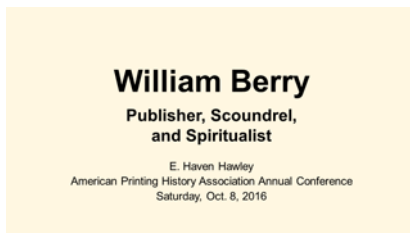


“William Berry: Publisher, Scoundrel, Spiritualist”
E. Haven Hawley

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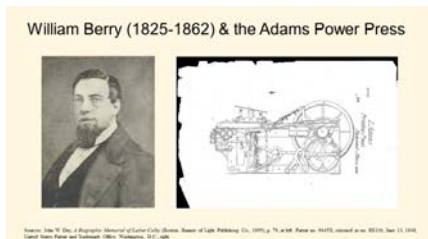
E. Haven Hawley is chair of Special and Area Studies Collections at the University of Florida. The author thanks Heather Smedberg for reading the paper at the conference. This paper provides an abstract of a book-length manuscript in progress. A portion of this paper was expanded and revised significantly for publication. [See: E. Haven Hawley. “William Berry: Publisher, Scoundrel, and Spiritualist.” *Printing History* 22 New Series (Summer 2017): 30-52.]



[SLIDE 1: WILLIAM BERRY, PUBLISHER, SCOUNDREL, AND SPIRITUALIST]

William Berry’s transition from publisher of *Life in Boston* to the spiritualist newspaper *Banner of Light* was years in the making. From relatively obscure origins, he found a way to scratch his name into Boston publishing history and to help establish the longest-lived journal of the Spiritualist movement in the United States. *Banner of Light* was published as a weekly from 1856 to 1906, with a monthly issue completing the run in 1907.

In this talk, I will sketch how he found a way into printing and publishing, established his partnerships, and the strategies that he pursued. He was a self-made man, and he knew how to balance risks and resources in the search for profit. He formed partnerships to fill overcome any gap blocking his success. And he shrewdly assessed social trends and power structures, reshaping his business practices and social identity to fit his environment.

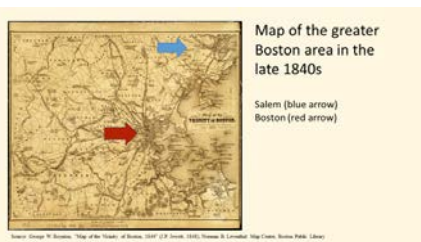


[SLIDE 2: WILLIAM BERRY & THE ADAMS POWER PRESS]

William Berry entered trades at their least respectable and most permeable boundaries. Berry’s evolving identity as a publisher, scoundrel and spiritualist presents a classic example of “pariah capitalism.” This term, first articulated by sociologist Edna Bonacich, explains how individuals from marginalized populations attempt to gain entry

to a commercial profession by performing roles that are profitable but socially undesirable. William Berry tried to bypass and co-opt the power structures of commerce in Boston, first as an exchange agent, then in printing, and finally in publishing. Berry was a “man on the make,” and he aspired to gain power and profit, regardless of the propriety of his operations.

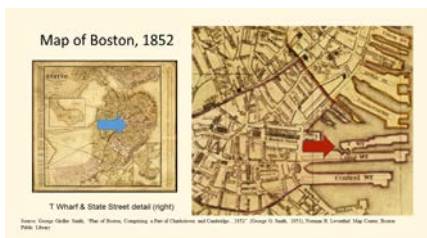
William Berry has been a chief actor through which I have sought to understand how real people put the Adams power press to use in creating a flood of 19th-century publications in the United States. The press is credited with producing the majority of books in this country for more than a half century. And yet, like William Berry, today the Adams power press is only a glimmer, despite its prevalence. My extensive search for historical machines has not produced a single surviving press. Even so, the machine itself whispers to us. An abundance of gripper marks produced by the patented Adams design can be seen in 19th-century American books and newspapers. Today I will focus on recovering the intersection of William Berry’s life and his business practices through the phases of his career.



[SLIDE 3: MAP OF THE GREATER BOSTON AREA IN THE LATE 1840s]

Tracing William Berry’s identity is a slippery task. Berry claimed to have been born in Salem, Mass., one of New England’s pre-eminent shipping centers. Salem’s harbor provided a densely commercial environment in the 1840s, with international ships arriving daily to unload their freight, take on new loads and supplies, and to resume their journeys, with many ships making stops in Boston for refitting. Salem’s children were literate, both in commerce and writing.

The city’s distinct--and disturbing--history included infamous witch trials of the late seventeenth century as well as legendary seafaring and Revolutionary heroics. Salem and other New England areas adapted their industries and role in commerce in order to remain relevant. Many young men ventured outside of their own coastal towns to seek careers rather than following in their father’s footsteps as farmers, fishermen, or small merchants. Less than an hour by rail from Salem, Boston offered positions for ambitious men with commercial skills. Boston’s booming population also provided a ready market – as well as potential anonymity for people like Berry.



[SLIDE 4: T Wharf, Long Wharf, and State Street]

William Berry became a clerk for and junior partner with Jabez Moulton Davidson at least by January of 1847. Their mercantile commission business relied upon Davidson's knowledge of transport networks and Berry's ability to keep business records. They coordinated the goods for ship cargoes, with Berry noting inventories, sales, and payments and credits. By that February, Berry's initiative provided an avenue for the younger man's advance.

The two became William Berry and Co., with Berry providing \$1,000 to establish the firm, and that sum enabling Davidson to eliminate a small tax debt. William Berry and Co. conducted business on the bustling T wharf, attached to Boston's famous Long wharf, which serviced the largest ships entering the port. The T wharf was home to a key port official and numerous commission merchants supplying groceries, sails, barrels, and other products.

As incoming ships emptied their cargoes, sailors disembarked and walked from the T and Long wharves to the bottom of State Street. Many of the sailors did not continue up State Street to the financial district and merchant's exchange. Rather, they opted to stroll eastward to Ann Street, where cheap gin dives, women without virtue, and pickpockets awaited those with shore leave and spending money.

Berry and Davidson quickly accumulated accusations of fraud for making oral and written promises of payment without actually having funds for such agreements. The account books that Berry kept provided evidence to help their defense, but Berry resisted allowing the entire records he kept to be used as evidence. Davidson appealed to the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, which in March 1848 ordered a new trial for Davidson – either using the entire account book or none of it.

Davidson shrewdly moved his office temporarily to a location where he could rub shoulders with powerful men of business and politics, and it appears that he used connections to avoid any new trial. As early as 1847, William Berry's business model included activities best shielded from the eyes of others. From Davidson, he learned how to manipulate the social aspects of Boston's legal system to avoid prosecution – and that fraudulent activity was no business to make public.



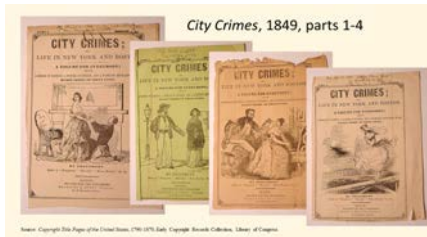
[SLIDE 5: WOODCUT BY WILLIAM BERRY]

Just months after the March 1848 ruling, William Berry turned to Boston's publishing sector for employment, and in this arena he established a career. He gained a position fashioning woodcuts for William L. Bradbury's newspaper *The Boston Blade*. William Berry carved large wood engravings that appeared just under the masthead in the three surviving June and July issues of *The Boston Blade* of 1848.

The Boston Blade continued a series of 1840s newspapers associated with Bradbury. After Bradbury became editor of the first, titled *Boston Satirist*, in 1843, he shifted the paper toward a specialty in gossip. Bradbury's publications shared scandalous gossip about lower-level Boston, thinly-veiled hints about impropriety among neighbors in outlying districts, and columns of poetry and opinion. Mechanics, working men, and seamstresses offered topics of conversation

and were presumed readers. Bradbury lampooned temperance reformers and specific police leaders, and he promoted quack doctors accused of treating sexual diseases. Such publications were largely seen as gin-room entertainment for the lower classes and instruments for blackmail, and Bradbury had more than one accusation of libel leveled against him.

By 1847, he changed the name of the paper to *The Boston Blade*. He integrated the fiction of George Thompson, an author writing under the name of Greenhorn or other names, into the paper, and he published a Greenhorn novelette in 1848. Bradbury's combination of gossip reported by locale, serialized fiction, and publication of a book in wrappers became a hallmark of William Berry's activities.



[SLIDE 6: CITY CRIMES, 1849, PARTS 1-4]

Together, William Bradbury and William Berry established *Life in Boston* as a vehicle for publication of Thompson's novels. The firm of Bradbury & Berry published *Life in Boston* starting about September 1848. Berry continued his work as an engraver during the new partnership, with his skill growing. The company copyrighted and sold two parts of *City Crimes*, a four-part work by Thompson. Berry's engravings appeared on the colorful wrappers of each part, which sold for 12-1/2 cents each.

The first wrapper for the *City Crimes* series featured a titillating cover of a parlor scene. While conveying the middle-class ideal of a gentleman proposing to his lady love, the illustration carried a sexualized twist emphasizing the erotic power women held over men. Berry signed the wood engraving on the left side, hinting that he had begun shifting his role to designing rather than just engraving an image.

Berry acquired these and other Bradbury printing assets when Berry took over control of *Life in Boston* in the winter of 1848-49. He retained the cuts and rarely used them through 1856, but they re-emerged in *Life in Boston* after Berry sold his own assets to Samuel K. Head, in preparation for embarking on a plan to publish *Banner of Light*.

After buying out Bradbury's interest, Berry teamed up with Henry Wright, a printer, and established his own production network. He made sure to bring George Thompson along into the venture. The strategy of publishing fiction in *Life in Boston* before issuing complete novels emerged as a constant in his operations.

In October 1849, Berry & Wright copyrighted Greenhorn's *Venus in Boston*, an anonymous work titled *Adventures of a Pickpocket*, and Paul de Kock's *The Evil Genius*. However, just one month after filing for copyright with Berry, Henry Wright sold his rights to all three works to Berry for just one dollar. Wright probably sought to dissociate himself from the newspaper as quickly as possible, knowing of a police investigation underway against *Life in Boston*. That investigation produced an indictment in January 1850 against Berry for conspiring to defraud and defame a Boston man in the pages of *Life in Boston*.

Their partnership did not dissolve immediately, however. Berry & Wright claimed copyright for another anonymous novel, *Julia King*, in April 1850. The title character of that

work was named after a well-known fictional prostitute. In total, William Berry filed for copyright on perhaps ten books in 1849 and 1850, claiming works penned by George Thompson or pseudonyms.



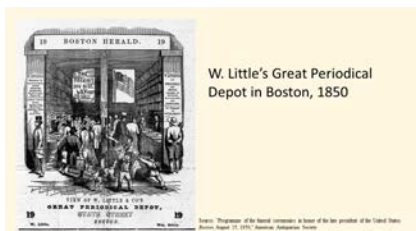
[SLIDE 7: LIFE IN BOSTON, SEPT. 1, 1849]

Berry's business strategy took advantage of the intersection of newspaper and book production. We can compare the typesetting for three works published both as installments in his newspaper and as completed books. Portions of *Venus in Boston*, *Jack Harold* and *The Road to Ruin* were printed in *Life in Boston* from 1849 to 1851. For each of these, the typography, punctuation, typos, and ratios of measurements reveal that the same setting of type was used in the newspaper and book forms. Small differences in overall measures are readily accounted for by shrinkage of paper. Fortunately, *Life in Boston* noted the practice of wetting paper for printing to help us understand that this traditional practice was still maintained by Berry during that time.

Berry cut costs in two ways. He used the *Life in Boston* setting of type, with arrangement into book pages and the addition of as little as two pages of new type, for his books. And in paying newspaper composition rates, he avoided surcharges for double-column book composition.

From *The Cost Books of Ticknor and Fields*, we can estimate the costs of book composition for long primer as 40 cents per 1,000 ems. Bourgeois was about 37 cents per 1,000 ems.

William Berry probably paid 35 cents or less per 1,000 ems for newspaper composition. Berry's typical 51-line books contained about 1,800 ems per page, or just a little less than the standard estimate of 2,000 ems per page of bourgeois in octavo format. Setting into pages, sometimes with leading adjustments or insertion of images to break columns, added a few cents per 1,000 ems. Stereotyping probably cost about half of the original composition charge, and boxes from a stereotyping firm made it easy to ship sets to New York or elsewhere, for local printing.



[SLIDE 8: W. LITTLE'S GREAT PERIODICAL DEPOT IN BOSTON, 1850]

William Berry developed two main ways of distributing his newspapers and books: the post office, which provided an outlet in every town in New England and across the country for

Life in Boston, and the *Boston Herald's* counting office, which provided access to a printing network, protection for his public profile, and probably a shipping center for the books or plates.

In the first strategy, Berry continued a trend toward postal distribution of newspapers as practiced by William L. Bradbury. By sending his newspaper to other jurisdictions, Bradbury could claim that he did not offend Boston morals and should not be prosecuted locally. He gave discounts to post masters and local reading clubs in order to encourage personnel to not reject his newspapers.

The Postal Act of 1845 sought to bar large story papers from obtaining preferential mailing rates. The law as passed created higher rates for newspapers larger than 1900 square inches. That limit of 1900 square inches approximated the technical limits of platen presses for single-impression printing during the 19th century. This effectively excluded the larger papers printed on bigger cylinder presses, as intended. It also encouraged the use of mid-level technologies and especially platen presses for any publication to be mailed cheaply.

The law also stipulated paper be mailed directly from manufacturers, rather than counting houses. The restriction required publishers to print their own publications or to make their operations and mailing addresses known to an outside printer. These push-pull factors made the Adams power press, which was affordable for mid-level jobbing printers, well suited to the needs of niche publishers like Bradbury and Berry.

The other half of Berry's distribution strategy relied upon the counting room of the *Boston Herald* or other storehouses. Willis Little and the Great Periodical Depot became the face of Berry's operations in 1850, providing cover to him as he began advertising discounts to wholesale agents in other regions of the United States. The counting room served as a distribution point both to the public who walked in from the street and to Western and Southern dealers, sending books and possibly plates as freight.

During this period and following years, gripper marks linked to the Adams power press frequently appear on *Life in Boston* and the books that Berry published. As printers know, sheets need to be conveyed through a press by a mechanism or by hand. Such processes may require a clearance on the edge of sheets. The inventors of the Adams power press incorporated grippers (which Isaac Adams sometimes called "nippers") into the press design. His spring-activated grippers created indentations on the leading edge of sheets caught between the metal plates carrying paper through the press. It is important to note that the press itself, whether through size limits on mailing, its ability to delicately print stereotype plates, or its capacity for jobbing and book printing, was fundamental to the success of William Berry.

William Berry faced a number of prosecutions for publishing obscene libel in *Life in Boston* and distributing some of the most explicit books sold in the United States through the depot and his other locations. Willis Little fled Boston to avoid prosecution, but Berry found others to replace him. The loss of George Thompson to competing opportunities in New York around 1852 stunned Berry, forcing him to find a new writer. Samuel K. Head brought both printing skills and growing authorial contributions to Berry's enterprise, and by 1853 the team was so successful that Boston's Municipal Court again took notice.

Prosecution records suggest associations between local printers and booksellers for both Head and Berry during this time. In 1855, Berry decided to make significant personal changes. He married and moved close to his wife's family. By 1856, he promoted Spiritualism, and by 1857, he had sold *Life in Boston*.



[SLIDE 9: BANNER OF LIGHT]

The burned-over district of New York, in which the Second Great Awakening had spread rapidly earlier in the century, gave birth in the 1840s to spiritualism in the United States. Boston proved to be fertile ground for Spiritualism, especially among Transcendentalists, Unitarians and Quakers. Both William Berry and Spiritualism came to Boston in the 1840s. By the 1850s, Spiritualism offered a sense of order and opportunity to Bostonians, even as its claims of contact with spirits and spectacular occurrences inspired skepticism.

Audiences of a thousand or more congregated for Sunday services at the Boston Melodeon by 1853, paying ten cents each for admission to be part of a community experience that rivaled large Congregational churches. Prominent mediums inspired followers and connected Boston to the national movement and lecture tours across the country. At the home of one prominent Boston merchant, participants reportedly witnessed a table that levitated so high that its legs indented the room's ceiling. Levitation, apparitions, or medical mediums providing advice to the ill were among the many ways of channeling the will of the departed.

Berry's social connections had been limited as a man whose power base derived from the working class, but spiritualism attracted powerful adherents among the middle class and cultural leaders. Abolitionists, women's rights supporters and temperance advocates found an easy home among spiritualist circles, quite unlike the reception these reformers gained among many working-class Bostonians and from the typical editorials of *Life in Boston*. Advocates of free love and devout Christians each found a place within the broad embrace of Spiritualism, which lacked a governing body to dictate specific practices or beliefs.

A first prospectus for *Banner of Light* emerged in 1856, issued by Bigelow, Colby & Co. The prospectus emphasized connections between Spiritualism and eternal life, ensuring compatibility with local religious sensibilities and Timothy Bigelow's elite connections. But by 1857, a second prospectus appeared from Luther Colby & Co., without Bigelow. That advertisement promoted the *Banner of Light* as a newspaper with popular stories, fit to bring home -- with Spiritualist information added as news was available. At this juncture of late 1856 or early 1857, Berry transferred his printing assets to Samuel K. Head, who continued publishing *Life in Boston*. The sale of those assets appears to have created the backing for Luther Colby's firm, without Bigelow.

The first issue of *Banner of Light* appeared on April 11, 1857. Luther Colby & Co. situated the journal as a general interest weekly of philosophy and literature, producing a high-quality, eight-page newspaper that appealed broadly rather than catering only to niche audiences. The paper positioned spiritualism as a reform of rather than in opposition to Christianity.

After struggling with Colby and others for editorial control of *Banner of Light*, Berry briefly published the newspaper alone from New York. He was lured back to Boston and gained more public credit as being the business manager for the publication.

Berry lost the battle to direct the editorial voice of the publication, however. He finally left the paper to volunteer for a Boston sharpshooter unit fighting in the Civil War. He died at Antietam in 1862. Years afterward, when Berry's strong personality was remembered more kindly by Colby and others involved with *Banner of Light*, the newspaper reported hearing from Berry, speaking from the Great Beyond. But these contacts were rare. The spirit of William Berry curtly reported that he had little time for such communications; he was busy publishing in the Great Beyond.