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 United States territory consists of three separate parts, different in size, natural features, level of development and population: 1) the main part, the United States proper, with an area of 7,800,000 square kilometers. It borders on Canada in the north and on Mexico in the south. It is washed by the Pacific Ocean in the west, the Atlantic Ocean in the east, and the Gulf of Mexico in the south-east; 2) Alaska, which occupies the north-western part of the continent of North America, including a lot of islands; 3) Hawaii in the Pacific Ocean. Natural Resources. Shipbuilding is developed along the Atlantic coast and in San Francisco on the Pacific coast. Textile industry is also well-developed, especially in the South near large cotton plantations. The Mid-Atlantic, also called Middle Atlantic states or the Mid-Atlantic states, form a region of the United States generally located between New England and the South Atlantic States. Its exact definition differs upon source, but the region usually includes New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Washington, D.C., Virginia, and West Virginia. When discussing climate, Connecticut is sometimes included in the region, since its climate is closer to the Middle Atlantic than the New...