

Reading French in Early Nineteenth-Century New York The New York Society Library as Agent of Cultural Exchange

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La circulation de l'imprimé entre France et États-Unis à l'ère des révolutions

Franco-American Networks of Print in the Age of Revolutions

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Article abstract

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**READING FRENCH IN EARLY
NINETEENTH-CENTURY
NEW YORK:
The New York Society Library as Agent
of Cultural Exchange**

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ABSTRACT

The circulation records of the New York Society Library contextualize late eighteenth-century New Yorkers' engagement with French-language books and authors. Founded in 1754, the Society Library holds extant circulation records that date from 1789–1792 and 1799–1806. These records reveal what eighteenth-century readers were checking out of the library and presumably reading. The paper analyzes both quantitative and qualitative data related to readers' borrowing practices and examines which French works were most often borrowed. This, in turn, allows us to speculate on what might have been the appeal of these works in the complex cultural environment of the early American republic. Finally, this paper seeks to understand why Anglophone readers chose to read in French, particularly when English-language titles were available, what they gained from this practice, and how these works supported the intellectual aspirations of a new nation.

RÉSUMÉ

Les registres de prêts de la New York Society Library (NYSL) mettent en contexte l'intérêt qu'avaient les New-Yorkais, à la fin du XVIII^e siècle, pour les livres en français et les auteurs d'expression française. Fondée en 1754, la NYSL a conservé des registres de prêts datant des années 1789-1792 et 1799-1806. Ces documents révèlent quels étaient les ouvrages que les lecteurs de l'époque empruntaient et, on peut le présumer, lisaient. L'article s'appuie sur des données à la fois quantitatives et qualitatives liées aux pratiques d'emprunt, et relève les ouvrages en français les plus souvent choisis. Nous avançons des hypothèses pouvant expliquer l'attrait de ces derniers dans un milieu culturel complexe, celui des premières années de la république américaine. Enfin, nous cherchons à comprendre les raisons pour

lesquelles les lecteurs anglophones lisaient en français alors que des titres en anglais étaient accessibles, ce qu'ils en retiraient, et la manière dont ces œuvres ont pu soutenir les aspirations intellectuelles de la nouvelle nation.

Keywords

Library history, reception history, Rousseau in early America, Voltaire in early America, subscription libraries

Mots-clés

Histoire des bibliothèques, histoire de la réception, réception américaine de Rousseau, réception américaine de Voltaire, bibliothèques de souscription

On August 9, 1799, Nancy Ivers borrowed the New York Society Library's (NYSL) copy of *Lettres de Ninon de l'Enclos au marquis de Sévigné*, using her own account to borrow volume one and her father Hezekiah's account for volume two. She kept these volumes for over two months, until October 21, 1799. Nancy was not the only library subscriber who borrowed this work; it was frequently taken out of the library during the period 1799–1804. The letters exchanged by two seventeenth-century French elites may seem like unlikely reading for a young woman in early republic New York City.¹ Indeed, the work may have reminded those in her social circle of a similarly titled work in English held by the library and likely familiar to many of its readers, *The Letters from the Marchioness de Sévigné to her daughter the Countess de Grignan*.² However, one can see why Nancy might have borrowed Ninon de l'Enclos's letters in French. Attributed to Louis Damours, this text is a fictional version of l'Enclos's relationship with Charles de Sévigné, depicting what Gabrielle Verdier calls a "privileged libertine situation: the education of a young man by an older woman and the seduction of a young virgin by an older couple."³ Though its title recalls the Grand Siècle and perhaps allows family members to assume that she's reading more edifying material, the book was in fact rather scandalous.⁴ Nancy Ivers was one of a small number of primarily anglophone readers at the NYSL who regularly borrowed materials in French, even when English translations were available for the works they borrowed. NYSL readers did not have a unified political agenda underlying their choice to read in French. Rather, they sought engagement with the French language for several reasons, including its longstanding reputation as the language of the intellectual elite, and as the vehicle of fashionable contemporary literature, history, and philosophy. This paper examines which French books were

available to readers in New York City during the early republic, and attempts to provide some answers to the question of who these readers were, and why they might have chosen to read in French, using both quantitative data and case studies focused on three very different readers.

The reading histories discussed in this article are pulled from the NYSL City Readers website, which brings together digitized versions of the library's first (1789–1792) and second (1799–1805) charging ledgers, as well as the library's catalogues and other archival material from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁵ Clearly, these ledgers coincide with a turbulent moment in Franco-American relations, a time that spans the fall of the Bastille in July 1789, the Haitian Revolution beginning in 1791, and the XYZ Affair of 1800. The second ledger, in particular, overlaps with a period that François Furstenberg calls “the most consequential years for American history, French history, and Atlantic history” in his 2014 work, *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees who Shaped a Nation*.⁶ These events led to an expansion of the number of French speakers in the United States, who included political refugees fleeing both the French and Haitian Revolutions. In *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace estimate that “By the end of 1793, ninety percent of [Haiti's] forty thousand whites, royalists as well as republicans, had fled to the United States. All told, four or five thousand people, creole planters and black servants alike, debarked in New York City.”⁷ This article inserts itself into the context of resurgent interest in Franco-American relations as scholars revisit the questions surrounding the political and cultural ties between France, Haiti, and the early United States. This scholarship has examined political, cultural, and literary history. Susan Branson's *These Fiery Frenchified Dames* details how women in Philadelphia used the French Revolution as a means to increase their own political agency.⁸ In their 2009 article, “Les Lumières américaines : continuités et renouveau,” Nathalie Caron and Naomi Wulf argue for an increased emphasis on Enlightenment works and ideas in the historiography of the eighteenth-century United States.⁹ Furstenberg makes a claim for the extensive engagement of the early American republic and France via the experiences of prominent émigrés. Courtney Chatellier's 2018 dissertation, “The French Revolution in Early American Literature, 1789–1815: Translations, Interpretations, Refractions” argues for the considerable influence of French literature in translation on the development of the early

American novel.¹⁰ Studying the NYSL circulation records provides us with granular data with which to understand early republic engagement with French language, culture, and texts. Furstenberg writes, “If all of Elite Europe stood in awe of French manners, taste, and culture, the veneration of polite society was even more acute across the Atlantic, where a sense of cultural inferiority pervaded many circles among the formerly colonial elite.”¹¹ In that case, French language reading can be used as a gauge of anglophone NYSL readers’ desire to connect with a more cosmopolitan ideal.

Founded in 1754, the New York Society Library was an early subscription library established in the then-colonies, preceded by Benjamin Franklin’s well-known Library Company founded in Philadelphia in 1731.¹² The library’s stated goal was to provide a growing colonial city with a range of contemporary reading materials; some scholars have suggested that it also sought to provide a counterbalance to the influence of the Anglican affiliation of King’s College (now Columbia University), which was founded in that same year.¹³ The membership structure was similar to that of many subscription libraries of the period; members purchased a share in the library (five pounds in 1789) and then paid an annual fee of 10 shillings to maintain their memberships.¹⁴ Women as well as men could join the library.¹⁵ The NYSL notes that 57 women held subscriptions during the period covered by the charging ledgers; some borrowed books extensively, others few or none.¹⁶ Some women readers are easily identifiable, such as Henrietta Marie Colden, who hosted a prominent salon during the period.¹⁷ During the British occupation of New York from 1776–1783, the Society Library closed. When it reopened and began to rebuild its collections and services, it did so in a changed landscape.¹⁸ The population of the city rapidly increased, doubling between 1783 and 1785. This growth only continued as the city became the capital of the United States in 1789, as well as a centre for business, manufacturing, and financial speculation. For Richard D. Brown, the growing post-Revolution population resulted in more and different readers:

Rising social aspirations gave impetus to the practice of extensive reading. In pursuit of ideological, evangelical and commercial objectives, ambitious men sought out secular books and magazines as markers of respectability, not just as requirements for responsible voting. Women and girls read extensively to become fit wives and mothers to citizens.¹⁹

Books—both American reprints of overseas publications and imports—became cheaper and easier to acquire.²⁰ Reading and self-cultivation became a means of building social capital.

The NYSL itself was implicated in this growth of reading from both a cultural and economic perspective. The rise of the circulating library by the 1790s meant the NYSL faced increasing competition for readers. This need for an expanded community of subscribers became only more acute when the library took on a large amount of debt in 1795 to construct its new home at Nassau Street. We lack direct evidence that libraries like the NYSL viewed themselves as being in direct competition with circulating libraries. However, James Green notes, “Indirect evidence can be found in changes that occurred in subscription libraries at the exact time and places where commercial circulating libraries began to flourish. These changes included more liberal access policies and a more popular choice of books, both of which made the subscription libraries more like the new commercial ones.”²¹ Green cites Hoquet Caritat, the French bookseller whose circulating library expanded to approximately 30,000 titles, as the NYSL’s main competition—a competition that ended in his return to France in 1804 and the bankruptcy of his business soon after.²² Caritat took an active role in promoting French and published a standalone *Catalogue des livres français* in 1799. With his wide-ranging circulating collection that featured many genres of texts, Caritat aimed to attract a cultivated public to his circulating library—exactly the kind of reading public that the NYSL wanted to attract as well.

NYSL readers must have been members of New York City’s upper and mercantile classes, given their ability to pay the fees associated with membership in the library. Some members, such as Aaron Burr and Rufus King, had a significant impact on the history of the United States; as the NYSL proudly proclaims, its borrowers included 42 members of the first nine U.S. Congresses.²³ Christine Pawley calls this type of easily identified reader a “named reader” and notes that scholars interested in these readers can “turn to individual archival genres, including diaries, letters, and other sources of biographical materials that may have included details about the subject’s reading practices.”²⁴ Other members—Matthew Clarkson, for example—were part of these social circles, but are not as well-known as some of their

contemporaries and may not have left behind commentary on their reading.²⁵ For other readers, we must reconstruct or reimagine the reasons for their reading preferences. Most NYSL readers left no other record of their reading, leaving scholars to infer from the books themselves why they might have chosen to read what they did. For Pawley, this absence of information means that it is useful to imagine readers in collective terms. I argue here that the choice to read in French is a useful mechanism for understanding the choices of individual readers, even when we are unable to access other archival documents that bear witness to their reading choices. As Frank Felsenstein and James J. Connolly note of their nineteenth-century readers in the American Midwest, “Knowing something about the books that ordinary people read and how they put them to use in their lives opens up a dimension of historical experience that often eludes us.”²⁶ Those readers who read in French demonstrate a cosmopolitan cultural and intellectual ambition that often transcended national politics.

Library charging ledgers, day books, bookseller records, have all long been marshalled in the drive to understand eighteenth-century histories of reading, as they provide scholars with crucial information about who was reading, what they were reading, and when they read it. Jan Fergus used these to understand novel reading in both eighteenth-century London and the Midlands.²⁷ Mark Towsey has mined the records of private, subscription, circulating, and religious libraries to understand rural Scottish readers’ engagement with the Enlightenment.²⁸ In the case of the records of the NYSL, Laura Miller has used them to trace the popularization of Newton and other early natural philosophers.²⁹ Patrick Spedding surveyed the reception of Eliza Haywood’s works via the NYSL circulation records.³⁰ Most recently, Sean Moore has cited the case of the NYSL’s readers of Robinson Crusoe as one means of understanding the relationship between slavery, libraries, and the book trade in the early United States.³¹ Though circulation records reveal much about reading practices, scholarship on reader records must acknowledge two main difficulties. First, teasing out the reading habits of individual readers can be difficult. As others, including James Raven, have suggested, just because an account was in one person’s name did not mean that the person was the exclusive reader of the books borrowed.³² Other household members may also have been present when texts were read aloud, a common eighteenth-century practice. And, there is also the question of

whether borrowed books were actually read, as Christine Lupton notes in her discussion of reading and its place in the constrained time of everyday life, “For good reason, histories of reading tend to be histories of *not reading*.”³³ At the NYSL, for example, multi-volume works were often taken out of the library for only a day or so and then returned, begging the questions of why they were borrowed in the first place and which portions of the work were read, if any at all. NYSL readers reflect this kind of slippage—they borrowed books rapidly; some of them read one type of work exclusively or made their way through one work volume by volume. They read novels extensively; one of the most popular works was Jane Purbeck’s *Honorina Somerville*, volumes of which were borrowed 354 times by 113 individual readers.³⁴ Most readers jumped around, reading many types of works, in ways that sometimes challenge interpretation. Secondly, the sheer volume of reader transactions can be difficult to process, even with the aide of digital technology.³⁵ The digitization of the NYSL’s records has made them accessible to scholars around the world—but the total number of borrowing transactions was 78,108.³⁶ As the numbers suggest, readers read many types of books: novels, history and travel, philosophy, and timely texts about politics. Examining French-language reading practices limits the corpus while focusing on a range of works that have an intellectual cohesion.

Careful study of library catalogues is another way of understanding the books library readers had access to—with limits, of course. Just because a library owns a book, doesn’t mean a reader will borrow it. Building a list of French books in the Society Library is no simple task. The Library’s early catalogues date from 1758, 1761, 1773, 1789, 1791 (plus a 1792 continuation of the previous year), 1793, an 1800 supplementary catalogue of books added since 1793, and a 1813 catalogue.³⁷ Until the 1793 catalogue, all book titles are rendered in English, with a parenthetical note about their language when necessary, and the 1793 rendering of titles is inconsistent at best. Place and date of publication are not included in the catalogue until 1800. The number of works noted as being in French is relatively small vis-à-vis the Library’s collections: 15 in 1789; 22 added in 1792; 59 in 1793; with 28 more French titles added by 1800. The Society Library was not unique among its American contemporaries in its holdings of French language books, nor was it unique amongst libraries in the greater Anglo-American world.³⁸ By 1807, the Library Company in Philadelphia held a 1782 Geneva edition of Rousseau’s *Collection*

complète (in addition to multiple single titles by Rousseau in English), a 1768 edition of Voltaire's *Collection complète*, as well as Mme de Genlis's *Les veillées du chateau* and *Le Théâtre à l'usage des jeunes personnes*. Both cities—New York and Philadelphia—had enough of a French community for booksellers to maintain substantial holdings of works in French. In Philadelphia, the primary bookseller was Moreau de Saint-Méry and in New York, Caritat. French books were present in private libraries, and these occasionally found their way into the Society Library through exchange when an individual exchanged a book or books for a share or multiple shares in the library, a common practice at the library.³⁹ The NYSL's copy of the *Encyclopédie*, for example, was given to the library by Edward Greswold in exchange for 20 library shares.⁴⁰ Many of the library's French works are duplicates of English editions already owned by the library. These include multi-volume sets from those we might call *grands hommes*—Voltaire, Molière, Rousseau, Destouches, Montesquieu, Fontenelle—the type of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French authors that any library claiming intellectual authority would be sure to have. French works of overwhelming popularity, such as Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des européens dans les deux Indes* and Fénelon's *Télémaque* were also available in both languages. The majority of these French-language works were bought after the library reopened in 1789; a manuscript record for August 1789 shows that subscriber Samuel Campbell was paid 13 pounds for Rousseau's works in 30 volumes, a purchase confirmed in the 1789 catalogue listing. Voltaire's *Œuvres* in 40 volumes entered the collection at about the same time, with a 36-volume English edition listed in the 1792 catalogue continuation.⁴¹

The borrowing statistics for the English and the French editions of these works show that library patrons sometimes sought to engage with these writers in the original French. For both Fénelon and Raynal, the English editions were significantly more popular. Raynal's *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des européens dans les deux Indes*⁴² is borrowed only nine times by four borrowers in French from 1789–1805, and a 1784 edition of his works is taken out seven times by three borrowers; a translated version of the *Histoire philosophique et politique* is borrowed 116 times in English by 47 borrowers.⁴³ Fénelon's *Télémaque* is borrowed once by Marinus Oudenaarde in French, but 86 times in English by 66 borrowers. For Rousseau and Voltaire's complete works, the statistics are somewhat

different; interest in reading Rousseau and Voltaire in the original French was relatively robust. Volumes of Rousseau’s collected works were borrowed 117 times in French by 29 borrowers compared to 110 times in English by 50 borrowers; Voltaire’s 268 times in French by 82 borrowers compared to 195 times in English by 59 borrowers.⁴⁴ In the case of Rousseau, the most borrowed volume of the French edition of his works was volume three, which contained the first book of his 1761 novel *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*. Table 1 illustrates the popularity of the novel with those borrowing his work in French.

Contents	Volume number	Frequency of borrowing	Number of borrowers
<i>Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse</i> , book 1	Volume 3	12	9
<i>Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse</i> , books 2 and 3	Volume 4	9	8
<i>Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse</i> , book 4 and 5	Volume 5	8	7
<i>Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse</i> , book 5 and 6	Volume 6	8	7
<i>Du contrat social</i>	Volume 2	6	6

Table 1: Most borrowed volumes of Rousseau’s *Collection complète*

Society Library readers paid considerable attention to Rousseau’s novel and works such as the *Emile* and paid less attention to his works of political philosophy. The library held two English translations of the novel, a 1784 *Eloisa* borrowed 133 times by 42 borrowers, as well as a 1796 *Julia*, borrowed 39 times by 11 unique borrowers. *Emilius; or, A treatise of education* was borrowed 78 times by 32 readers; whereas the standalone English edition of the *Social Contract* attracted only seven readers. The top five volumes borrowed from Voltaire’s *Œuvres* are listed in Table 2. It is possible that *La Henriade* was borrowed as much as it was not because of reader interest in that particular work, but rather because readers have a habit of borrowing multi-volume works sequentially, beginning with volume one.

Contents	Volume number	Frequency of borrowing	Number of borrowers
<i>Esprit des nations</i> , book 1	Volume 10	19	15
<i>La Henriade</i>	Volume 1	18	16
<i>Esprit des nations</i> , book 2	Volume 11	15	12
<i>Romans et contes philosophiques</i>	Volume 36	14	14
<i>Siècle de Louis XIV</i>	Volume 30	13	11

Table 2: Most borrowed volumes of Voltaire's *Œuvres*

As a comparison point, the library's most relevant single titles of Voltaire in English were: *An essay on universal history, The manners and spirit of nations, from the reign of Charlemagne, to the age of Lewis XIV*, borrowed 30 times by 14 borrowers; *Candidus*, borrowed 25 times by 25 borrowers, and *The age of Lewis XIV*, borrowed 83 times by 44 borrowers.

The reputation of Voltaire and Rousseau was such that demand to read these works in the original French was relatively robust, even in the case of the primarily anglophone readers at the NYSL. Rousseau and Voltaire would have been familiar to many NYSL readers—readers of history, politics, and even novels. Their works were often cited as the inspiration for the French Revolution, particularly by Edmund Burke, but also by many lesser-known conservative, anti-Jacobin writers and novelists.⁴⁵ Society Library readers would have been well-versed in this anti-Rousseau, anti-Voltaire, anti-philosophical, anti-French language, given the availability of texts such as the abbé Barruel's *Memoirs illustrating the history of Jacobism* and Charlotte Biggs's *A residence in France during the years 1792, 1793, 1794, and 1795*, as well as novels such as Charles Lucas's *Infernal Quixote* and Jane West's *A Gossip's Story* and *A Tale of the Times*. This controversy did not dim the appeal of the original Rousseau and Voltaire to many Society Library readers, as noted above.

Who was reading Rousseau and Voltaire in the original French? Voltaire's readers were primarily male. One prominent reader of Voltaire was Aaron Burr who borrowed multiples volumes of Voltaire's *Œuvres* during April and May 1790, a time period that coincided with his term as New York State

Attorney General. In the earlier charging ledger, the librarian sometimes recorded who came in person to borrow a book. On April 14, 1790, it is noted that Burr himself borrowed a volume of Voltaire. Matthew Clarkson also read Voltaire in French during the summer of 1790, while he served his term in the New York State Assembly. Clarkson was also one of Rousseau's more notable readers. Rousseau's and Voltaire's French editions had only 13 readers in common—one of these was Clarkson, another was Nancy Ivers. One of Rousseau's more enthusiastic readers, Andrew Smith, borrowed both volumes of the English edition of Rousseau's *Confessions* in February 1802. Beginning on February 23, 1802, he then borrowed Rousseau's *Collection complète* sequentially, ending with volume 24 on January 31, 1804. During this period, he checked out few other works, only Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* and Helen Maria Williams's *Julia*, both at about the same time as he borrowed the volumes that held *Julie ou la nouvelle Héloïse*. Voltaire's and Rousseau's works in French remained popular throughout the period covered by both charging ledgers, even as public perceptions of the French Revolution and Franco-American relations evolved.

The library's bilingual French-English dictionaries and French grammars were essential to many of the NYSL's readers who wanted to read in French. The Society Library's founders would likely have read Latin, and possibly other languages, but by the time the 1790s arrived, the NYSL had acquired a significant amount of books that abridge, translate, supplement, and excerpt for readers, all books to help a growing reading public read well.⁴⁶ In addition to the foreign language reference material, the Society Library held copies of Joseph Priestley's *Grammar* (1768 edition), Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle Lettres*, individual volumes of which were borrowed 86 times by 43 Society Library readers, and Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, borrowed 59 times by 27 readers. In the 1789 catalogue, we see citations for works that would support reading in other foreign languages in the collection, such as Ainsworth's Latin and English Dictionary, Hickbard's Hebrew grammar (one of four or five in the 1789 catalogue), John Mair's *Introduction to Latin Syntax*, and Hottinger's *Grammar of the four languages*—the Hebrew, Chaldaic, Syriac and Arabic. The 1792 catalogue continuation includes Baretti's Spanish and English dictionary (later, also an Italian-English dictionary from Baretti, a well-known London-based lexicographer), Transtagano's Portuguese and English dictionary, and in the 1793 catalogue,

a dictionary of Dutch, English, and French in two volumes, as well as a copy of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*. It is perhaps important to note here that at the time, the Society Library was the lending library for King's College, which perhaps explains the amount of support for learning Hebrew and other biblical languages. Certainly, though, the languages represented by the dictionaries here would have supported a wide range of Atlantic world endeavours, whether they were mercantile or intellectual.⁴⁷

The Society Library held copies of both Abel Boyer's (lexicographer and translator, 1667–1729) and Louis Chambaud's (d. 1776) French-English dictionaries, as well as a copy of Boyer's *The complete French master*.⁴⁸ Boyer's dictionary (1699) and his grammars (1699 and 1719) were widely circulated as tools for learning French throughout the eighteenth century.⁴⁹ In addition to reference books, the Library held several volumes that may have been used for instruction in French, a *Recueil choisi de traits historiques, avec la signification des mots en anglais au bas de chaque page* and *Petite bibliothèque amusante ou recueil de pièces choisies*. These works would have contained light pieces that may have been easier to read in the original French than longer form works. Robert Benson, likely a member of the Purchasing committee, bought a second copy of Boyer's dictionary for the library on May 18, 1805, so it certainly seems as though the book was well used. Both dictionaries circulated in addition to possibly being used in the library; sometimes they were taken out of the library for a day or two, sometimes a month, with the longest borrowing period being from April to December 1800, by Alexander Hosack, a physician. The household of Maria Livingston and Nicholas de la Plaine (a math faculty member at Columbia) borrowed Boyer's dictionary for about two-and-a-half weeks in March 1800, after which they immediately borrowed Antoine Laurent Lavoisier's *Traité élémentaire de chimie: présenté dans un ordre nouveau et d'après les découvertes modernes*. Boyer's dictionary was clearly borrowed here as an aid to reading an of-the-moment scientific treatise.

Dictionary use helps to shed light on Nancy Ivers, a frequent library borrower between August 9, 1799 and December 28, 1805, whose record shows a sustained intellectual engagement with works in French. As is the case for many of the NYSL's women readers, it is difficult to learn much about Nancy's life beyond the basic biographical details. Born about 1787, she was the daughter of Hezekiah Beach Ivers (1749–1795). Though Hezekiah Ivers

was born in Connecticut, he had moved to New York City by 1774, when his marriage to Mary Arden is attested in the New York City Marriage Index. It is likely that Hezekiah's brother, Thomas, is the Thomas Ivers listed in the 1800 census as head of a 14-person household (five slaves, five adults over 16, and four children under the age of 16). In the *Longworth's American almanack, New-York register, and city directory* for the year 1800, a Thomas Ivers and a William Ivers—likely another brother—are both listed as rope makers.

Hezekiah Ivers was himself a member of the Society Library. It's likely that another member of his household used his account, given that it continued to be used after his death from yellow fever in 1795.⁵⁰ Transferring a share in the Society Library to a family member was a common practice, so it is unsurprising that the account remained open. Hezekiah—or a family member using his account—borrowed 15 works between October 1 and May 4, 1792. These included some of the library's most popular books: Charlotte Palmer's *Female Stability*, Jane Purbeck's *Honoraria Somerville*, and Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*. All of the works borrowed were novels, with the exception of one travel narrative, *An interesting narrative of the travels of James Bruce, Esq. into Abyssinia, to discover the source of the Nile*. Given the biographical evidence, it would seem that the Iverses were a reading family—Nancy's uncle Thomas, or perhaps her cousin, his son, also Thomas, was a Society Library subscriber as well. Nancy began borrowing works from the library in August 1799 when she was about 12 years old. At first, the two accounts were used in tandem; one account was used to borrow volume one of a work, and the other volume two, for example. Novels were overwhelmingly the types of works borrowed between 1799–1805 by both the Hezekiah and Nancy accounts. However, there is evidence that Nancy Ivers also sought out other, perhaps more intellectually challenging reading. She passed the months of July and August 1800 borrowing Buffon's *Birds* and his *Beasts*, spending about a day with each of the volumes that make up those two works. In March 1802, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* was checked out for 10 days on Hezekiah's account.

The Nancy Ivers borrowing record shows a sustained interest in reading works in French. Nancy would have likely learned French through private or small group tutoring sessions, or at one of the academies for ladies often advertised in newspapers at the time.⁵¹ Nancy plunged directly into reading

in French when she got her own account, borrowing one volume of the library's edition of *Lettres de Ninon de l'Enclos au marquis de Sévigné* under her own name and another with Hezekiah's account. In early 1803, Nancy Ivers read Hester Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*. First published in 1773, Chapone's *Letters* was a guide for young women seeking to develop intellectually. Eve Tavor Bannet notes, "Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* rapidly became a transatlantic best-seller: her book saw fifteen London editions, as well as five American, five Irish and four Scottish editions before 1800."⁵² Chapone's work encouraged young women to learn and read in French:

Dancing and the knowledge of the French tongue are now so universal that they cannot be dispensed with in the education of a gentlewoman; and indeed they are both useful as well as ornamental; the first, by forming and strengthening the body; the second by opening a large field of entertainment and improvement for the mind. I believe there are more agreeable books of female literature in French than in any other language; and, as they are not less commonly talked of than English books, you must often feel mortified in company if you are too ignorant to read them.⁵³

Chapone suggests an ambitious course of reading for her pupils, encouraging them to read Charles Rollins's *Histoire ancienne*, as well as Vertot's *Histoire romaine*, Crévier, and Voltaire's *Siècle de Louis XIV*.

Taking Chapone's advice to heart, Nancy Ivers then borrowed the library's English edition of Rollins, reading through volumes one and two during March and April 1803. She returned to Rollins in June 1803, reading through volumes four through eight in a six-month period. Then, as prescribed by Chapone, she began to read in French more widely and more often. She returned again to the letters of the Ninon de l'Enclos and began to borrow what is transcribed in the ledger as "Boyer's French Grammar," which could be either Boyer's dictionary or his *New French Master*, which contains facing translations for practice reading in French and dialogues to help those learning to speak French. Nancy regularly borrowed this book alongside her other reading, beginning in 1804, when her account seems to have been combined with the Hezekiah account. From early 1804 on, she checked out two books at once. For nearly a year, Boyer's work remained the second book

borrowed on her account, implying that she made a concerted effort to improve her reading skills in French. Nancy Ivers's plan for intellectual improvement belies Brown's claim that women read only to prepare themselves to be wives and mothers.

In 1805, she began reading even more regularly in French, borrowing over a period of two months the four volumes of Rousseau's *Collection complète* that contain *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*. Like several of her fellow library members, she was drawn to the first book of the novel, which is the story of the courtship between Julie and St. Preux, Julie's pregnancy and miscarriage, and the two lovers' separation. She also read Jacques Delille's anti-Revolutionary poem, *Le Malheur et la pitié* in French, the library's edition of which contains helpful endnotes which explain the poem's references, the theatre of Florian and Destouches, and the proto-romanticism of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Guillard de Beaurieu. Nancy's broadening engagement with text in French demonstrates the extent to which the Society Library's readers connected with French texts, language, and ideas. Her library account was used to read many novels—as is the case of that of her fellow library patrons—but it also reflects an attempt to complete a course of self-education of which the mastery of the French language is an essential component. Nancy's study of French has an ending befitting a romantic comedy. In 1810, five years after the record of her borrowing ends, she married Anthony John Charles Gerard, a native Frenchman who emigrated to the US in 1808 and became a naturalized citizen of the United States in that same year.

Nancy Ivers was not an unusual reader, though she was an interesting one. Most readers' records reflected a blend of reading for pleasure and reading as an intellectual pursuit. John Rodman (1775–1847) was one reader whose reading pattern reflects an ongoing engagement with the French language, as well as French literature and politics. Unlike Nancy Ivers, John Rodman's public life and career provides a framework through which to interpret his reading program at the library. Rodman, whom the City Readers database identifies as a politician and lawyer, was also a merchant actively engaged with French politics. He married his wife, Harriet Fenno Rodman, in 1801; she died in 1808. Rodman translated and published *The Commercial Code of France* and Montgaillard's *Situation of England in 1811*. He received a letter in 1812 from Thomas Jefferson thanking him for a copy of the latter.⁵⁴ Rodman was

known for his facility with the French language. An 1886 genealogy of the Rodman family notes:

He was a thorough master of the French language, an accomplishment rare in those days, and in 1814 published a translation of the *Commercial Code of France*, which has been pronounced a *magnum opus* by a leading member of the New York bar of the present day, a work which has reflected great credit upon him as a lawyer and a scholar.⁵⁵

His borrowing record at the Society Library dates from November 1799 to August 1804. Though Rodman's need to read French may have been professional, the French-language books he borrowed seem to show someone who read the language for pleasure and, like many readers and translators, used dictionaries to supplement his understanding of the language.

History and politics dominated Rodman's reading, though novels such as Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive*, Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*, and Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* appear in his borrowing record by 1804. Rodman read about French current events in English, borrowing James Thomson's *The Rise, progress, and consequences of the new opinions and principles* for several days in April 1800, abbé Barruel's *Memoirs illustrating the history of Jacobism* (volumes one and two) shortly thereafter, John Moore's *A view of the causes and progress of the French revolution*, and Charlotte Biggs's *A residence in France during the years 1792, 1793, 1794, and 1795*. In August–September 1800, likely not long before his daughter was born in 1801, Rodman (or perhaps his wife) spent a month reading the library's English-language copy of Rousseau's *Emilius; or a treatise of education*, which he perhaps considered a practical treatise on the art of raising a child. Just after that, Rodman borrowed volumes one through four of the library's *Théâtre de Florian*, keeping the volumes for about three weeks. Rodman then borrowed Chambaud's dictionary for five weeks, after which he borrowed volumes 18, 20, and 21 of the *Œuvres de Voltaire*, likely the most intellectually complex material that Rodman read in French. Rodman's reading reflected the composition of his household—a range of materials, some of them entertaining with appeal for many groups of people, others more difficult. Later in his life, Rodman would actively promote French language learning to his only daughter, Anna Eliza. On September 29, 1814, Rodman wrote to his daughter:

I send you by the steamboat some more French books, namely, five volumes of *Les Lettres de Madame de Sévigné*, and a volume of *Leçons de Littérature et de Moral*. The former are very celebrated for the ease and elegance of style in which they are written. They are considered as the best models of epistolary writing extant. I advise you to read them with attention, and when you have finished these volumes I will send you the other five. The other book contains elegant extracts in prose and is worth reading for the matter as well as the style.⁵⁶

At the time of this letter, Anna Eliza Rodman would have been approximately the same age as Nancy Ivers when she began borrowing books at the NYSL. Her father's book recommendations, however, adhere to a more conventional list of reading in French for young women. Rodman's engagement with the French language, which we can retrace through his borrowing, is an interest he also seeks to pass down to his daughter. Close attention to Rodman's French reading—and that of his household—give us a sense of the types of French books that appealed to upper-class readers during the period.

Though French immigration to New York City was robust in the late eighteenth century, the Society Library remained a primarily anglophone library. For most readers, borrowing the library's books in French was a way to build their French language skills, rather than a sign of mastery. Only one reader, John Augustus Soulier, borrowed primarily in French; his borrowing records date from February 9, 1803 to May 1, 1804. Soulier was a partner in the dry goods firm of Mantin & Soulier, located at 76 Williams Street. Mantin & Soulier begin to advertise their merchandise in the July 16, 1800 edition of the *Mercantile Advertiser*, listing for sale fabric, sewing silk, mittens, stockings, as well as French shirting linen, French sheeting, and a French linen called brin. Soulier—or members of his family—were likely merchants in Haiti prior to and during the Revolution. The *Moniteur Général de la Partie Française de Saint-Domingue* of February 16, 1793 mentions “Dutilh et Soulier, négogians en cette ville [Cap-Français], qui ont une maison de commerce à Philadelphia, sous la raison d’Etienne Dutilh et Wachsmouth.”⁵⁷ In the summer of 1802, the *New-York Price-Current* listed Mantin & Soulier as active importers of coffee from Haiti, and brandy, wine, and prunes from Bordeaux. Like the Ivers family, Soulier was also a slave holder—an extremely common phenomenon in early nineteenth-century New York City; he had likely

brought at least one slave with him from Haiti.⁵⁸ From December 28 to March 6, 1802, the firm advertised a 10-dollar reward for a runaway slave in the *American Citizen*:

Ran away on Saturday the 19th instant, from the subscribers, a French negro man named Sannon, about 20 years old, is a likely looking lad, speaks tolerable good English, has a number of pimples on his face, 5 feet 6 inches high; has on a pair of trousers, and jacket of a dark mixt coating, drab lion skin great coat, the buttons being covered with gold tissue. He stole from the subscribers a French gold repeating watch, with a gold chain and seal. Also another plain gold watch, with a black seal, tied with a silk string. 20 dollars will be given to any person or persons that will secure the watch or 30 dols. for the said Runaway and property so that his masters may get him again.⁵⁹

The reward price of both Soulier's slave and watch corresponds to the 30-dollar price for a share in the library, which was the listed rate in the early nineteenth century.⁶⁰ By the late fall of 1802, Mantin & Soulier decided to close its doors, advertising to its customers: "they will sell the remainder of their Stock, both Wholesale and Retail, at the first cost, and even under, rather than dispose of it at Auction."⁶¹ In the *Mercantile Advertiser* of July 2, 1804, John Augustus Soulier makes public that he will be returning to Europe and that anyone who owes money to the firm of Mantin & Soulier should give it to Joseph Thebaud, another merchant and long-standing importer of goods from France.⁶²

During the period when he was working to close what was likely a failed mercantile endeavour, Soulier was also borrowing fiction and other light reading from the NYSL. Like Nancy Ivers, John Soulier borrowed *Les Lettres de Ninon de L'Enclos*—twice, in both February and March 1803. This work was followed up with a series of similar works: the library's 1776 four-volume edition of Rétif de la Bretonne's *Paysan perverti*, which he took out for three days in the summer of 1803 and Laclos's *Les liaisons dangereuses*, which he kept for a week. These works were followed by Jean de la Fontaine's *Contes et Nouvelles*, *Les Journées amusantes*, by Madeleine-Angélique de Gomez, and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Vœux d'un solitaire*. He spent a significant amount of time reading the novels of Marie-Jeanne de Riccoboni, checking out

volumes one through six of her *Œuvres complètes* from August 27 to November 15, 1803. After he returned these first six volumes, he paid an overdue fine and then checked out volumes one and two again, as well as volumes seven through nine, until December 29, 1803. Soulier's only foray into history and Enlightenment philosophy came during the two-and-a-half-month period when he borrowed volumes 15 and 16 of the library's edition of Voltaire, which contained the *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*. Soulier could have borrowed at least half of these works from the circulating library of Caritat; Caritat listed Riccoboni, Laclos, Bretonne, and a 70-volume collection of Voltaire in his *Catalogue des livres français*. In that case, why would he choose to subscribe to the NYSL for just over a year—a very brief borrowing period? One reason might be that Soulier was able to take advantage of the connections he made at the NYSL to facilitate the closing of his business. Joining the NYSL connected Soulier to a set of fellow readers of means who would have had to the funds to buy out his stocks of imported materials. Soulier provides an example of one reader whose participation in the library was deeply connected to the Haiti Revolution and other shifts in Caribbean and Franco-American politics and trade during the 1790s. Even though he turned to the library's collection mainly for pleasure reading, he also read Voltaire. This blend of light reading and more intellectual works characterized the tastes of many readers at the NYSL; what made Soulier an atypical reader was his fluency in French.

Ivers, Rodman, and Soulier are just a few of the many NYSL subscribers who borrowed books in French. Yet they are cases—a young, female reader seeking intellectual engagement; a lawyer learning to read French for political and professional purposes; a French slaveholder fleeing the revolution in Saint Domingue—that illustrate the range of functions that the library's French language books served. Their borrowing patterns reflect both the broader reading patterns traceable through the library's circulating records and the individual idiosyncrasies linked to their own biographies and intellectual goals. Like many of their fellow borrowers, all three of these readers read Rousseau or Voltaire in French, a trend which is reflected in a quantitative analysis of the borrowing records for these authors. Two of them made use of the library's reference works to support their reading practices and likely to improve their French. Taken individually, these three readers complicate a cohesive notion of engagement with French books via the

NYSL, though the idea of French as a language for the elite persists. Much remains to be done to elucidate the complex relationship between NYSL readers, French texts, and French authors; doing so will provide scholars with increased insight into the intersection of American readers and French intellectual and political culture.

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NOTES

¹ For further context on Damours’ novel and its relation to the libertine tradition, see Colette Cazenobe, “De L’enclos à Laclos: Une Étape vers *Les Liaisons dangereuses*,” *Revue d’Histoire Littéraire de la France* 85, no. 2 (1985): 217–33, and Gabrielle Verdier, “Libertine, Philanthropist, Revolutionary: Ninon’s Metamorphoses in the Age of the Enlightenment,” in *Libertinage and the Art of Writing, II*, ed. David Rubin (New York: AMS, 1992), 4.

² During the period covered by the second charging ledger, the library owned a translated version of Sévigné’s letters in seven volumes, published in London by Sewell in 1801. Readers did not begin borrowing it until April 1804, though it was checked out frequently thereafter. Currently, the NYSL owns an eight-volume edition of Sévigné in French: *Recueil des lettres de madame la marquise de Sévigné, à madame la comtesse de Grignan, sa fille* (Paris: Compagnie des libraires, 1774). It is not clear when this edition was acquired, as it is not listed in the 1813, 1838, or 1850 catalogues.

³ Verdier, “Libertine,” 114.

⁴ For information on censorship practices in early subscription libraries, see K.A. Manley, “Jeremy Bentham has been Banned: Contention and Censorship in Private Subscription Libraries before 1825,” *Library & Information History* 29, no. 3 (September 2013): 170–81.

⁵ City Readers. New York Society Library. <http://cityreaders.nysoclib.org/About/Index>. I would like to acknowledge Erin Schreiner, formerly special collections librarian at the NYSL and currently executive director of the Bibliographical Society of America, for her commitment to this project.

⁶ Francois Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees Who Shaped a Nation* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2014), 406.

⁷ Mike Wallace and Edwin G. Burrows, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 314.

⁸ Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

⁹ Nathalie Caron and Naomi Wulf, “Les Lumières américaines : continuités et renouveau,” *Transatlantica. Revue d'études américaines. American Studies Journal*, no. 2 (December 27, 2009), <http://journals.openedition.org/transatlantica/4566>. This article was translated as, “American Enlightenments: Continuity and Renewal,” *The Journal of American History* 99, no. 4 (2013): 1072–91, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jas587>.

¹⁰ Courtney Chatellier, “The French Revolution in Early American Literature, 1789–1815: Translations, Interpretations, Refractions” (PhD Dissertation, Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2018).

¹¹ Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French*, 102.

¹² Often called associational libraries, subscription libraries were not public in our twenty-first-century sense of the term. Prominent citizens in a given city or town would come together to found the library, set the price of a share and the terms of dues and membership, and set about building a collection of books, guided by the implicit value of bringing increased learning to their community. For the price of a share, members could have access to an expansive library beyond what most of them could afford to spend on book purchases. Subscription libraries are often discussed alongside circulating libraries, which grew in popularity in the later decades of the eighteenth-century. The latter, which were often run by booksellers, charged only a modest per-title fee to borrow a book, and often appealed to a different type of reader. See James Green, “Subscription Libraries and Commercial Libraries in Colonial Philadelphia and New York,” in *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States*, eds. Thomas Augst and Kenneth Carpenter (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 53–71. For an extensive listing of early American subscription libraries, see James Raven, “Social Libraries and Library Societies in Eighteenth-Century North America,” in *Institutions of Reading*, 24–52. As a comparison point, Mark Towsey notes that in Scotland, “At least 15 subscription libraries were founded before 1790, and a further 37 dated to the 1790s.” See *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and Their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750–1820* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010), 58.

¹³ A short history of the NYSL, as well as a bibliography of the library’s history, can be found on the library’s website at <https://www.nysoclib.org/about/history-library>. For more on the political context of the library’s founding, see Tom Glynn, *Reading Publics: New York City’s Public Libraries, 1754–1911* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

¹⁴ On the structure and history of early subscription libraries in both the British and American contexts, see David Allen, “Politeness and the Politics of Culture: An Intellectual History of the Eighteenth-Century Subscription Library.” *Library & Information History* 29, no. 3 (2013), 159–69.

¹⁵ This was not true for all subscription libraries, though as Towsey and others have noted, it often was possible for women to read via a male relative's account, or to inherit the use of a share after the death of a male relative.

¹⁶ See the NYSL's page on its women readers: <https://cityreaders.nysoclib.org/Gallery/60>.

¹⁷ Her husband Richard was a grandson of early New York intellectual and politician, Cadwallader Colden. See John M. Dixon, *The Enlightenment of Cadwallader Colden: Empire, Science, and Intellectual Culture in British New York* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2016).

¹⁸ For more on the reopening of the library, see Rob Koehler, "Challenging Institutional Ambitions: The Practice of Book Exchanges at the New York Society Library, 1789–1795," in *Before the Public Library: Reading, Community, and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850*, eds. Mark Towsey and Kyle B. Roberts (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2018), 201–217.

¹⁹ Richard D. Brown, "The Revolution's Legacy for the History of the Book," in *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790–1840*, eds. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 58–74. I would take issue with Brown's statement that women read only as mothers to citizens.

²⁰ James Green, "The Rise of Book Publishing," in *An Extensive Republic*, eds. Gross and Kelley, 75–127. In the early period of the library's history, importing books from London was a significant challenge. Though few letters demonstrating the NYSL's transactions with its London booksellers survive, it is clear that it was difficult for the early Trustees to negotiate with their London agents and receive the books they wanted. James Raven uses the more complete records of the Charleston Society Library to demonstrate this in *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748–1811*. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002).

²¹ Green, "Subscription Libraries," 53. In the case of the NYSL, the primary means of attracting more readers meant allowing them to borrow multi-volume works in a complete set. "If the members of this Society were allowed to take out from the Library sets of books instead of a single volume at a time, it would not only be a great conveniency [sic] to the present members but would also be great inducement for other persons to become members of the Society and thereby increase its funds." Readers could now take out one folio, one quarto, three octavo volumes, or six 12mo volumes at a time "relating to the same subject on each share he or she may hold in the Library." New York Society Library Archive, Trustee Minutes, 7 May 1800.

²² More information about Caritat and his circulating library can be found in George Gates Raddin, *An Early New York Library of Fiction: With a Checklist of the Fiction in H. Caritat's Circulating Library, No. 1 City Hotel, Broadway, New York, 1804* (Wilson, 1940). <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b3939043>.

²³ City Readers. New York Society Library. <http://cityreaders.nysoclib.org/>.

²⁴ Christine Pawley, "Seeking 'Significance': Actual Readers, Specific Reading Communities," *Book History* 5, no. 1 (2002): 145. <https://doi.org/10.1353/bh.2002.0013>.

²⁵ Matthew Clarkson's portrait by Gilbert Stuart can be viewed online: Matthew Clarkson, ca. 1794. Metropolitan Museum of Art. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/12675>.

²⁶ Frank Felenstein and James J. Connolly, *What Middletown Read: Print Culture in an American Small City* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 3.

²⁷ Jan Fergus, *Provincial Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁸ Mark Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*.

²⁹ Laura Miller, *Reading Popular Newtonianism: Print, the Principia, and the Dissemination of Newtonian Science* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2018).

³⁰ Patrick Spedding, "Eliza Haywood's Eighteenth-Century Readers in Pennsylvania and New York," *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 56 (2014): 69–93.

³¹ Sean D. Moore, *Slavery and the Making of Early American Libraries: British Literature, Political Thought, and the Transatlantic Book Trade, 1731–1814* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

³² On general household use of borrowed books, see the chapter "New Members and the Desire for Grandeur" in Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers*, 69–71.

³³ Christina Lupton, *Reading and the Making of Time in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 16.

³⁴ Jane Purbeck, *Honoraria Somerville: A Novel. In Four Volumes* (London: Printed for G. G. J. and J. Robinson, Pater-Noster-Row, 1789). Borrowing statistics are given by number of times volumes are taken out as well as by the number of readers who borrowed each work, following Towsey's practice, of which he notes, "Here we see the value of looking not only at overall borrowings of each title, but also at the number of individuals who withdrew a title—a seemingly simple refinement of the borrowing statistics, but one with great significance when we consider that Hume's History came in six or eight volumes and Henry's in six." Towsey *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment*, 72. For additional approaches to borrowing metrics, see Spedding, "Eliza Haywood."

³⁵ In the past, this reading data was even more difficult to analyze. For example, see Ronald J. Zbornay's description of his methodology for his 1993 study *A Fictive People: Antebellum Economic Development and the American Reading Public* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 159. He writes, "The portion of the data selected for analysis here focuses on two three-year periods: 1847 through 1849 and 1854 through 1856, representing the temporal divisions of the charge ledgers themselves. The number of charges in the six chosen years still amounted to about three hundred thousand transactions; a sampling technique that recorded only every tenth patron, and the records of all women patrons, made the data more manageable."

³⁶ City Readers. New York Society Library. <http://cityreaders.nysoclib.org/About/Index>.

³⁷ Ibid. <http://cityreaders.nysoclib.org/Gallery/75>.

³⁸ The Leeds Library, for example, was connected to a separate Foreign Circulating Library. See Alice Hamilton, “The Leeds Foreign Circulating-Library, c. 1779–1814,” in “*A very good public library*”: *Early Years of the Leeds Library*, eds. Geoffrey Forster et al. (Wylam, UK: Allenholme Press, 2001), 111–71.

³⁹ For more on this practice, see Koehler, “Challenging Institutional Ambitions.”

⁴⁰ New York Society Library Archives, Bookseller and Acquisition Records, 1770–1799.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² The NYSL cites the editions as *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissemens et du commerce des européens dans les deux Indes : en sept tomes* (Paris: Chez Lacombe, 1778) and *Oeuvres de M. l'abbé Raynal* (Geneva: Chez. J. L. Pellet, 1784).

⁴³ Readers of Raynal in French were George Pollock, Thomas B. Altwood, Matthew Clarkson, Leffert Lefferts Jr., John Jordan Morgan, Henry Walton, and Charles Buxton.

⁴⁴ These editions are best established as *Collection complète des oeuvres de J. J. Rousseau* (Geneva: 1782); *The works of J. J. Rousseau. Translated from the French. In ten volumes* (Edinburgh: Printed for J. Bell, J. Dickson, and C. Elliot, 1773–1774); *Oeuvres de Monsieur de V**** (Neufchâtel: Charles-Joseph Panckoucke, 1772); and *The works of M. de Voltaire, translated from the French: with notes, historical and critical / by T. Smollet, M.D., T. Francklin, M.A. and others* (1776). The French multi-volume edition of Voltaire may be in part from the Panckoucke edition, but it also seems to be a collection of volumes from multiple sources, rebound by the NYSL as a complete set. Some of the library’s volumes are still in the original binding, with the volume number on the spine. This was likely the volume number used when the transactions were recorded in the charging ledgers; thus, these are the volume numbers used to determine which works of Voltaire readers actually borrowed.

⁴⁵ See M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴⁶ See Eve Tavor Bannet, *Eighteenth-Century Manners of Reading: Print Culture and Popular Instruction in the Anglophone Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁴⁷ As an interesting point of comparison, Alice Hamilton notes in her study of the Leeds Foreign Circulating Library, “On an individual level it is impossible to determine categorically why given member chose to read in the library. However, it seems improbable that anyone joining planned to learn foreign languages for the first time, as there is a surprising absence of dual-language (English to another language) books, and the library contained very few grammars or dictionaries” (119).

⁴⁸ The NYSL owned at least one copy of Boyer’s French-English dictionary, as well as *The New French Master: for ladies and gentlemen; containing, I. A new methodical French grammar. II. A well digested and copious Vocabulary. III. Familiar Phrases and Dialogues on all Manner of Subjects. IV. Dialogues of Wit and Humour. V. A Taste of the French Poetry. VI. A Collection of French Songs. VII. A Collection of Choice Proverbs, both French and English. VIII. A catalogue of the most approved French books, recommended as proper in fitting up a Lady’s or a Gentleman’s Library. For The Use Of His Highness William, Sometime Duke Of Gloucester. By Mr. Abel Boyer, Author Of The Royal Dictionary, French And English.*

⁴⁹ For additional information about the dictionaries of Boyer and Chambaud, see Monique C. Cormier, “Fragments of History Prior to Two Editions of the Dictionary by Lewis Chambaud, a Rival of Abel Boyer,” *International Journal of Lexicography* 23, no. 2 (2010): 173–87, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijl/ecq012>.

⁵⁰ *Names of persons who have died in New-York of the yellow fever, from the 29th of July, to the beginning of November, 1795*. (New York, NY: November 7, 1795), 15. *Early American Imprints*. https://docs-newsbank-com.ezproxy.gc.cuny.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EAIX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=0F3014AFA2108CF0&svc_dat=Evans:caidoc&req_dat=0D0CB5FCC016CE55

⁵¹ One example, among many, reads, “French Language Taught grammatically by J. Martin, a native of Paris (lately from Europe). Fifteen years practice in instructing persons of both sexes in the elementary branches of Science and the rudiments of Speech, in the French language, encourages Mr. Martin to say with confidence that his method is easy and pleasant; by varying and adopting his lessons to the capacity of the learner, the study becomes an amusement instead of a task, and the pupil acquires, imperceptibly, a familiarity in reading, writing, and speaking the French with fluency and precision. Ladies and gentlemen will be attended at their houses, or at Boarding Schools in town or country.” *American Citizen* (New York) 2, no. 604 (23 Feb. 1802), 3. *Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers*. <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2:109C89F2599BFC08@EANX-10A08CC9AF1A3E28@2379280-10A08CCA10BBBCB8@2-10A08CCBA0454E88@Advertisement>.

⁵² Bannet, *Eighteenth-Century Manners of Reading*, 128.

⁵³ Hester Chapone, *Letters on the improvement of the mind* (London, 1773), 172.

⁵⁴ Founders Online. Thomas Jefferson to John Rodman, 25 April 1812. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-04-02-0552>

⁵⁵ Charles Henry Jones, *Genealogy of the Rodman Family, 1620 to 1886*. (Philadelphia: Printed by Allen, Lane & Scott, 1886), 54. North America, Family Histories, 1500–2000 [database online]. Provo, UT, USA: [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) Operations, Inc., 2016.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 54

⁵⁷ *Moniteur General de la Partie Française de Saint-Domingue* (Cap-Français, San Domingue; February 16, 1793). *Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers*. <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2:145FA13F7B4D7648@EANX-14F4538AEEC86508@2375987-14F4512C03191B28@4-14F4512C03191B28@>.

⁵⁸ Burrows and Wallace note that by the 1790s, “slavery had been solidly reestablished in New York.” They estimate that “two-thirds of merchants kept slaves, mostly for use as domestic servants—cooks, butlers, gardeners, stable hands, and the like” (286).

⁵⁹ *American Citizen* (New York) 2, no. 556 (December 29, 1801). *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
<https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2:109C89F2599BFC08@EANX-10A08C47F9EF8330@2379224-10A08C485B030230@2-10A08C498479B8B0@>.

⁶⁰ The 1813 catalogue makes note of this price and a subsequent increase: “As the price, however, has for some time past stood at thirty dollars, with an annual payment of two dollars and fifty cents, the trustees have thought it advisable to fix the price for the present, for new shares, at forty dollars, with the same annual payment as before.” See *A Catalogue of the books belonging to the New-York Society Library; together with the charter and by-laws of the same*. (New York, NY: C. S. Van Winkle, 1813), 6–7.

⁶¹ *Mercantile Advertiser* (New York? December 1, 1802). *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
<https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/readex/doc?p=EANX&docref=image/v2:10CCB11A7B28F178@EANX-10CF6DEB03DEA960@2379561-10CF6DEB4B09BAB8@1-10CF6DEDEFEFE960@>.

⁶² *Ibid.*, July 2, 1804. *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*.
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