

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: AMERICAN AMATEUR: FRANCIS HOPKINSON AND THE
POETICS OF PUBLISHING IN REVOLUTIONARY AMERICA
Kevin Anthony Wisniewski, Ph. D., 2018

Directed By: Dr. Craig Saper, Professor
Language, Literacy, and Culture Program

This study examines the publishing career of the eighteenth-century writer, composer, and designer Francis Hopkinson. The breadth of his work and versatility of his style make Hopkinson a unique figure in revolutionary America. He fully embraced printed media as a mode that shapes culture, politics, and individuals alike and pushed the social, visual, technological boundaries of the printed word. During the American Revolution, Hopkinson emerged as a literary leader in Philadelphia. Employing a book studies methodology, this project focuses on the publication details surrounding Hopkinson's major works, including his relationships with his fellow revolutionaries, printers, and artisans; the intertextuality, materiality, and visual appearance of his works; and the extent of these works' geographic distribution and readership. This study divides the arc of Hopkinson's development into four categories: literary hoaxes, political propaganda, national symbols and narratives, and literary and typographical experiments. Hopkinson's works most often relied on humor to deliver their messages, and this work demonstrates how the writer used humor to interact with readers and texts; to play with words, images, and ideas; and to highlight and to form American character and identity.

Hopkinson's canon extends the understanding of American publishing during the period. Spanning from the 1750s to the 1790s, Hopkinson's career also calls for a reevaluation of American literary history. It not only typifies the cultural shift from oral to manuscript to print modalities but also embodies the ways in which these modes influenced and interacted with each other. Although he worked in a variety of literary genres from drama to poetry to novels, his forte was the literary essay. An examination of his work demonstrates the pivotal role the periodical essay played in both the American Revolution and the development of American literature. The development of publishing in eighteenth-century America is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon. Because printing and publishing faced fewer constraints there than in Britain and on continental Europe, America was in the vanguard of the movement often called the printing revolution. This work explores the ways in which publishing may be viewed as part of the literary experience and is rooted in the idea that both the socio-historical elements of publishing and the design elements of a text are intricately connected to literary meaning. Hopkinson's publishing career reflects the political and cultural transitions underway in revolutionary America and its people.