Title: Books for the Instruction of the Nations: Shared Methodist Print Culture in Upper Canada and the Mid-Atlantic States, 1789-1851

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Abstract (summary):
Recent historians who have written about the development of Methodist religious identity in Upper Canada have based their narratives primarily on readings of documents concerned with ecclesiastical polity and colonial politics. This study attempts to complicate these narratives by examining the way religious identity in the province was affected by the cultural production and distribution of books as denominational status objects in a wider North American market before the middle of the nineteenth century. The first chapter examines the rhetorical strategies the Methodist Book Concern developed to protect its domestic market in the United States from the products of competitors by equating patronage with denominational identity. The remaining chapters unfold the influence a protracted consumption of such cultural commodities had on the religious identity of Methodists living in Upper Canada. For more than a decade after the War of 1812, the Methodist Book Concern relied on a corps of Methodist preachers to distribute its commodities north of the border. This denominational infrastructure conferred the accidental but strategic advantage of concealing the extent of the Concern's market and its rhetoric from the colony's increasingly anti-American elite. The Concern's access to its Upper Canadian market became compromised, however, when Egerton Ryerson initiated a debate over religious equality in the province's emergent public sphere in the mid-1820s. This inadvertently drew attention to Methodist textual practices in the province that led to later efforts on the part of Upper Canadians to sever the Concern's access to its market north of the border. When these attempts failed, Canadian Methodists found ways to decouple the material and cultural dimensions of the Concern's products in order to continue patronizing the Concern without compromising recent gains achieved by strategically refashioning themselves as loyal Wesleyans within the colony's conservative political environment. The result was the emergence of a stable and enduring transnational market for Methodist printed commodities that both blunted the cultural influence of British Wesleyans and prepared the ground for a later secularization of Methodist publishing into and beyond the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

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The Mid-Atlantic States (also called Middle Atlantic States or simply the Mid Atlantic) form a region of the United States generally located between New England and the South. Its exact definition differs upon source, but the region often includes Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Washington D.C., and sometimes Virginia and West Virginia. An 1897 map displays an inclusive definition of the Mid-Atlantic region, including Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania. Frederick Jackson Turner wrote in 1893 about the important role the Mid-Atlantic or “Middle region” had played in the formation of the national American culture, and defined it as “the typical American region”. The Bank of Upper Canada, founded in 1822 as a de facto creation of the Family Compact, collapsed 44 years later. My story looks at archival more. Canada's banks today are among the most stable in the world. But that wasn't always the case. “In precisely those parts of Upper Canada where the United States School Books had been used most extensively,” he railed, “there the spirit of insurrection in 1837 and 1838, was most prevalent.” While Ryerson thundered in public, however, his fellow preachers quietly went about their usual business of filling the shelves of the colony’s burgeoning Sunday school libraries with books imported in bulk from the United States.