, court and market days, and distances between towns. Because the almanac contained such a variety of information, its utility extended to almost everyone: a captain needed to know the tides; a farmer needed to know the rising and setting of the sun; a merchant needed to know market days; a lawyer needed to know when courts met. At the same time, this information was geographically specific: a farmer in Massachusetts needed to know the rising and setting of the sun in Boston, not Philadelphia or London; a circuit lawyer in Philadelphia needed to know when courts were meeting in Pennsylvania and Delaware, not Connecticut and Rhode Island; and people bringing goods to market needed to know the market days in towns near them, not in distant colonies.<sup>3</sup>

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they were "appearing but annually." Arthur Schlesinger Sr., *Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain, 1764–1776* (New York, 1958), 41–42. Historians have paid more attention to *The New England Primer*, but primarily for its didactic uses, and have never addressed many of the political connotations of the text. David Hall discusses techniques of reading *The New England Primer* in "The Uses of Literacy in New England," esp. 26. See also Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1970), 77–79.

3. For the best analysis of the complex book trade occurring across the Atlantic, see Amory and Hall, *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*. Although their content made almanacs local products, their spectacular profit was also probably an attractive impetus for local printers to produce almanacs. Benjamin Franklin recounted in his *Autobiography* that he "reap'd a considerable profit from" his *Poor Richard's Almanack*. Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings*, ed. Ormond Seavey (New York, 1986), 106. The almanac was the Stationers' Company's most profitable text; Blagden, "Thomas Carnan and the Almanack Monopoly," 23–24. Virginia almanac-makers had a profit margin of more than 300 percent, and Boston printers could expect to earn £50 per year from almanacs; Cynthia Z. Stiverson and Gregory A. Stiverson, "The Colonial Retail Book Trade: Availability and Affordability of Reading Material in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in Joyce et al., *Printing and Society in Early America*, 143–51, 165–68, and Mary Ann Yodelis, *Who Paid the Piper? Publishing Economics in Boston, 1763–1775* (Lexington, Ky., 1975), 32–33. At the time the average worth of an entire estate in New England was £160; Thomas Purvis, *Revolutionary America, 1763–1800* (New York, 1995), 112. Al-

Though the specific content of almanacs varied from one printing center to another, almanacs printed in different locations shared many similar characteristics throughout the British Atlantic World. Almanacs were printed in huge numbers in both British North America and in Britain. The London Stationers' Company sold almost 500,000 almanacs annually throughout the 1760s. With sole copyright and such massive sales, it is not surprising that the company reaped an annual profit of over £1,500, which made the almanac the company's most profitable text.<sup>4</sup> The physical form of the almanac was also similar throughout the Atlantic world. Each calendar was formatted as a table and organized in the same general manner from one location to the next. The calendar contained, among other things, a list of important dates in English history. The title pages also looked similar: a title in large type was followed by a list of what was contained in the almanac, and there was usually a verse at the foot of the page. Almanacs often contained a "man of signs" with an explanation in the opening pages. Inevitably, astrology, which was linked to this image, played a prominent role in the purported usefulness of an almanac, as did the ability of the compilers to predict the weather.<sup>5</sup>

British and American almanacs shared similar pseudonyms and titles in

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though there are no sure figures on the profit from *The New England Primer*, its repeated publication and the accounts of booksellers demanding more editions from printers attest to its profitability. Isaiah Thomas retold the story of how, when he was an apprentice, his master, Benjamin Mecom, was approached by Zachariah Fowle to help in the production of the primer, making it was one of the first texts Thomas helped produce; Isaiah Thomas, *History of Printing in America* (1810), ed. Marcus McCorison (New York, 1970), 142.

4. Tables with almanac circulation and estimated profits for the 1760s and 1770s can be found in Blagden, "Thomas Carnan," 40–43. Blagden also determined that for the years 1673–1682, 38 percent of all paper went to making almanacs. Whether this number continued to be so high throughout the eighteenth century is unknown. Bernard Capp in *English Almanac, 1500–1800: Astrology and the Popular Press* (Ithaca, 1979) accepted most of Blagden's numbers, though he often used 400,000 as the annual circulation of the almanac. Blagden's number is based on of the official Stationers' Company ledger.

5. Details on the Stationers' Company's monopoly run throughout the work of Cyprian Blagden, but are perhaps best expressed in "Thomas Carnan," which includes the details on circulation. The best recent analyses of the monopoly and its affects on the almanac can be found in Maureen Perkins, *Visions of the Future: Almanacs, Time, and Cultural Change, 1775–1870* (Oxford, 1996), 13–46, and Capp, *English Almanacs*, 240–41. Perkins argues that the monopoly on almanacs was not absolute in legal terms before 1775, but that a series of Stamp Acts and maneuvers by the company allowed their monopoly to exist in practice. For instance,

addition to content and form. For instance, Benjamin West, based in Providence, Rhode Island, published an almanac in Boston called *Bickerstaff's Almanack*. Isaac Bickerstaff, the inspiration for West's almanac, was a pseudonym used in 1707 by Jonathan Swift in a famous satire of almanacs, their authors, and their alleged ability to prognosticate. Richard Saunders, the pseudonym for Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack*, was an actual English almanac-maker. Other popular titles in the colonies originated first in Britain, such as *Poor Robin's Almanack*.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the almanac was a genre of the British Atlantic world. Colonial printers inherited the form of the text from an established British model and imitated popular British authors and titles. Colonial readers shared much with British readers as well. They could all read a complicated calendar table, would recognize many of the same titles, and probably shared a similar understanding of astrology. By consuming titles and authors that mimicked British models and sharing the same historical calendar that formed the foundation for British identity, colonial Americans could imagine themselves as part of a broader British Atlantic reading community.

Production, however, was the primary difference between these three centers. The structure of almanac production in Britain differed from colonial America in an important way. Unlike colonial North America, England

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according to Blagden, the company paid universities £1,000 annually not to produce any almanacs, and it advocated for laws that required almanacs to be taxed, which meant that the Stationers' Company, because of its size and organization, was the only group that could successfully assume the tax. Thus, Perkins concludes, "The only competitors were those who dared to publish unstamped almanacs, risking three months' imprisonment or a fine. The company continued to behave as if its monopoly existed, issuing warnings to other printers not to issue unauthorized, that is unstamped, almanacs." After the court decision that formally ended any implied monopoly rights, the Stationers' Company took to the next-best method of eliminating competition: it wielded its enormous capital to buy up all the popular competing almanacs. Perkins, *Visions of the Future*, 18–21.

6. Capp provides one of the best analyses of the Swift episode in *English Almanacs*, 244–48. It is also discussed in Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (Princeton, 1989), 89–91, and Perkin, *Visions of the Future*, 26. The story of Richard Saunders as an almanac-maker can be found in Capp, *English Almanacs*, 44. Capp discusses how the Stationers' Company rejected the almanac of John Silvester in 1681, but then "pirated much of the material and published it in an almanac under the name Richard Saunders," who had been long dead. Saunders's career "continued" well into the nineteenth century. Franklin was undoubtedly exposed to Saunders's almanacs while in England in the 1720s.

had a highly structured and regulated process for almanac production. Since the reign of James I, the Stationers' Company had held a monopoly on the sale of almanacs that lasted in practice if not in law until 1776. Every year the company published about twenty almanacs, their print runs based on the previous year's demand. The relative lack of competition caused the almanac as a genre to maintain a certain stability. As Maureen Perkins concluded in the most recent survey of English almanacs, "The eighteenth century was a period of stagnation for English almanacs. The Stationers' Company was producing almost the same titles and content at the end of the century as it had done at the beginning."<sup>7</sup> Thus, though the almanac should be thought of as a genre of the Atlantic world, the texts themselves should be viewed as the local products they were, influenced by local exigencies that gave new form and shape to this genre depending on location. London almanacs became unchanging, but local production forged two different forms of the almanac in Philadelphia and Boston, two of the largest printing centers in British North America.



The first almanacs in British North America were issued by printers in Cambridge, Massachusetts, beginning in 1639. For many years they consisted of sixteen pages, or one foolscap sheet of paper folded three times to make an octavo, and they were usually compiled by tutors at Harvard. As early as 1675 a competing annual almanac began to appear in Boston, and by the mid-1720s there were as many as five a year. In 1726 Nathaniel Ames, a Harvard-educated physician and tavern keeper, entered this crowded field with his *Astronomical Diary*, which was published by the leading printer of the day, Bartholomew Green. When Green died in 1732, his son-in-law John Draper took over the business. Under Draper's management, Ames's quickly became the dominant almanac not only in Boston but throughout New England. Ames sold his copy to his printer, who in turn sold the almanacs wholesale to booksellers and other print shops. Occasionally, a competing almanac appeared on the market, but there is little doubt that Ames dominated. Throughout the 1750s, printers and booksellers who offered competing almanacs tried to trade on Ames's popularity. Some competitors, for instance, printed a false Ames title page to sew onto their own almanacs, whereas others would sell a dozen alma-

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7. Perkins, *Visions of the Future*, 18–21.

nacs bundled with an Ames copy on the top and bottom, and others stacked in the middle.<sup>8</sup>

Facing an ever-increasing number of pirated Ames almanacs, in 1758 John Draper formed a partnership with other Boston printers to collectively produce the almanac. At the same time, he lengthened the almanac from one foolscap sheet to three half-sheets of paper, making it twenty-four instead of sixteen pages. In this new arrangement, Draper and company continued to buy the almanac copy from Ames, but they collectively printed the sheets and sold them at their print shops to individuals and booksellers at a rate higher than before. These collective forms of production—first the relationship between Ames and Draper and then within the printers' consortium—made production more efficient but also reinforced the Boston tradition of reduced competition, minimal innovation, and the importance of a “branded,” known almanac-maker.<sup>9</sup>

The structure Draper and company created helped establish Ames's almanacs as a brand that would define almanac production in eighteenth-century New England. The Ames almanac dedicated twelve pages to the calendar, leaving little room for miscellaneous features. A brief essay by Ames described by one historian as “essay-like prose on astronomy, astrology, philosophy, and religion,” as well as some lunar calculations, often took up this extra space. After the addition of eight pages in 1758, the preface was occasionally longer, but most of the new space was filled with various recipes, medicinal cures, and lunar calculations.<sup>10</sup>

Draper—or whoever else would annually purchase Ames's copy—claimed

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8. For reports of these shenanigans, see the *Boston Gazette*, December 3, 1759. The history of Ames's relationship with Draper is chronicled in both Benjamin Franklin V, ed., *Boston Printers, Publishers, and Booksellers, 1640–1800* (Boston, 1980), 101, 311–22, and Thomas, *History of Printing in America*, 54–70, 85–87, 122–24.

9. Stephen Botein examines the almanac trade and the changes made to the production techniques in “‘Meer Mechanics’ and an Open Press: The Business and Political Strategies of Colonial American Printers,” *Perspectives in American History* 9 (1975): 127–225, as do Franklin, *Boston Printers*, 99–103, 311–22, 358–60, Thomas, *History of Printing in America*, 146–48, and Amory, “Reinventing the Colonial Book,” 52–54.

10. Robert Sidwell explored the way the almanac served to educate a reading public in “The Colonial American Almanacs: A Study in Non-institutional Education” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1965). He argued that material included in almanacs served as a tool to educate the broader populace on health, agriculture, and virtue. Marion Stowell deals with prefaces generally in *Early American Almanacs*, 143–61; quote about “essay-like prose” from 147.

to have sole privileges to its printing. Yet these printers could not exert their imagined privileges because, unlike England, Massachusetts lacked copyright laws. In Boston someone could simply reprint any text without any legal ramifications and, indeed, at least two printing houses in Boston were established in the 1760s for the sole purpose of copying Ames's almanacs. Booksellers established these new presses because they believed the prices of Ames's almanacs were artificially inflated, and a controversy erupted that turned the printer and bookseller into direct competitors. These disgruntled booksellers hired two brothers, Daniel and John Kneeland, in 1759 to reproduce Ames's almanac as soon as it hit the market. The booksellers' actions, however, just led to a countervailing monopolistic force in the market that gave rise to another print shop. When these booksellers denied William M'Alpine, a new bookseller, the right to sell their edition, he imported a press from his native Scotland to reprint Ames's almanac. Such actions demonstrate how important almanacs were to printers and booksellers in Boston. Such pirating also frustrated both Ames and the Draper consortium, whose aim was to control this lucrative trade. Yet, with no other legal recourse, both regularly placed newspaper advertisements and other notices warning the public that the copied version—which also happened to be cheaper—was inferior to the original and calling on the public's morality to reject such unfair tactics. Most important, however, the competition did not spur new almanac titles, simply the reproduction of a dominant brand defined by a single, known author.<sup>11</sup>

Eventually, rather than reprint Ames, these other houses hired new local almanac-makers, beginning first with Nathaniel Low in 1761 and eventually including others such as Daniel George and Samuel Stearns. Though there may have been more almanacs in the market at this point, these new Boston-based almanac-makers simply mimicked Ames's almanac in length

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11. The stories of pirated almanacs are inherently fascinating, but they are largely beyond the scope of this paper. Almost every year Boston newspapers contained debate over where to find true almanacs and how to tell a true Ames from a false one. See, for example, the *Boston Evening-Post*, December 17, 1759 in which Ames formally announces that his only true almanac was printed by Draper. For information on M'Alpine's frustrations and his public letters decrying the closed structure of the almanac trade, see Franklin, *Boston Printers*, 359. Stephen Botein in "Meer Mechanics" found that the Draper consortium, because it was composed mostly of newspaper publishers, refused to advertise competing almanacs. In 1765 the Kneelands' relationship with the booksellers and perhaps each other broke down and each brother opened his own shop, meaning that perhaps three houses were established as a result of the Draper consortium. Franklin, *Boston Printers*, 311–22.

and general content. Samuel Stearns, for example, sought Ames's advice on making almanacs in 1768. Only when Benjamin West entered the Boston market in 1767 with *Bickerstaff's Almanack* for 1768 did real innovations occur. West had created a successful almanac in Providence, and he based his Boston almanacs on this alternative model. West's almanacs were usually at least thirty-two and frequently forty pages long and introduced images and entertaining stories. His first almanac, for instance, included a woodcut of Patagonian giants on the title page and an essay that described them. Ames and others soon followed suit.<sup>12</sup>

By 1765 the reverberations of the 1758 changes in almanac production had fundamentally reshaped the Boston almanac market and the printing industry in general. Printers were more likely to be booksellers, and booksellers printers. Rather than a single almanac-maker dominating the market, at least four almanacs were produced annually by recently opened shops. The decentralization of almanac production continued throughout the rest of the decade before the Revolution. By 1774 the number of almanacs produced annually increased to seven, which continued to be about the average in the early republic.

Despite the transformation in market competition after 1758, much remained the same for almanacs in Boston throughout the colonial period. Almanacs remained the product of a known almanac-maker, and each au-

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12. Reports of other almanacs-makers mimicking Ames can be found in Samuel Briggs, comp., *The Essays, Humor, and Poems of Nathaniel Ames, Father and Son, of Dedham, Massachusetts, from Their Almanacks, 1726–1775, with notes and comments* (1891; rept., New York, 1970), 34, Ames noted in his diary in November 1768 that “Sam Sterns of Bolton wants to know how to make almanacks.” Although some historians believe Nathaniel Low’s almanacs “rivaled those of Ames,” West may have caused Ames the most concern. Indeed, Low himself acknowledged his almanacs were of poor quality in a 1764 apology to readers and applauded the work of Ames in 1765; in 1768 Ames wrote that he needed to “stop the progress of the other almanacks especially Bickerstaffs.” See Nathaniel Low, *Astronomical Diary for 1765* (Boston, 1764), in which he states in his preface that he did not include a list of roads or taverns because Ames’s was so complete. Instead, perhaps to try to create a niche, he included a long essay, “Beauty Defended,” which ran through half the almanac. The apology for the poor quality of his work can be found in *An Astronomical Diary for 1764* (Boston, 1763). He wrote, “Notwithstanding all our Care and Industry to prevent Mistakes several gross Errors have been committed in our Almanacks for the two Years past, especially in our last year”; Franklin, *Boston Printers*, 2, argues that Low rivaled Ames. Marion Stowell provides a biography of West in *Early American Almanacs*, 88–92. For examples of others copying the West model, see Ames’s almanac for 1773, in which he included an image of a dwarf from Russia and a description of her in the text.

**Table 1**  
**Changes in market competition, 1743–1784<sup>1</sup>**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Almanacs</i>
1743	3
1744	1
1753	2
1754	3
1763	3
1764	2
1773	6
1774	7
1783	6
1784	5

1. Statistics taken from *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639–1800*. Original research was conducted using the microfilm collection at the University of Pennsylvania Library. Subsequent verification conducted through online platform hosted on [www.newsbank.com](http://www.newsbank.com).

thor usually signed and dated the preface, reminding readers that he was a single, real individual. In other words, new authors, following the lead of Ames, worked to “brand” their almanacs and build customer loyalty through trust and reputation. Except for West’s, the almanacs continued to be twenty-four pages long. The traditions bound up with Ames’s domination probably caused this persistence. The first two printing houses established after the Draper consortium did not so much compete with Ames as copy him. The only substantive change to this homogeneity came from West, someone outside the Boston tradition. That an outsider from Providence, rather than a Boston printer or almanac-maker, thought of introducing a longer almanac with more material shows how insular printing centers bordering the Atlantic could be.

Where Boston’s almanac market during the 1750s and 1760s was defined by feuds, anxious competition, and—from the perspective of Ames and Draper—theft, Philadelphia’s market was remarkably stable and mature by the 1740s. Philadelphia began regularly producing competing almanacs in the 1720s, had three or four almanacs competing in the 1730s, and supported about eight almanacs per year by the 1740s. Philadelphia accounted for 30 percent of all almanacs produced in the colonies between 1764 and 1783; Boston was a distant second with 19 percent. Almost every printer in

**Table 2**  
**Lengths of Boston almanacs 1750–1768. Note the near**  
**uniformity within the market except for West.<sup>1</sup>**

<i>Year</i>			<i>Year</i>		
<i>Pub.</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Pages</i>	<i>Pub.</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Pages</i>
1750	Nathaniel Ames	16	1760	Nathaniel Ames	24
1750	Roger Sherman	16	1760	John Eddy	16
1751	Job Shepherd	24	1760	Roger Sherman	16
1751	Nathaniel Ames	16	1761	Nathaniel Low	16
1752	Nathaniel Ames	16	1761	Nathaniel Ames	24
1752	George Wheten	24	1762	Nathaniel Ames	24
1753	George Wheten	16	1762	Nathaniel Ames	24
1753	Nathaniel Ames	16	1763	Nathaniel Ames	24
1754	Nathaniel Ames	16	1763	Nathaniel Low	24
1754	Roger Sherman	16	1764	Nathaniel Ames	24
1754	George Wheten	16	1764	Nathaniel Low	24
1755	Nathaniel Ames	16	1765	Nathaniel Low	24
1756	Nathaniel Ames	16	1765	Nathaniel Ames	24
1756	George Wheten	16	1766	Nathaniel Ames	24
1757	James Davis	16	1766	Nathaniel Low	24
1757	Nathaniel Ames	16	1767	Nathaniel Ames	24
1758	John Eddy	16	1767	Nathaniel Low	24
1758	Nathaniel Ames	24	1767	Benjamin West	44 [12mo]
1758	Joseph Steward	24	1768	Nathaniel Ames	24
1759	John Eddy	24	1768	Roger Sherman	24
1759	Nathaniel Ames	24	1768	Benjamin West	44 [8vo]
1759	Roger Sherman	24	1768	Essex Almanac	24 [12 mo]
1760	Nathaniel Ames	24	1768	Nathaniel Low	24 [12 mo]
1760	John Eddy	16	1768	New England Alm	24
1760	Roger Sherman	16	1768	Edes and Gill	24

1. Statistics taken from *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639–1800*. Original research was conducted using the microfilm collection at the University of Pennsylvania Library. Subsequent verification conducted through online platform hosted on [www.newsbank.com](http://www.newsbank.com).

**Table 3**  
**Market competition in Philadelphia compared to Boston.<sup>1</sup>**

<i>Year Pub.</i>	<i>Boston</i>	<i>Phila*</i>
1743	3	8
1744	1	8
1753	2	6
1754	3	6
1763	3	7
1764	2	7
1773	6	8
1774	7	8
1783	6	8
1784	5	6

\* Two or three German-language almanacs per year are excluded.

1. Statistics taken from *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639–1800*. Original research was conducted using the microfilm collection at the University of Pennsylvania Library. Subsequent verification conducted through online platform hosted on [www.newsbank.com](http://www.newsbank.com).

the City of Brotherly Love produced and sold his own almanac to individuals and booksellers. From the beginning, Philadelphia almanacs tended to be longer than Boston's—the first extant almanac was forty pages—and by the 1760s Philadelphia almanacs averaged thirty-two pages; some were more than fifty pages long.<sup>13</sup>

Philadelphia almanacs differed from their Boston counterparts in content as well as form. They often contained extended lists of officeholders, meetings, and roads. In addition, Philadelphia almanacs contained pages of entertaining and informative miscellany that filled the extended space. In a Philadelphia almanac one could find prescriptive literature, maxims, excerpts from histories, jokes, and stories of faraway lands, along with recipes, medicinal cures, and various astronomical information. Philadelphia printers even began printing a supplement, called a pocket almanac, which was much smaller and shorter and contained almost exclusively useful data. Such pocket almanacs were less popular than the regular almanacs—*Poor Rich-*

13. G. Thomas Tanselle, "Some Statistics on American Printing, 1764–1783," in Bernard Bailyn and John Hench, eds., *The Press and the American Revolution* (Worcester, 1980), 344.

ard's regular almanac sold 12,000 per year, whereas the pocket version sold 2,000—but their existence attests to how dynamic the market was compared to Boston's.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps because printers compiled their material from a variety of sources and sometimes produced more than one almanac per house, Philadelphia almanac-makers were fictitious personae often inspired by British almanacs. Richard Saunders of Franklin's *Poor Richard's* took inspiration from a prominent British almanac-maker, and "Thomas More," the putative author of Franklin's other almanac, *The American Country Almanack*, was the author of *Moore's Almanack* in Britain. William Bradford's two almanacs, *Poor Will's Almanack* and *Poor Robin's*, were similarly taken from British titles. Others names of almanac-makers in Philadelphia were Andrew Aguecheek (from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*), Timothy Telescope, and Abraham Weatherwise. Only one almanac in Boston followed this trend: Benjamin West's *Bickerstaff's Almanack*, which was printed by two printers recently arrived from Britain, John Mein and John Fleeming.

Pseudonymous authorship in Philadelphia contributed to an already playful genre by allowing printers greater artistic license in their prefaces. In Boston, almanac-makers had personal reputations to defend. In Philadelphia, however, "Richard Saunders" could pen long essays about his poverty, and Father Abraham Weatherwise could write an extended essay year after year about his travails through life, as they attempted to build customer loyalty. Philadelphia almanac-makers often injected their "authors" into other content as well. Andrew Aguecheek, for instance, related stories of

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14. For just a few examples of the various features found in Philadelphia almanacs, see *Father Abraham's Almanack for 1766* (Philadelphia, 1765), which contains an extended essay on Abraham's life; *Poor Richard's for 1768*, which contains items such as William Penn's views and advice on marriage, a noble saying of Peter the Great, and "a smart repartees of British ministers"; and *The Universal American Almanack, or Yearly Magazine for 1770*, which had, among other things, an epitaph for Martin Luther, a variety of poems, and a long story, "Gastern, Marquis of Renty." Items that could be found in Philadelphia almanacs range from a view of a traveler to North America in 1774 (*Universal American Almanack for 1772*), to a history of freemasonry (*Universal American Almanack for 1764*), to a maxim on the "differences between the words go and come" (*Poor Will's Almanack for 1774*), to an essay on "good-breeding" and how a "well-bred man" should act (*Father Abraham's Almanack for 1767*). The list could go on. Franklin claimed his almanac sold "near ten Thousand" annually in his *Autobiography*, 106. Franklin's numbers have been confirmed—enlarged, actually—on the basis of Hall and Sellers' records consulted by Marion Stowell; Stowell, *Early American Almanacs*, x, and Amory, "Reinventing the American Book," 52.

**Table 4**  
**Comparison of Boston Almanac Length, Pocket Almanacs Excluded<sup>1</sup>**

<i>Philadelphia</i>			<i>Boston</i>		
<i>Year</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Pages</i>	<i>Year</i> <i>Pub.</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Pages</i>
1759	Universal	40 [8vo]	1759	Eddy	24
1759	Father Abrahams	50 [8vo]	1759	Ames	24
1759	PA Almanac	32 [8vo]	1759	Roger Sherman	24
1759	PA Town & Country	40 [8vo]	1760	Ames	24
1759	American Almanac	28 [8vo]	1760	Eddy	16
1760	Poor Richards	36 [12 mo]	1760	Sherman	16
1760	Father Abrahams	56 [8vo]			
1760	Pa Town & Country	40 8vo			
1760	Universal	40 [8vo]			

1. Statistics taken from *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639–1800*. Original research was conducted using the microfilm collection at the University of Pennsylvania Library. Subsequent verification conducted through online platform hosted on [www.newsbank.com](http://www.newsbank.com).

“Ghosts and Apparitions” in the middle of the 1770 *Universal American Almanack*. These personae established customer allegiance by being able to create literary pleasure as well as provide utilitarian data in such a “yearly magazine,” as *The Universal Almanack* was subtitled. Franklin himself admitted that he designed his almanac to be both “entertaining and useful.”<sup>15</sup>

The differences between almanacs in these printing centers reflect how colonial print cultures within the Atlantic world could produce distinct forms of the same genre. Historians have tended to describe the almanac as relatively monolithic throughout colonial North America and the Atlantic world. Yet the evidence surveyed here suggests that regional traditions and

15. See any *Poor Richard's Almanack* before the 1760s, when David Hall took over its control. Hall often included a preface that introduced a letter or some other correspondence he said he had selected for the reader. Abraham Weatherwise's biographical sketch ran for years; for an example see *Father Abraham's Almanack for 1767* (Philadelphia, 1766), Timothy Telescope (pseud.), *The Universal American Almanack for 1770* (Philadelphia, 1769), Franklin, *Autobiography*, 106. *The Universal American Almanack*, which went through a series of different printers, began with a subtitle of “or Yearly Astronomical, Geographical, Historical Magazine” in the 1750s and then switched to just “or Yearly Magazine” in 1763.

economies played large roles in materially forming almanacs and shaping their content. With this understanding, we can begin to see how local economies and culture were intertwined. In London an economic regime that limited enterprise created a product that was stagnant and relatively uniform. In Boston attempts to create a monopoly through a single popular author proved problematic but fostered a culture in which almanacs were shorter and fairly narrow in their content. In Philadelphia, unlike Boston, printers did not try to exercise monopoly rights or form collective agreements to keep others out of the almanac trade. Instead, each printer entering the market in Philadelphia knew that to compete he had to match or surpass his competitors' content, not simply copy it. In this openly competitive environment, almanac length grew, and printers filled the space with entertaining material as well as useful data, whereas Boston almanac-makers simply aimed to make their almanacs useful and accurate. Thus, readers in the two largest provincial printing centers in the British Atlantic could share in the consumption of almanacs, but they would ultimately be reading vastly different texts. A Philadelphian would find entertainment in his "yearly magazine," but a Bostonian would read a much shorter, utilitarian work.



The imperial crisis, beginning with the Stamp Act, further exposed the differences in the print and popular cultures of Boston and Philadelphia by changing each city's almanacs in very different ways. Almanacs in both Boston and Philadelphia addressed the Stamp Act almost immediately. In Boston Nathaniel Ames Jr. turned the once-formulaic preface of his almanac into a platform to decry the act and "all those who would oppress or tyrannize . . . British America." In Philadelphia David Hall used *Poor Richard's Almanack* to attack the stamp tax. In 1765 he reasoned that increased taxes would hurt the empire by draining specie from the colonies, which in turn would force Americans to manufacture on their own rather than purchase manufactured goods from England. The following year he published the entire Stamp Act in the almanac.<sup>16</sup>

As both Boston and Philadelphia almanac-makers were comfortable politicizing their publications in the face of the Stamp Act, the legislation may have caused a brief moment of unity among almanacs in these two cities, but the repeal of the law caused divergence in the use of the almanac as a

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16. Nathaniel Ames, *An Astronomical Diary for 1766* (Boston, 1765); Richard Saunders (pseud.), *Poor Richard Improved for 1765* (Philadelphia, 1764) and *Poor Richard Improved for 1766* (Philadelphia, 1765).

political text. In Philadelphia Hall retreated from politicization, and throughout the rest of the imperial crisis no subsequent almanacs contained explicit political messages except for *Poor Will's Almanack for 1776*. *Poor Will's* publisher, Joseph Crukshank, included a list of delegates to the Second Continental Congress, but only after offering advice on “the causes and cure of a diarrhea,” a “description of the imperial palace at Pekin in China,” and “a picture of a modern pretty fellow,” among other things. Aitken also included a politically charged maxim. After the list of delegates, he quoted Locke: “The liberty of man, in society, is to be under no legislative power, but that established by consent in the commonwealth, not under the dominion of any will, or restraint of any law, but what that legislature shall enact according to the trust put in it.”<sup>17</sup>

Philadelphia almanac-makers sporadically used such maxims to comment on the ongoing crisis. John Dunlap in his *Father Abraham's* included them more than others, although he did so with great subtlety, leaving open their interpretation. In 1770 he included a maxim on patriotism and love of country that traced its origins to the Greeks and Romans, which although not explicitly related to the imperial crisis could certainly have been read as such. The next year *Father Abraham's Almanack* included a passage asserting Britons “know better than any other people on earth how to value, at the same time, these three great advantages, religion, commerce, and liberty,” another statement that could be read a number of ways. In 1777, after Independence, *Father Abraham's* published maxims on tyranny, Cato, and bad kings, and in 1779 the almanac contained an antiwar poem that lamented the deaths of young men. Although certainly topical, none of these pieces explicitly addressed current events.<sup>18</sup>

Local tradition probably dictated the mode in which the Philadelphia printers politicized their products. Although prefaces were prominent in Philadelphia, the pseudonymous almanac personae such as Timothy Telescope could not be viable political commentators. Instead, maxims, poems, and stories—all established content in Philadelphia almanacs—became the venues for political expression. Though some clearly addressed contemporary politics, these miscellaneous entries were often short—a paragraph or two—and the rest of the almanac was apolitical, which perhaps mitigated

17. William Burnett (pseud.), *Poor Will's Almanack for 1776* (Philadelphia, 1775).

18. Abraham Weatherwise (pseud.), *Father Abraham's Almanack for 1771* (Philadelphia, 1770); *Father Abraham's Almanack for 1777* (Philadelphia, 1776); and *Father Abraham's Almanack for 1780* (Philadelphia, 1779).

the political thrust of the maxims. The issue of *Father Abraham's Almanack* that described tyranny, for instance, also included a humorous “anecdote of Walter Raleigh” and an account of the “sinful custom of dueling.” Moreover, pseudopolitical maxims appeared infrequently in Philadelphia, perhaps only in six of seventy Philadelphia almanacs.<sup>19</sup>

Boston almanacs, on the other hand, became increasingly political in the wake of the Stamp Act, which shows continued and growing diversity between the two provincial centers of printing in the British Atlantic. After Ames's 1765 preface, which explicitly addressed the tax in heated terms, most prefatory essays voiced the author's opposition to British policy or advocated support for such protest movements as home manufacturing. And the prefaces were not the only parts of the almanac to be politicized. Increasingly, the additional material was also highly political, including sheet music for John Dickinson's “The Liberty Song,” the resolves of the Boston Town Meeting that advocated nonimportation, Massachusetts Bay's Charter (published in 1768, the year after Parliament suspended New York's Assembly), and the “anecdotes of John Wilkes.” Elaborate political cartoons—often the work of Paul Revere—also began to fill Boston almanacs. In short, printers replaced matter that had once been informative and instructive, such as medicinal cures or essays on how to read the stars, with highly politicized pieces.<sup>20</sup>

The politicization of the almanac in Boston was extremely one-sided,

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19. Other examples appeared in *Poor Will's Almanac for 1771*, in which an essay on the “national calamity” is included; the author never addresses what the national calamity is but concludes that a “forgetfulness of God” by the people is sure to spell trouble. Such an analysis may not necessarily have applied to the imperial crisis; then again, if it was read as a commentary on the crisis, it could provide solace regardless of which side the reader was on.

20. Benjamin West, *Bickerstaff's Almanack for 1769* (Boston, 1768), contained the anecdotes of Wilkes as well as an elaborate engraving of him and the sheet music for “The Liberty Song.” The resolves can be found in Samuel Stearn, *North Americans' Almanack* (Boston, 1769). The charter can be found in *Edes & Gill's North-American Almanack for the Year of our Lord 1769* (Boston, 1768). Edes and Gill also placed an image of liberty teetering toward destruction on their title page in 1768, and in 1770 they used Revere's engraving of Boston's port being shut in 1768 as the frontispiece. Ames included an image of John Dickinson in 1771. The *Massachusetts Calendar* printed in the fall of 1771 for the year 1772 included Revere's engraving of the 1770 Boston Massacre. The almanac went through two editions, keeping the event alive in readers' minds for an additional year. As Revere became more radical, so too did the images included in almanacs, such as Revere's *Wicked Statesman* in Ezra Gleason's almanac for 1774.

uniformly opposed to British policy. The almanac-maker and would-be Loyalist Samuel Stearns politicized his almanacs in support of the Patriot cause until he was forced to flee to Canada after Independence; afterward, local militias used his almanac for target practice. Richard Draper, son of John Draper and an avowed supporter of the Crown, continually printed Ames's patriotic almanac until his death in 1774. His wife, Margaret, who took over the shop after his death, continued the tradition even though she was a Loyalist. Ames's almanacs almost always contained highly charged political pieces opposed to British policy. Although both Drapers were outspoken supporters of Parliament and imperial policy, profit rather than personal beliefs drove printers' decisions.<sup>21</sup>

The reason for such unanimity had to do with Boston traditions, such as the role of the author and market competition, that had become intertwined with an increasingly politicized consumer base. Ames, the leading almanac-maker in Boston, first established the tradition of politicizing the almanacs during the Stamp Act crisis, which others could easily follow. Even before the political crisis, Ames created an almanac that was didactic and serious, a form more inclined to turn political during the imperial crisis than a playful one. Boston also produced an enormous amount of political pamphlets during the imperial crisis; Massachusetts accounted for 38 percent of all pamphlets published between 1764 and 1783, almost twice as many as the second-largest producer, Philadelphia. The majority of these pamphlets were published in Massachusetts before the Revolution, whereas most of those published in Philadelphia came after Independence. The almanac, because of its annual publication, was able to adapt to fit within this broader print culture of pamphleteering while still maintaining its traditional usefulness. Indeed, the almanac probably became the single most popular and widely read political pamphlet in Massachusetts. Last, and perhaps most important, almanac-makers were bound by what the popular audience expected of them. Ames, Low, Stearns, Gleason, George, and West were all real individuals who had to negotiate their way through this highly politicized environment while protecting their reputations and livelihoods. In an era of suspicion, in which mobs could storm suspect businesses and homes,

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21. For a description of Samuel Stearns's plight as a Loyalist, see John C.L. Clark, "The Famous Doctor Stearns" in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 45 (October 1935): 317–424. For the Drapers, see Franklin, *Boston Printers*, 99–111, in which Richard Draper is described as "a staunch and outspoken loyalist." Margaret Draper published a pro-British newspaper during the occupation of Boston.

as happened to John Mein's print shop, authors had to express sympathies that met with the general approbation of the populace. In other words, the market had come to expect, welcome, and prefer such politicization, and almanac-makers responded by cramming their twenty-four page previously utilitarian texts with political items.<sup>22</sup>

The lack of politicization in Philadelphia almanacs similarly reflected local circumstances, so that almanacs in colonial North America were two vastly different forms of the same genre. The personae cultivated through pseudonyms in Philadelphia had assumed a carefree attitude, focused on entertaining the reader. Such personae were not responsive to the public in the same way that Nathaniel Ames was and thus could more easily steer clear of political debate that might alienate potential customers. The Philadelphia market was far too divided or, as one historian has categorized it, "disaffected," to tempt almanac-makers to follow *Poor Richard's* onetime foray into politicization. Boston's highly charged political environment created a demand for political almanacs. In more divided Philadelphia, printers, lacking such an animating public opinion, maintained the status quo, even though their local print culture had created a form that had plenty of room to be political if the market desired it.<sup>23</sup>



Although colonial North America's almanacs varied drastically from one location to another, they all shared a common historic calendar throughout the British Atlantic that by the 1750s transmitted a very royalist view of British history. Every calendar commemorated the Powder Plot (November 5, 1605), Charles I's beheading (January 31, 1641), the Restoration of the monarchy (May 29, 1660), and the birth and ascension of the reigning monarch. This interpretation of major events in British history evoked a common sense of British heritage founded on a shared loyalty to and struggle for the British Crown. The entirely English historical perspective re-

22. Franklin, *Boston Printers*, 365–69, discusses Mein's encounter with the Boston mob. On pamphlets see Tanselle, "Some Statistics on American Printing," 355–58; Raymond, "To Reach Men's Minds."

23. Tanselle, "Some Statistics on American Printing," 355–58, reports that Philadelphia produced 21.3 percent of the pamphlets in North America, most of those coming after Independence. Anne Ousterhout uses the term "disaffected" to describe Pennsylvanians in *A State Divided: Opposition in Pennsylvania to the American Revolution* (New York, 1987).

flected the general orientation of colonists who faced eastward, toward the imperial core, and thought of themselves as Britons above all else.<sup>24</sup>

The calendar at midcentury exemplified the larger eighteenth-century process of Anglicization happening throughout colonial North America. Many seventeenth-century almanacs in Boston contained extended chronologies detailing events of local significance such as the founding of towns, churches, and presses, and the deaths of prominent individuals. If the early calendars commemorated other historic events, they were often events of global significance, such as the founding of the first press, the birth of Alexander the Great, or the death of Archimedes. In short, the early almanac calendar in Boston did not evoke a sense of British national identity or have any clear articulation of a common understanding of British history. Philadelphia almanacs did not appear until the late seventeenth century, but their calendars did not adopt the civil war or Powder Plot dates until the eighteenth century. By 1750, however, the almanacs in both regions had settled on a monarchical calendar focused solely on a British history that began with the Powder Plot, continued through Charles's beheading and the Restoration, and culminated with the commemoration of the reigning monarch.<sup>25</sup>

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24. For examples, see Nathaniel Ames, *An Astronomical Calendar for 1765* (Boston, 1764), Richard Saunders (pseud.), *Poor Richard's Improved for 1765* (Philadelphia, 1764), and Richard Saunders (pseud.), *The English Apollo 1765* (London, 1765). Michael Zuckerman describes the identity of colonial Americans as striving "to be Britons" in such a way that "each colony maintained its primary economic and cultural relations with England rather than with other colonies"; Michael Zuckerman, "Identity in British America: Unease in Eden," in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, eds., *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Princeton, 1987), 115, 157.

25. Samuel Danforth, *An almanack for the year of our Lord 1647* (Cambridge, Mass., 1647), was the first almanac to include a chronology. In total, it recounts twenty-nine events since the founding of the colony and takes up two pages in the back of the almanac. Below the chronology is another table that recounts the founding years of twenty-seven different towns. Danforth's second chronology continued with the same themes, but it incorporated events that had transpired since the last almanac's publication. See also Daniel Russell, *An almanack of coelestiall motions for the year of the Christian aera, 1671* (Cambridge, Mass., 1670), for calendars. Russell celebrated Archimedes slaying in AM 3440, the founding of the University of Paris by Charles the Great, the birth of Alexander the Great, the correction of the calendar by Caesar, the founding of Venice, and the teaching of logic by Prometheus. In addition, the calendar recounts the founding of virtually every European kingdom except England. The only dates of English significance are the building of London,

The dates celebrated in this calendar symbolized the essence of British identity, the point almost entirely being the perseverance of the monarchy and personal loyalty to the Crown. The imperial crisis and especially Independence presented a straightforward challenge to this historic calendar, the most explicitly political element in mid-eighteenth-century almanacs. After Independence, printers tried to reshape the calendars in an attempt to express the shared history of the new nation. Yet, even though they hoped to create a common heritage, the fragmented world in which they lived before the Revolution—a world that gave rise to two vastly different almanac genres—continued to impede their efforts.

In 1766 the Stamp Act's repeal introduced the first new date to the calendars in both Philadelphia and Boston. In Boston two of the three almanacs introduced the Stamp Act's repeal on March 17. The one almanac that did not, Nathaniel Low's, included it the next year. After 1767 the Stamp Act appeared in virtually every Boston calendar until Independence. In Philadelphia William Bradford's almanacs included the Stamp Act's repeal in its calendar from 1768 through 1772. But this calendar also continued to celebrate the traditional British dates, including the births of all the members of the royal family. Bradford was the only one who chose to alter the traditional calendar, and after he stopped producing almanacs in 1772, the entire Philadelphia market commemorated only the traditional calendar. In fact, the brief politicization of *Poor Richard's* content and Bradford's calendars shows that opposition to the Stamp Act was the only political event that Philadelphia printers felt needed to be addressed. By 1772, however, there no longer was a dynamic, universal opinion animated against it or any other recent events.<sup>26</sup>

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the founding of Oxford, the governing of London by a mayor and a sheriff, the building of the Tower of London, and the Gunpowder Treason. The building of London, Oxford, and the Tower of London all fit within the general theme of similar European dates contained in the calendar.

26. The repeal of the Stamp Act appeared first in Boston in Benjamin West, *New England Almanack* (Boston, 1766), Nathaniel Ames, *An Astronomical Diary for 1767* (Boston, 1766), and *Mein and Fleeming's Register for 1767* (Boston, 1766). The register, another genre imported from Britain, differed from almanacs in many ways and is not otherwise included in this study. Nathaniel Ames, *An Astronomical Diary for 1767* (Boston, 1766), Nathaniel Low's *An Astronomical Diary for 1768* (Boston, 1767), and *An American Calendar for 1768* (Philadelphia, 1767) included the repeal for the first time. For Bradford, see *Pennsylvania Pocket Almanack for 1769* (Philadelphia, 1768), and *Pennsylvania Pocket Almanack for 1773* (Philadelphia, 1772); Philo Copernicus, *An American Calendar for 1770* (Philadelphia, 1769), *An American Calendar for 1771* (Philadelphia, 1770), and *An American Calendar for*

Boston printers, on the other hand, continued reshaping their calendars after the repeal of the Stamp Act, forging a new narrative of British history that at first coexisted with the traditional British calendar but ultimately transformed this conservative, royalist calendar into a radical one that justified the overthrow of the monarchy. Throughout the imperial crisis, Boston almanacs commemorated recent local events, such as the shutting of Boston's port and the Boston Massacre. Printers included many of these dates immediately after they occurred, but some were added years later as the events gained greater salience in the popular memory. Nathaniel Low's calendar after the Boston Massacre, for instance, memorialized the massacre and the repeal of the Stamp Act, but it also added the dates on which Low claimed the Stamp Act was first opposed during three days of divisive protest and rioting in August 1765. The Sons of Liberty soon orchestrated large annual commemorations of those dates to erase former controversies, so that by the time they were included in these calendars, they had become part of a shared local memory of united protest. Thus, printers not only added calendar dates to memorialize events that had galvanized the populace within the preceding year, but also reassessed past events to revise the almanac's historic memory to meet popular culture. By 1775, on the verge of Independence, the transformation of the Boston calendars was nearly complete, as they reinterpreted the first English civil war in a new, more radical light, styling Charles I a tyrant rather than a martyr and honoring Oliver Cromwell.<sup>27</sup>

With Independence, almanac-makers in Boston once again transformed the calendar, this time to commemorate a new nation free from monarchy.

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1772 (Philadelphia, 1771). Bradford stopped including the Stamp Act with the publication of his *Pocket Almanack for 1774* (Philadelphia, 1773), and Bradford himself stopped producing almanacs the next year.

27. Nathaniel Low, *An Astronomical Diary for 1772* (Boston, 1771). The August dates also appeared in an almanac published in Salem in 1771; Freeman, *An Essex Almanac for 1772* (Boston, 1771). They appeared repeatedly after this in various almanacs. Nathaniel Low's almanacs are perhaps the best examples of the civil war being recast; see Nathaniel Low, *An Astronomical Diary*, for the years 1773–78. Cromwell is celebrated in the almanacs of Ezra Gleason, *Massachusetts Calendar for 1774* (Boston, 1773), Gleason, *Bickerstaff's Boston Almanack for 1777* (Salem, 1776), and Low, *An Astronomical Diary for 1776* (Boston, 1775) and *An Astronomical Diary for 1777* (Boston, 1776). In addition to the calendars, Samuel Stearn's *North American's Almanack* included a "Prayer of Cromwell," written by him before his execution. For the politics of the August dates, see Simon Newman, *Parades and the Politics on the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia, 1997), 24.

They based this national identity on the war and Independence by adding military events that occurred in other colonies, thus helping evoke a sense of shared experiences among diverse states. Nathaniel Low's 1777 almanac, among others, included recent dates such as American Independence, the Battle of Charleston (South Carolina, August 16, 1777), and the Battle of Brandywine (Pennsylvania, September 11, 1777). In addition, Low also included older dates—Charles's beheading and Cromwell's birth—that combined to justify the Revolution by linking it to British precedents in which the monarch was overthrown in the name of liberty.<sup>28</sup>

Conspicuously absent were dates such as the repeal of the Stamp Act, which had been in every almanac published in Boston since 1767. The Stamp Act's repeal had significance only for individuals who consented to the ideological allegiances of the British Empire. Boston almanacs did maintain a subtext of British history in their calendar, however. Although it was now framed by the Revolution, many kept Charles's execution as the first date celebrated. Almanac-makers would not have kept this date in the calendar unless it had a generally understood meaning throughout the market, and its inclusion shows that the broader market had settled on a new understanding of Charles's beheading, one that, alongside battles and Independence, fit within a radical Whig understanding of British history.<sup>29</sup>

Philadelphia calendars remained unchanged throughout the imperial crisis. Printers certainly could have incorporated new dates, as the *American Almanack* shows, but they chose not to. Indeed, even after Independence, Philadelphia almanacs remained politically muted and ambiguous. In the two years following Independence, every calendar excised references to the current monarch, although one almanac kept the birth of King George's wife, Queen Charlotte. While they added no new events, they did keep Charles's beheading and the Powder Plot, which one could read as celebrations of British rebellions against the monarch, but without Independence

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28. Nathaniel Low, *An Astronomical Diary for 1778* (Boston, 1777). Aside from the calendars, numerous stories of the war were retold in almanacs, and a couple even produced a detailed map of New York City and the encampments of Washington.

29. For some early examples of these dates' adoption, see George, *George's Almanack for 1776*, *North American Almanack* (Worcester, 1775), Ezra Gleason, *Bickerstaff's Boston Almanack* (Boston, 1776), Benjamin West, *New England Almanack* (Providence, 1777). Charles's execution was celebrated numerous times in the 1790s and at least as late as 1800. See Isaiah Thomas, *Isaiah Thomas's Massachusetts Connecticut, Rhode-Island, Newhamphshire & Vermont Almanack for 1801* (Worcester, 1800).

as a framing reference, one could also construe them as failures of unpopular rebellions. This ambiguity in both calendars and general content indicates a market so divided that no almanac-maker felt comfortable politicizing his almanac in the way Boston almanac-makers had.<sup>30</sup>

It was not until 1778, after the British occupation of the city, that Philadelphia calendars began chronicling a new national history. In 1778 *Poor Richard's* and *Father Abraham's* included both Charles's beheading and Independence. This calendar framed Charles's beheading as a precedent to and touchstone for Independence. War, however, began to change the way printers oriented the calendars, and, by 1780, well after Philadelphia had been evacuated by the British army, all Philadelphia almanacs commemorated Independence and a series of battles that occurred in the colonies. In a war in which "half the free population lost either a brother, nephew, or first cousin," it is not surprising that both printing centers used the war as a foundation for the nation. Unlike Boston's, however, Philadelphia almanacs completely erased any remnants of their British heritage; Charles's beheading was never again commemorated after 1778.<sup>31</sup>

The subtle politicization of the calendars, rather than the overt politicization found in many of the almanacs, indicates more than an individual author or almanac-maker trying to declare publicly his beliefs or fit in a broader culture of pamphleteering. Rather, the reshaping of the history conveyed in the calendars reflects fundamental changes in an understanding of

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30. The almanac that kept Queen Charlotte's birth is William Andrews (pseud.), *Poor Will's Almanack for 1777* (Philadelphia: 1776).

31. Thomas Purvis, *Revolutionary America*, 234. Although this Philadelphia trend toward ambiguity was absolute throughout the market, John Dunlap is perhaps the best example. Just as Margaret Draper was a Loyalist who published Patriot almanacs, Dunlap was a captain in the Philadelphia militia that had to evacuate Philadelphia because of his sympathies. His almanac calendars, however, did not reflect his politics. Only after the British left did he adopt new dates in much the same way as the New England almanac-makers had, and only then did he begin to create a sense of national identity bound by a shared national experience with war. Abraham Weatherwise, *Father Abraham's Almanack for 1777* (Philadelphia, 1776), includes both Charles's beheading and the Powder Plot; the next year Dunlap dropped the Powder Plot but did not add Independence. The following year, 1778, he finally added Independence. In 1779 he had only Independence, and then in 1780 he finally nationalized his calendar. Hall's *Poor Richard's* provides another example. In 1776 *Poor Richard's* included the beheading, Powder Plot, and Restoration. In 1778 Hall included only the beheading and Independence. In 1779 he added the king of France's birth, which was celebrated in America once he became an ally to the cause; in 1780, like Dunlap, Hall nationalized his calendar by adding battles.

a shared heritage and place within the British Atlantic. Before the Revolution, almanac calendars evoked a sense of British identity that faced east and stressed a shared loyalty to the Crown. The Revolution broke those loyalties throughout colonial America, forcing printers to reorient the history in their calendars away from the Atlantic and toward a new nation both ideologically and geographically separated from Britain. But printers in Boston and Philadelphia made this shift at different times and in different ways. Printers in each center had to survey their market to determine which events their consumers would no longer honor as well as which new events had real meaning. Before the war, Boston printers felt the need to reshape the calendar inward, expressing acts of colonial defiance, whereas Philadelphia did not switch its orientation until after the war had struck the region. Once Philadelphia did shift, however, it became more radical than Boston, completely erasing any remnant of a British past.

Indeed, these distinctions in a genre some dismissed as simply “edifying pabulum” cast new light on two familiar evaluations of the American Revolution. The Bostonian John Adams recalled that the Revolution was “effected before the War commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations. . . . This radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people, was the real American Revolution.” The Philadelphian Benjamin Rush, however, concluded that “the American war is over; but this is far from being the case with the American revolution. On the contrary, nothing but the first act of the drama is closed.” The almanacs suggest that John Adams’s New England radicalized early—well before the war—and that Boston’s Revolution was nearly complete by 1776. The Philadelphia almanacs suggest that Benjamin Rush’s fellow Philadelphians experienced their Revolution as having only begun. In other words, like the almanacs themselves, the Revolution was on the one hand a shared experience—almanacs in Philadelphia and Boston eventually agreed on what was political—but also an event that occurred largely on the local level. And, at least through calendars meant to evoke a sense of national identity, this nation had at least two different origins. Some Boston almanacs founded this new nation explicitly within a British tradition beginning with the British civil war, whereas all Philadelphia calendars based the nation on Independence, completely erasing past allegiances to Britain.<sup>32</sup>

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32. John Adams to Hezekiah Niles, February 13, 1818, in Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 160. For Rush’s quote, see Alyn Brodsky, *Benjamin Rush: Patriot and Physician* (New York, 2004), 294.

Part of an almanac's ability to adjust to popular opinion was the nature of its production. Almanac-makers could annually reassess their content and easily adjust the historic calendar to meet demand. When printers confronted a market that demanded certain traditionally British parts of *The New England Primer* be changed, they found themselves facing a dilemma: the *Primer's* content was not as easily adapted as the almanacs'. Ultimately, the *Primer's* material constraints and local print history framed the choices printers made in Boston and Philadelphia during the early republic; this fact exposes how, even after Independence, the two largest printing centers in this new nation continued to diverge in their local print cultures.

*The New England Primer* was produced almost exclusively in colonial North America in the eighteenth century and became a cultural phenomenon there. English printers had produced a number of religious primers throughout the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. The origins of these religious primers date to the *Book of Hours*, which was later renamed *The Prymer*. These religious primers became a locus for religious politics: Catholic printers produced subversive primers, sometimes printed outside Britain, to counter Protestantism. During the English Reformation, Protestant reformers such as Thomas Cromwell worked to excise traditional Catholic religious beliefs from primers, and during Oliver Cromwell's reign in 1651 the British Commonwealth banned primers because of their association with Catholicism. In 1683 John Gaine published what may have been the first primer titled *The New England Primer* in London. No copy of the edition survives, we know nothing about Gaine, and the origins of the text are shrouded in mystery, but it seems likely that he published it for sale in Massachusetts. In 1686 Benjamin Harris, a London bookseller and an associate of Gaine's, moved to Boston and shortly thereafter published the first *New England Primer* in North America. Harris probably modeled its contents on the *Protestant Tutor*, which he had published in London. Although there are no extant copies of this early Boston editions, it is likely that it conveyed the same strong Protestant and Calvinist worldview that all extant *New England Primers* do.<sup>33</sup>

*The New England Primer* quickly became embedded in local print culture.

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33. The best analysis of English religious primers and Cromwell's view of them can be found in Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven, 2005). For information on the religious and political events of the period, including the banning of primers, see John Wroughton, *The Longman Companion to the Stuart Age, 1603–1714* (New York, 1997), 64. The most authoritative article on the origins of *The New England Primer*

Boston printers produced a *New England Primer* almost every year between 1750 and 1800. *The New England Primer's* cultural significance was not as strong elsewhere in the British Atlantic world, although it was prominent in Philadelphia, where Benjamin Franklin produced numerous editions. Between 1749 and 1765 Franklin and then David Hall printed over 35,000 copies of *The New England Primer*, or a little more than 2,000 annually. In contrast, a single edition was printed during the eighteenth century in Glasgow, in 1785. Thus, by the eighteenth century *The New England Primer* had become a wholly provincial text.<sup>34</sup>

*The New England Primer* became the primary text through which North American children, especially those in living in the Northeast, learned to read, but in the British Isles other texts taught children to read using similar models of rote memorization. Pictorial alphabets coupled with often religious rhymes and themes inculcated children with religious principles while also giving them the tools to read. Significantly, in North America, and especially New England, one title proved dominant, whereas in Britain many primers and other schoolbooks proliferated throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Nonetheless, just as almanacs had large variation between editions, so too did *The New England Primer* vary greatly between editions, printers, and cities in North America. These variations—the changes over time—demonstrate how changing political climates also shaped the content of this popular publication. At the same time, the form these changes took was often dictated by the local exigencies of the printers.<sup>35</sup>

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is Gillian Avery, "Origins and English Predecessors of the *New England Primer*," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 108 (1998): 33–62.

34. Tebbel, *A History*, 48–49. Between 1750 and 1800 Boston produced fifty *New England Primers*. More than one edition was printed in the following years: 1750 (2 different editions), 1767 (2), 1770 (3), 1771 (3), 1773 (2), 1779 (2), 1784 (3), 1787 (2), 1789 (3), 1790 (3 or 4), 1791 (2), 1793 (2), 1795 (4), 1796 (2); data compiled from *Early American Imprints, Series 1, 1639–1800*, [www.newsbank.com/readex/product.cfm?product=247](http://www.newsbank.com/readex/product.cfm?product=247). Franklin, *Boston Printers*, discusses the importation of *The New England Primer*, 277–80. The information on the Franklin and Hall primers can be found in their accounts in "James Parker: Final Report on the Franklin and Hall Account," *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 13, ed. Leonard Labaree (New Haven, 1969), 87–98. In addition to Franklin, Christopher Sower produced a *New England Primer* in the greater Philadelphia region in 1754, which reproduced exactly the 1752 Boston primer. Hall and Sellers continued to produce *New England Primers* after Franklin retired. See, for example, *The New England Primer* (Philadelphia, 1771), *The New England Primer* (Philadelphia, 1773), both by Hall and Sellers.

35. The exact number of primers and other children's books is hard to determine because of a very high loss rate; see John Barnard, "The Survival and Loss Rates of

The *Primer* resembled the almanac in that it taught a highly monarchical view of British history. The opening pages contained a rhyming alphabet that mixed religious (A: “In Adam’s fall / We sinned all”) and whimsical sayings (C: “The Cat doth play”). Two of the letters, however, carried political messages. For K the rhyme was “Our KING the good / no man of blood”; and for O the rhyme was “The *Royal Oak*, It was the *Tree* / That sav’d His/ Royal Majesty.” During the Revolution and early republic, printers struggled with how to address the monarchical meaning of these two letters because they were illustrated by woodcuts, which are difficult to change once made.<sup>36</sup>

The *Primer*’s woodcut for K depicted a regal king, which, accompanied by its rhyme, emphasized a royalist view of divine monarchy. This rhyme evoked the martyrdom of King Charles I, considered by his followers to be “no man of blood.” Early *Primers* often read, “King Charles the Good / No man of Blood.” Over time this had morphed into either just “King” or in a few instances “King George the good / No man of Blood.”<sup>37</sup> The exact meaning of this rhyme is unclear. It could imbue the monarch with divinity, implying that he was more than a mere mortal, or it could mean that the king had not been tyrannical, never improperly executing individuals, and thus had no blood on his hands. Either way, it meant that the king was just. The meaning of the letter O also goes back to the civil war. It celebrated the story of Charles II escaping Jacobites by hiding in the stump of an oak tree in 1652. The letter was depicted in the *Primer* as a tree with a face in it, presumably the king’s.<sup>38</sup>

These two characterizations fit the historical tradition contained in the prerevolutionary almanac calendars. Both almanacs and *Primers* delegiti-

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Psalms, ABCs, Psalters, and Primers from the Stationers’ Stock, 1660–1700,” *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, 6th ser., 21, 2 (1999): 148–50, and “The Stationers’ Stock 1663/4 to 1705/6: Psalms, Psalters, Primers and ABCs,” *The Library: The Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, 6th ser., 21, 4 (1999): 369–75. For a detailed analysis of these British texts, see Ian Green, *The Christian’s ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England, c. 1530–1740* (New York, 1996).

36. See *The New England Primer* (Boston, 1752) for a traditional primer, including the woodcut frontispiece of the king’s portrait.

37. For the “King George” couplet, see *The New England Primer* (Boston, 1750). For the origins of this martyrology, see Fabian Phillips, *The Royall Martyr; or, King Charles the First no man of blood but a martyr for his people* (London, 1660). See also Gillian Brown, *The Consent of the Governed: The Lockean Legacy in Early American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), 57.

38. For an example of the traditional rhyme, see *The New England Primer* (Boston, 1752) or *The New England Primer* (Boston, 1771).

mized the civil war while commemorating the persistence of the monarchy. The two publications may well have worked in concert for many readers. To children the primer inculcated the idea of a divine monarch and the importance of the Restoration, whereas to adults the almanac's calendar reaffirmed this history by commemorating the "martyrdom" of Charles, the ascension of Charles II, and the reign of the ruling monarch. The civil war played a more prominent role in the historic memory contained in both these publications than any other event, and the pervasiveness of the *Primer* in Boston may help explain the persistence of the date of Charles's beheading in Boston's postrevolutionary almanac calendars.

Just as printers reshaped the interpretation of the civil war in the almanac's historic calendar, they refashioned the meaning of these letters to meet the ideological demands of the new nation. The material available to printers of *The New England Primer* in postrevolutionary Boston shaped the choices they could make when they addressed the monarchy through the alphabet. In 1761 a new, entirely religious rhyme scheme was introduced for the problematic letters in a Boston edition of *The New England Primer*. The letter K was represented by "Proud Korah's troops / were swallow'd up," and O became "Young Obadiah, / David, Josiah/All were Pious." Both had new illustrations representing these rhymes; K was depicted by a group of people being "swallow'd" by the Earth, and the O was represented by three regal-looking men.<sup>39</sup>

These two new couplets introduced an alternative rhyme and woodcut scheme into the Boston market shortly before the imperial crisis began, and this new representation prevailed in the 1760s and 1770s, appearing in fourteen of sixteen editions before 1776. The origin of these rhymes had little to do with politics and everything to do with religion, but during the imperial crisis it became an attractive option to replace the traditional royalist rhyme.<sup>40</sup>

After the Revolution many Boston printers who published the *Primer* seemed to have only the traditional woodcuts, which meant they had to address the images directly. John M'Dougall reproduced both the king and oak woodcuts in his 1781 *Primer*, but he adjusted the rhymes to match popular sentiment by changing the former to "A King *should* be good / No

39. *The New England Primer* (Boston, 1761).

40. The only two that printed the traditional woodcuts were *The New England Primer* (Boston: Printed for the booksellers, 1767) and *The New England Primer* (Boston, Fleet: 1770). The 1767 edition is not credited, but its woodcuts seem to match the 1770 edition by Thomas Fleet.

man of blood,” which altered the traditional meaning of the rhyme by making the king fallible and thus human. For the latter, though, he used a woodcut of the oak that was accompanied by the clashing rhyme “Young Obadiah, / David, Josiah/All were Pious.”<sup>41</sup>

The oak woodcut coupled with the “Obadiah” rhyme occurred throughout early republican Boston editions of the *New England Primer*. For those who had only traditional woodcuts, the meaning of K was easily addressed through altering the rhyme. The traditional O image posed problems, however. The most popular image for O was the royal oak, and it appeared in at least nineteen of twenty-three editions, rather than the once-ascendant “Obadiah” image. Ten editions contained the traditional royal oak line, whereas a clash between the image of the oak and the Obadiah rhyme occurred nine times. The meaning of the oak could be contested, and printers who wanted to erase the political connotations of the rhyme relied on a local alternative tradition for guidance rather than experiment with a new, untested rhyme. At the same time, the printers’ reliance on woodcuts meant that the traditional image and rhyme would persist; material constraints thus made the *Primer* veer toward conservatism, whereas the almanac’s mutability allowed printers to erase its British heritage with greater ease.<sup>42</sup>

Philadelphia printers faced an even more difficult task because they did not have a prominent alternative rhyme in the *Primer*’s local print tradition. Philadelphia printers developed their own ways of changing the K rhyme to imply that kings were imperfect and tyrannical. The Philadelphia printers Joseph Crukshank and William Spotswood used the rhyme “A King that’s good / No Man of Blood” in the 1780s in separate editions. Then in the 1790s Thomas Dobson changed it to “The British King / Lost States Thirteen,” explicitly using the rhyme to recall the history of the Revolution.<sup>43</sup>

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41. *The New England Primer* (Boston: M’Dougall: 1781) Many of these printers were new printers; they had been Patriots during the Revolution and replaced the Loyalist printers who left Boston.

42. Nicholas Coverly exemplifies this problem. In 1779 he published a *Primer* with the religious K and O. By the next printing in 1782, however, Coverly had acquired the traditional woodcuts. For K he adopted the now commonplace “Kings should be good” but published the “Obadiah” couplet next to the traditional royal oak. Through four more editions Coverly recycled the woodcuts he had from the 1782 edition and continued to juxtapose the oak image with the “Obadiah” rhyme. At one point he ran the king rhyme with the image of Korah.

43. *The New England Primer* (Philadelphia, [1780?]); *The New England Primer* (Philadelphia, 1783); *The New England Primer* (Philadelphia, 1791); *The New England Primer* (Philadelphia, 1796); *The New England Primer* (Philadelphia, 1797); *The New England Primer* (Philadelphia, 1799). The latter rhyme was used in New

The solution to the problem of O emerged from the peculiarities of Philadelphia's distinctive print culture. Philadelphia printers were probably unaware of the "Obadias" rhyme. Indeed, no printer outside New England ever used that rhyme. Instead, in 1797 Dobson's *New England Primer* included the line "The Oven bakes / The Pretty Cakes" for the letter O. Dobson could do this only because he did away with woodcut images in the left-hand column and replaced them with a word to match the rhyme. For this first edition, Dobson had the word *Oak* on the left, though. The conflict, reminiscent of the Obadias/oak juxtaposition in Boston, was corrected in a subsequent edition. The reference to the oven can be traced to one of the non-*New England Primers* published in Philadelphia before the Revolution; John Dunlap's 1770 reprint of a Belfast primer contained the line "O was an oven to bake a plumb cake," and it probably provided the inspiration for Dobson's change. Just as Boston printers found the solution to their O problem in their own local print culture, Philadelphia printers also pulled theirs from an alternative first introduced in the colonial period.<sup>44</sup>

Such changes to the *Primer* in both Philadelphia and Boston indicate that the former loyalty to monarchy had become so controversial in both centers that printers felt it necessary to make what may appear to be relatively minor changes to these two letters. In this attempt to erase a British past in the early republic, printers also expanded the number of different *New England Primers* exponentially. Before the Revolution, only one *New England Primer* existed in the Philadelphia market, although there were different editions of it. In Boston, two different *Primers* existed for fifteen years before the Revolution. After the Revolution, as each printer tried to address the British origins of the *Primer* and meet the demands of the new nation, the number of different *Primers* increased within each market; Boston at the time had at least five different versions of *The New England Primer*, and Philadelphia had at least three. Thus, for a publication generally assumed to have been uniform and static, printers' reliance on local print traditions in the new nation actually created a number of different, locally specific texts.<sup>45</sup>

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York and then Lancaster, Pennsylvania, first and then probably spread to Philadelphia.

44. *The New England Primer* (Philadelphia, 1797); *The New England Primer* (Philadelphia, 1799); David Manson, *A New Primer* (Philadelphia, 1770).

45. The different combinations of image and rhymes for K and O were as follows: altered king rhyme with a clashing O rhyme; altered king rhyme with a traditional O; Korah image with a traditional oak (Thomas Fleet); wholly religious scheme; and king image with a Korah rhyme and a traditional oak rhyme (Coverly).



The need to create new national symbols in the wake of the imperial crisis and American Revolution exposed the degree to which almanacs and *Primers* were still local products. In 1773 anyone who purchased an almanac in Massachusetts would be reminded of the imperial crisis throughout the year. In Pennsylvania a consumer of the almanac would read a longer, far more playful genre, rarely encountering an item that reminded him of the political controversy swirling between Atlantic communities. Even after Independence, many Boston almanacs commemorated Charles's beheading, placing the American Revolution within a radical Whig tradition and perhaps expressing the Anglophilia that would define Federalist New England in the early republic, whereas Philadelphia almanacs uniformly defined the new nation as starting with Independence.

The changes to the *Primer* further show how the content of these publications was beholden to local print traditions as well as popular opinion. In both Boston and Philadelphia, printers solved the problem of the letter O by relying on their own local traditions, and though they all tried to erase the meaning of the traditional K, the solutions were never uniform. In Boston some printers had woodcuts for Korah, which allowed them to erase the monarchical rhymes and images all together. As a result, though every Philadelphian raised on the *Primer* in the early republic would inevitably be inculcated with the memory of the Revolution through memorizing the king rhyme, only some in Boston would be.

The annual almanac and *New England Primer* are cultural artifacts—commodities in which economic, political, popular, and print culture intersect. Viewing them as such during the era of the American Revolution shows how diverse the print cultures within the British Atlantic world could be and, in turn, how diverse the reading experiences for colonists may have been. Certainly, both the almanac and *Primer* were products of this British Atlantic world; both genres were first imported from Britain and both evoked a common sense of British identity. Yet as soon as the texts became local products, they became beholden to both local print traditions and popular cultures. One historian has concluded that “the average New England home library consisted of a Bible, an almanac, the *New England Primer*, and perhaps a few sermons.” That conclusion is probably true of

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In Philadelphia there were the two variations of the king rhyme and the oven for O. *The New England Primer* (Philadelphia, 1797); *The New England Primer* (Philadelphia, 1799).

Philadelphians as well. But as the print histories of the almanac and *New England Primer* show, although Bostonians and Philadelphians may have owned the same titles, the contents of these texts would have been as varied as the cultures in which they lived.<sup>46</sup>

Boston and Philadelphia were the two largest printing centers in the British colonies, but printers of almanacs and *Primers* in other Atlantic printing centers reacted to the imperial crisis and the Revolution in ways that reflected their own local cultures. The constraints of the market in every center dictated the timing and form of changes to almanacs, whereas material constraints in the *Primer* largely determined how printers reacted to the exigencies of the new nation. An occupied New York, for instance, continued producing royalist calendars throughout the War for Independence, and a Baltimore *New England Primer* solved the problematic O in 1798 with the rhyme “The Sturdy Oak, / It is the Tree, / That form’s the navy / of America”; the U.S. Congress had just that year designated Maryland home to the U.S. Navy. Of course, almanacs produced in London for English consumers did not adjust the traditional calendar at all, and the 1785 Glasgow *New England Primer* maintained the monarchical rhyme scheme for both K and O.<sup>47</sup>

Before the imperial crisis and the Revolution, the differences between printing centers in British North America were latent; the colonists’ shared British identity and orientation toward the imperial core could mask differences between the two regions. The effects of the Revolution, however, exposed differences in local popular and print cultures and caused printers to adopt different strategies to address the ideological demands of the crisis. Ironically, these differences arose as previously segmented regions tried to turn toward one another and forge an ideological basis for a new nation.

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46. Stowell, *Early American Almanacs*, x.

47. *Hutchins’s Improved for 1780* (New York, 1779) and *The New England Primer* (Baltimore, 1798); Charles Hutton, *The Ladies’ Diary; or, Woman’s almanack, for the year of our Lord 1785* (London, 1785); *The New England Primer* (Glasgow, 1785).