

# Women and Corporate Communication in the Early American Republic

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the work of women in corporations and corporate-ly structured organizations during the early American republic. The technology of the corporation enabled both for-profit and non-profit groups to efficiently gather and disperse funds, manage employees, and communicate with staff and shareholders. As managers and members of organizations such as the New York Female Missionary Society, women played a key role in the development of corporate communication and in the development of the corporation itself.*

**Keywords:** *Early American republic; corporate communication; Methodist; women*

Amid the fervor of nation-building in early nineteenth-century America, corporations played a crucial role in shaping the country's infrastructure. Corporations invested in and built banks, canals, toll roads, and steamboats. Likewise, schools, hospitals, missionary societies, Sunday School unions, and religious publishing houses turned to the technology of the corporation to raise money and manage employees. These business developments were not solely the result of for-profit business; indeed, many developments cross-pollinated from non-profit organizations to for-profit organizations and back again. In addition, the early American republic is "a key transitional period" particularly pertinent to understanding the current American economic system (Gilje 2). Gilje notes, "it was in this period that many of the later elements of capitalism—a flexible currency, banking, corporations, transportation systems, industrialization, and pervasive consumerism—began to take recognizable shape" (2). For these reasons, this foundational period, before the "giant corporation" and "specialized white-collar function" of the late nineteenth century (Douglas 126), is a ripe one to turn to for a better understanding of corporate structure and corporate communication.

All the more important, such cross-pollination between for-profit and non-profit entities sheds light on dark corners of our economic system and history: in considering the corporation for public good, the many corporate women of the early American republic can be recognized for their contributions

to business. As American evangelical movements such as Methodism were driven by women (Wigger 151), it is hardly surprising that women were active participants in religious corporations and corporately structured organizations. Yet, with a few exceptions, Writing Studies scholarship has not identified the early American republic as a period that has much to tell about the development of corporate communication nor about women as businesswomen. This formative moment for corporate communication offers a unique view in which women ran and financed business operations, in which non-profit business lead the way in innovation, and in which new and adapted forms of writing were necessary to manage regional, national, and even international organizations. This article examines the role of women in the origins of corporate structure and corporate communication in the early American republic. It does so by providing an overview of women and business; by establishing the development of the corporation as a technology; and finally by moving into a direct textual analysis through the annual reports of three organizations: the Union Canal Company, the Methodist Missionary Society, and the New York Female Missionary Society (NY-FMS). For my purposes, I use the term *corporation* to signify legally incorporated entities and the term *corporately structured organization* to refer to organizations that have the hallmarks of corporations (shareholders, officers and managers, and by-laws) without the act of legislature. Likewise, I use *business* to denote non-profit and for-profit economic activity, as well as the organizational management of employees, funds, goods, and even shareholders by corporate boards.

## Women and Business

In comparison to the early American republic, the eighteenth century arguably offered more economic independence and participation for women, as Hartigan-O'Connor's study of women in Charleston in the latter half the eighteenth century demonstrates. Eighteenth-century women were openly involved in the economy, appearing in newspapers as advertisers and in court dockets as business disputants (Hartigan-O'Connor 56). A Baltimore woman, Mary Katherine Goddard (1738-1816), published America's best-known copy of the Declaration of Independence, while Eliza Lucas Pickney (1722-1793) transformed southern agriculture with the indigo crop in the 1740s (Drachmas 9). Despite a shift to "public" masculine and "private" feminine spheres in the nineteenth century (Hartigan O'Connor 3), women business owners such as Rebecca Lukens (1794-1854) of Lukens Steel existed. Like Rebecca Lukens, women members and officers of corporations and corporately structured organizations were often the wives of for-profit businessmen (Ginzberg 48).

To be sure, voluntary associations and benevolent societies did not strive to make a profit, and frequently gave goods and services away for free. Nevertheless, they did act as businesses, hiring employees and managing them, overseeing funds, purchasing goods and services, and attempting to make a return on investment for their shareholders. Granted, this return on investment was meant as someone else's salvation, rather than monetary gain for the shareholder.

The job of feminist scholarship in the history of business writing is to find other, less visible women who are missing from the record, to return women to the narrative from which they are absent, and to re-imagine that narrative. By having only a small body of research that acknowledges such work, history at large and Writing Studies in particular have reinforced the ideology of a nineteenth-century "male" workplace (Boydston 39-40) and have "concealed and diminished the significance of these initial steps that women took beyond their prescribed domestic boundaries" (Shaver 16). I see the first step of such research to recognize women's work as business, rather than as simply charity.

The deep involvement of evangelical women in corporations and corporately structured organizations across the nineteenth century offers unique insight into women's work. For this particular case study, while the rhetorical activity of Methodist women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is well-documented (Tolar Burton; Shaver; Hill), the business writing of Methodist women in these same two centuries is only sparsely documented. Shaver opens the door to exploring the business activity of women in *Beyond the Pulpit*, noting that antebellum American Methodist women cobbled together religious careers from church activities, such as teaching Sunday school and running missionary societies (14). Likewise, Hill's *The World Their Household* and Ginzberg's *Women and the Work of Benevolence* establish the post-Civil War turn by evangelical women (and by society at large) toward professionalism. Using the lessons from their mothers' and grandmothers' work in non-profit corporations, women in the latter half of the nineteenth century strove for professionalism and efficiency in their own national and international organizations.

Shaver, Ginzberg, Robert, Renda, Cayton Kupiec, and others note the seriousness with which early nineteenth-century women approached benevolent societies—in reality, non-profit businesses. As Shaver has noted, benevolent societies offered an alternative for women who wanted a career but perhaps did not have the inclination to be an itinerant preacher's wife or to become one of the few female missionaries or preachers (16). Shaver describes it thus: "Because the church and church-supported activities were located in the indeterminate realm—between domestic activities and market enterprise—church work ultimately provided white, middle-class women with a sanctioned

retorical borderland from which they could step beyond the domestic sphere while still maintaining the social mores of the era" (14).

Although I agree with Shaver that women in voluntary and benevolent associations did operate in liminal spaces, I call attention to these women as businesswomen and caution that categorizing women's work as liminal has the side effect of devaluing it. Ginzberg notes both that gender boundaries contained greater flexibility in the early American republic than in the latter half of the nineteenth century (40) and that gender boundaries in some ways did not practically exist, though such boundaries existed ideologically (41). In much the same way, while women's corporations and organizations were often created in tandem to parent organizations (as is the case with the New York Female Missionary Society), these organizations functioned independently and could spend their money as they pleased. Men even recognized the superior non-profit business skills of women. This happened, for example, in 1839 with the Boston Penitent Females' Refuge, when "the male managers of the Penitent Females' Refuge in Boston gave up fund raising completely because 'it has been suggested to the Directors, that a more suitable and successful course would be to leave the collection of funds entirely to the Board of Directors of the Ladies' Auxiliary Society'" (Ginzberg 43). This all suggests that women's involvement and agency in business was accepted.

However, I do not wish to imply that the picture was rosy. Kerber's *Women of the Republic* documents well the many challenges women of this era faced: increasing limitations on their financial independence, for just one example, even as nineteenth-century women slowly gained the right to divorce. Rather, as Ginzberg, Shaver, Hall, and others have documented, women went about their work in spite of such obstacles. The challenge for us as researchers is to recognize how we may have unconsciously accepted the "public/private" ideology of the nineteenth century (with work being public and male) as a practical reality and what impact this ideology has on our narrative of women's work.

Likewise, viewing religious non-profit corporations and corporately structured organizations as outside of the economic system cloaks these businesses as something other than business, albeit businesses that always operated in tension with profit. Nord sees these organizations simultaneously rejecting commerce and accepting it with open arms. The market, for non-profits such as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, was a "wily and dangerous foe" (Nord 7) that, to put it plainly, had to be beaten at its own game. In supplying books and tracts free or at low-cost, these organizations worked against commerce. But in doing so, "The managers of the noncommercial Bible and tract societies made themselves practical businessmen, savvy marketers, large-scale manufacturers, and capitalists in order to save the country from the market revolution" (Nord 7). Again, corporations as a technology allowed

non-profit organizations to manage money efficiently and make decisions, setting up officers and a board of directors that would report top-down decisions to members spread across vast geographical spaces.

Both Ginzberg and Hall note the development of women's professions during this time, with the early nineteenth century setting the stage for the professionalism of the women's temperance movement, the relief movement of the Civil War, and the women's foreign missionary movement. Just as in the early American republic, in the late nineteenth century married women's fund-raising and organizing created the means for single women's careers (Hempton 159). Organizations such as the Methodist Church had become massive, with the Methodist Church becoming the largest institution outside of the Federal government (Shaver 4). Likewise, women of benevolent societies saw themselves as fully professionalized; Hill rather wryly notes, "In fact, the 'business of missions' might have been a more apt characterization [rather than "the science of missions"]" (109). The size and scope of non-profit corporations and corporately structured organizations had vastly intensified; unsurprisingly, with this came the need for professionalism, efficiency, and good business management.

The early American republic represents key developments for this later professionalism. Using state legislatures, women gained legal corporate status for their organizations and unusual legal power for themselves (Ginzberg 50). Using charters, by-laws, and policies, they began to organize themselves in ways that would later be referred to as "scientific." Using accounting and annual reports, they communicated with their shareholders and were held culpable for their results and for operating "efficiently."

## **Corporate Structure and Communication in the Early American Republic (1800-1840)**

Corporations were not a new development, but the immense popularity of corporations was. Colonial New Englanders had often used corporations to fund and organize public works projects, such as banks or roads; however, it was not until after the American Revolution that the number of corporations rose sharply, or, as Nord, puts it, "flourished abundantly" (18). As Wright notes, "A comprehensive roster of the profit-making and non-profit institutions established in New England between the 1780s and the 1820s would include thousands of entries" (73). These organizations ran the gamut from medical societies to turnpike corporations, insurance companies, and singing societies (Wright 73). Much of this corporate growth centered initially in New England, with 200 New England out of 332 total American non-profit corporations being chartered by 1800. Almost three times as many chartered corporations

per 100,000 inhabitants existed in the New England states when compared to the mid-Atlantic states, and four times as many when compared to southern states (Hall 101). At the same time as the number of corporations boomed, the definition of corporations refined. This new definition offered businesses a technology largely free from outside influence that efficiently stored (and hopefully increased) shareholders' investments and managed people and goods within a top-down structure.

What defined corporations then would be familiar to business today: a charter directing the corporate mission, a board of trustees, the corporation as an artificial person, and the sanctity of the corporation from outside interference, whether public or private. With a charter, corporations could concentrate money and organize efficiently for a specific purpose. With a board of trustees, corporations were able to hold officers to strict protocol and to provide ramifications if trustees strayed outside the corporate mission. With "artificial person" status, corporations had "the right to name; to sue and be sued; to acquire, hold, and dispose of personal and real property; to establish by-laws; and to transact business endorsed by an official seal" (Wright 140). And, with court cases such as the *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward* (1819), corporations were supposedly protected from state involvement (McGarvie 99).

Yet, there is one stark difference between the early American republic's corporations and today's corporations. Until the 1830s and 1840s, corporations—whether for-profit or non-profit—were expected to operate for the public good (Gilje 4-5). Many of these corporations would fall today into the classification of non-profit.<sup>1</sup> Ginzberg outlines this difference in her study of nineteenth-century benevolent societies, explaining, "Today, incorporation involves filing papers with a state official and paying a fee . . . In the early nineteenth century, the process was more complicated, for corporations were themselves viewed with suspicion; corporate status was limited, by and large, to charities, churches, and cities, 'harmless, and not profit-making entities' " (48-49). Rather than paperwork and a fee, incorporation came through an act of the state legislature (Ginzberg 49). Perhaps ironically, as the popularity of corporations in for-profit and non-profit business continued to spread (and as the number of petitions rapidly grew in the 1830s and 1840s) states dropped the qualification of public good from the requirement for a corporate charter (Gilje 4).

Non-profit corporations and corporately structured organizations, in their missions to place a Bible in every home or to provide schooling for children

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1 This type of corporation is more officially referred to as eleemosynary, but is referred to as non-profit here for simplicity's sake.

or to build hospitals for the ill, operated solidly within the realm of business. Nineteenth-century non-profit corporations could possess significant wealth and resources, and in managing large budgets, staffs, product dispersal, and marketing, corporate boards had to be “practical businessmen” even as they sought “to save the country from the market revolution” (Nord 7). Hall notes that by 1846, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) had an annual revenue of \$250,000 (five times that of Harvard University), with a staff of 300 missionaries and assistant missionaries across ninety-three missions (102). Likewise, the American Tract Society (ATS), making an annual revenue of \$154,000 that same year, “had a salaried staff of 12 corresponding secretaries and clerks who supervised the activities of 175 field agents” (102).

Perhaps most significantly, non-profit corporations learned how to be corporations and businesses alongside, if not in advance of, for-profit corporations. For just one example, non-profit evangelical corporations pioneered large-scale fund-raising and management. Subscription fund-raising through regional auxiliary organizations moved money back to a larger parent society. National parent societies could thus gather huge amounts of money. Wright records, “By 1817, the ABCFM, the most wide-reaching of the regional and national organizations in early nineteenth-century New England, drew support from 287 local affiliates” (58). For this reason, Hall calls the “scope and scale” of American religious organizations during this time “a striking contrast” to the for-profit sector (102). As Hall argues, the corporate structure is a technology in and of itself, and during the nineteenth century business had to learn how to use it effectively (107). Indeed, “America would lead the world in adapting the corporation to private business enterprise” in the nineteenth century (Nord 32).

Following Nord, I argue that non-profit religious corporations developed business practices before for-profit corporations, such as the railway industry, saw the need. But missing from these accounts is how influential non-profit corporations were in paving the way for corporate practices that followed. Strict accounting, a practice greatly encouraged by Methodism’s founder John Wesley (Hempton 110), was essential to organizations such as the ATS before it was essential to railroads or iron companies. In much the same way, the management of hundreds of employees at sites hundreds, if not thousands, of miles apart was broadly needed earlier than it was in the for-profit sector. For this reason, Nord posits that religious organizations did not just use business practices that were already in place, but were innovators of business practice, if not progenitors (111). I suggest that both Nord and Hall would agree that non-profit and for-profit business acted in parallel streams which frequently intersected; indeed, there was no way they could not have

influenced one another. Members and officers of non-profit business were often also for-profit businessmen, as the example of Arthur Tappan and Co. attests. Arthur Tappan and his brother Lewis supplied not only money to the ATS, but also business organization (Nord 89).

What follows is an examination of annual reports of three organizations: the Union Canal Company of Pennsylvania, the Methodist Missionary Society, and the New York Female Missionary Society (NY-FMS). Behind the seemingly mundane nature of these annual reports is business innovation: the struggle of corporate officers to constantly adapt their communication and management practices in a rapidly changing economy. My goal in supplying male-authored comparison annual reports for NY-FMS is two-fold. Whereas scholars such as Donawerth have made a strong case for a women's tradition of writing, particularly pre-1800, I propose that these texts support what Skinner finds in her research of late nineteenth-century women physicians: female physicians' writing had more in common with male physicians' than with non-physician females. As Skinner notes, "the boundary between 'masculine' and 'feminine' rhetorical practices, always fuzzy and permeable, becomes even less clear when women engage in what we might be tempted to call 'masculine' communicative acts" (183).

Also, non-profit and for-profit business writing shared corporate genres. In these early stages of free-market enterprise, both non-profit and for-profit business writing exhibited elements of sociability and a longer, less to-the-point sentence structure than in the late nineteenth century. Many types of corporate communication developed over the nineteenth century, from broadsheet regulations (Yates) to incident reports (Brockman) to account books (Johnson), in response to managerial need. As Johnson argues in *The Language of Work*, many of these forms developed because pre-discursive (i.e., watch-and-learn) communication simply was not enough for business to function anymore. Brockman extrapolates on this, writing, "prior to 1850, organizations had little need for administrative structure because their small size allowed owners to manage personally" (9). In the early American republic, for example, E.I. Dupont could write his correspondence himself (six thousand letters annually) (Douglas 126) and Rebecca Lukens could invoice accounts in individual letters (Johnson 59). But at the same time, railroad and steamboat accident investigators found that they could not rely on the coroner's report and had to invent the incident report as a genre (Brockman).

## THE UNION CANAL COMPANY

The Union Canal Company's annual reports are prime examples of corporate communication in transition, moving from pre-discursive communication and an epistolary tradition to nineteenth-century scientific corporate



management. In addition, its annual reports also emphasize the cross-pollination between non-profit and for-profit sections. In a time when corporations by definition were “for the public good,” the Union Canal Company was equally about business as it was about nation-building.

Following Douglas’s assertion that business and business writing in the early American republic were more personal, it is unsurprising that the Union Canal Company’s annual report of 1818 starts by addressing the shareholders and acknowledging their concerns. Union Canal President Joseph Watson and the Union Canal Board encourage shareholders to quiet their anxiety—or, rather, quiet their complaining.

Those persons, to whom trusts of an important kind have been confided, naturally feel some anxiety, to explain the course of their proceedings, and more particularly, when required to do so by the charter from which they receive their appointments. To feelings of this kind, the Managers of the Union Canal Company, are not insensible, and their determination has received a new impulse, from the wish at this time so universally expressed, in favour of internal improvement. In the chasm<sup>2</sup> produced by the subsidence of party passions, it is gratifying to observe the space filled with rational schemes, for moral reform and physical advancement. (Union Canal 3)

Watson continues, arguing that the scope and timeline of the Union Canal Company (originally devised as the Schuylkill and Susquehanna Canal Company) was unrealistic.

In seeking to divert blame from the Board of Managers, Watson quickly turns from a discussion of the project timeline to the public purpose of a for-profit corporation. In doing so, he uses grandiose language that references a Christian republic as he gently chides the shareholders.

The views which gave rise to the Schuylkill and Susquehanna Canal Company, originated with men of enlarged and comprehensive minds, whose patriotic wishes for the improvement of the state, was seconded by their personal interest for its success. They saw that no single scheme, could develop and bring into action, at once, so many sources of wealth, as the connection of the waters of the two great rivers, the Delaware and the Susquehanna. That they were correct in this opinion, experience has shown, as it is believed, not an individual can be found, who has geographically examined those rivers, but will

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2        Someone has crossed out the typo “charm” on the Library Company of Philadelphia’s copy and hand-written in “chasm.”

admit the truth. But to them, like sojourner in the wilderness, it was denied to see the promised land. (Union Canal 3)

Largely, Watson and the Board use the 1818 annual report to move blame from the Union Canal Company and its managers to public opinion. Public opinion had shifted away from the canal project to join the Susquehanna and Schuylkill rivers to the Atlantic, delaying the project. This lack of public opinion, Watson claims, is paired with a lack of monetary support. Amusingly, this public works project of the early American republic suffered the same fate as many current American public works projects—the initial plans and funds for the project were raised in 1795, which means that twenty-three years later the project was still in development. According to the Lebanon County Historical Society, physical work (aside from surveying) on the canal started three years after this report, in 1821, with the full canal opening ten years later, in 1828 (“History of the Union Canal Company”). Today, you can ride through one of the canal tunnels by boat at Union Canal Park in Lebanon, Pennsylvania.

The 1818 Union Canal Company annual report includes tables and data, denoting a shift in the genre towards greater inclusion of table bvgs, charts, and figures. At this time, however, the inclusion of such data was by no means expected or required. (A later report, from 1820, includes no tables or charts.) Watson recounts the entirety of the work done on the Delaware and Schuylkill Canal, estimating the entire cost to dig the canal at \$1,221,000 for seventy miles. Watson also includes a report from the engineers about the availability of water for the canal, all with the goal to convince shareholders that the proposed site of the canal is the best site. He seems to have been continually frustrated by concerns over the site and points of connection to the Atlantic, mentioning it several times. Two pages after the engineer’s report, Watson concludes that the public has been largely misinformed. He writes, “It has been the misfortune of the Union Canal Company, for particular circumstances, to lay under suspicions of supineness and indifference, by those not informed of their real situation. The charge is not merited, and with a candid public, it can be readily removed” (13). A page later, Watson signs off the annual report, using formatting that is repeated by both the Methodist Missionary Society and NY-FMS. He writes, “By order of the Board, Joseph Watson, President. G. Ehrenzeller, Secretary. Office of the Union Canal Company of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, November 17, 1818.” Thirty years later the Union Canal Company’s reports used cleaner, direct language, easier-to-read type, and more and more tables and figures.

#### THE METHODIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY

Whereas the 1818 Union Canal Company report uses data to argue the appropriateness of its plan to shareholders, the First Annual Report of the

Methodist Missionary Society uses tables to verify to its shareholders that funds have been used appropriately. That this report would focus so greatly on accounting is unsurprising. As Hempton notes, Methodism's founder John Wesley set a precedent for exact accounting; following this, "The records of the Methodist Church in all parts of the world are full of neat rows of figures constructed by circuit stewards, chapel committees, and mission secretaries" (110). Hempton refers to the accounts of New England Methodist itinerant preachers during this time as "impeccably presented" (123); accounts needed to be, not only to track the many expenses of traveling preachers and the books sales these preachers used to support themselves, but also to protect the rapidly growing denomination from corruption. Indeed, without trust in accurate accounting, voluntary donations would disappear and the funding system that supported Methodist itinerant preachers, as well as non-profit corporations and corporately structured organizations such as the Methodist Missionary Society, would dissolve.

The First Annual Report is about ten pages long, with the last two and a half pages consisting of accounts from the treasurer, Joshua Soule, the rest of the report signed by Nathan Bangs, the Methodist Missionary Society's third vice president. Again, what is emphasized to shareholders is accurate accounting. These last pages are certified by William A. Mercein and William B. Skidmore, auditors, as "a correct transcript of the books of the Treasurer of the Missionary and Bible Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America" (Bangs 194). I include the first, short section of this transcript as an example:

September 13, 1819. To cash paid for postage of a letter, - \$00 27  
December 10, - To do. paid Abraham Paul's bill for printing, 53 31  
January 14, 1820. To do. paid J.C. Totten, for blank books, 27 18 2/4  
April 17,- Balance in the treasury , - - 737 27 1/4. ("First Annual Report"  
193)

It is also interesting to note that of the final \$823.04 in the account, \$137.29 has been provided by NY-FMS, nearly 17% of the parent society's total funds. Other women also appear in these accounts—a Miss Fanny Ashcroft, who paid \$20 for a lifetime subscription, the members of a female bible class who paid \$20 to make Nathan Bangs a lifetime member, a Miss Ann Van Houten, who paid \$1, and an unnamed woman who paid \$.50. There are perhaps other unnamed women included in this list, under the many anonymous annual subscriptions and one-time donations listed.

While the annual report ends in accounting, the rest of the report outlines the society's mission, presents the funding method for the society (auxiliary societies), excerpts short updates from eight auxiliaries, and includes part of a letter from Bishop McKendree praising the mission and the business model.

Unlike either of the two NY-FMS reports, the parent society's First Annual Report is largely self-congratulatory; as the report notes, "it appears all of the annual conferences have warmly approved of the plan and objects of the Society" (Bangs 189). Several pages later, Bangs writes in response to Bishop McKendree's letter, "From these interesting communications, the managers have reason to congratulate the Society on the success of its efforts" (191). However, these praises and Bangs's assertion on the second page of the report that "These circumstances afford no small evidence of the utility of the plan, and of its ultimate success" (186) were premature. Apart from the Wyandot mission, missions in the early American republic were largely failures.

### THE NEW YORK FEMALE MISSIONARY SOCIETY

While the two previous cases represent male-authored corporate communication, the New York Female Missionary Society (NY-FMS) is a representative case study of a larger set of women's business activity and women's corporate communication. As Hill states, "Local auxiliaries, like temperance groups and women's clubs, offered conservative women a forum for developing skills in public speaking, fund-raising and organizational management that could be easily transferred from these semiprivate spheres to the public arena" (4). These local auxiliaries should not be underestimated in their economic importance. Both Hill and Shaver document the outstanding number of these organizations, with Shaver noting that the American Board of Foreign Missions boasted 592 women's auxiliaries in 1828 (4). The popularity of non-profit corporations and corporately structured organizations would continue throughout the nineteenth century even as fund-raising models and their corporate structure refined.

When read alongside spiritual journals and correspondence of American Methodist women, NY-FMS may seem to be operating under an epistolary tradition and the Methodist tradition of spiritual literacy, to borrow Tolar Burton's term; there are certainly elements of these two traditions within the NY-FMS documents. However, the officers' and members' writing expands beyond one-on-one communication and personal spiritual development. Rather, these women are participating in and inventing business communication—within annual shareholder reports, there are the origins of the contemporary genres of the company mission statement, the business plan, meeting notes, or motions to shareholders to make a structural change. NY-FMS, just like the Union Canal Company and Methodist Missionary Society, had to solve the problem of how to communicate and manage operations across the region, and, in the case of NY-FMS and the Methodist Missionary Society, communicate and manage operations across the nation and nations.

NY-FMS's membership included the who's who of New York City, and its business documents—annual reports and assorted correspondence—were periodically published in the *Methodist Magazine* (*MM*), a precursor to the *Christian Advocate*. Thus, in publishing NY-FMS's corporate communication, *MM* made visible women as corporate managers. This makes for a somewhat rare research site of women's corporate communication, for as Shaver has explained, "Even when women kept diaries, wrote letters, or prepared meeting minutes and reports of their activities, these works were seldom considered valuable, thus, most have been lost to later generations" (4). Perhaps even more intriguing is that during this period women appeared in *MM* mostly through their deathbed confessions (Shaver 54); yet, when women did appear in another capacity, it was as businesswomen.

NY-FMS, formed on July 5, 1819 in New York City (Daggett 77), was to have a lifespan of over forty years (141). Its first meeting set a corporate structure of four officers (First Directress, Mary Mason; Second Directress, Mrs. John Vanderpool; Treasurer, Mrs. Doctor Seaman; and Secretary Mrs. Caroline M. Thayer) and twenty-four other members of the Board of Managers (Daggett 7). NY-FMS's corporate model was based on subscription investment, often referred to as the widow's mite or cent societies. The use of subscription investment for national and regional fund-raising was a widespread and hugely successful method; in this model, women saved meticulously what pennies they could and made small donations that added up to great numbers. Membership subscriptions were priced low to attract many investors, and sometimes women grouped together to raise the funds for just one subscription, as is the case with the female bible class mentioned in the First Annual Report of the Methodist Missionary Society. Whereas NY-FMS members were meant to invest in the organization through subscriptions, the NY-FMS board was tasked with ensuring the organization fulfilled its chartered mission, organizing fund-raising, selecting appropriate missionary workers as well as recruiting speakers from missions to visit New York, financing women's missionary work, and accounting for this missionary work and the expenditure of organization funds.

By the Civil War, NY-FMS's outdated subscription-model of fund-raising, an older business model, and the loss of the previous generation of supporters meant the end of the society (Robert 127). While certainly not the oldest such organization, as Wright puts the establishment of the first female cent and subscription societies at around 1800 (56), this was the first women's auxiliary to the Methodist Missionary Society. Arguably, NY-FMS's legacy would be the work of two of its missionaries, Ann Wilkins and Sophronia Farrington, in Liberia, as well as NY-FMS's support of the Wyandot mission in Ohio.

Non-profit corporations and corporately structured organizations, particularly religious ones, frequently needed to exercise the “visible hand of management” before their counterparts in the for-profit sector did. While pre-discursive communication might work at an iron factory where the boss lived and worked on-site, it simply was not an option for missionary and tract societies. Communication needed to happen regionally, nationally, and internationally; a missionary could not walk down the hall and ask a question or get approval from his or her missionary society. Nor could missionary societies verbally discuss business decisions with every member. Some verbal discussion could take place at annual meetings, but such organizations had to ensure that they had disclosed accounting and policy changes even to members not in attendance. Thus, communication, and through it, geographically-dispersed corporate management, had to happen in writing.

Ironically, (a) the accounting that Wesley had encouraged in his followers, (b) the corporate structure of missionary societies, and (c) the pressure for success led to the inflation of numbers and an avoidance of describing the full troubles missionaries faced. Shareholders needed to be kept investing, and to that end, corporate writers padded their accounts and put a positive spin on negative results. As McGloughin notes, “Missionary journals and the annual reports of mission boards were obliged to provide statistical tables as corporate reports to their stockholders; but statistics were not the measure of successful missions” (339). These would be the missions of Sophronia Farrington and later Ann Wilkins, both funded by NY-FMS, in which “Behind the mapping, organizing, reporting, and strategizing of Methodist missions, and behind the printed ranks of annual reports, balance sheets, and missionary stations, the private correspondence of Methodist missionaries shows the human cost of the great missionary adventure” (Hempton 176). Many such missions would end in disaster and death for both the indigenous peoples Protestant evangelical Americans sought to convert and for the missionaries themselves.

With a strong epistolary feel and seemingly personal touch, NY-FMS’s writing follows corporate communication of the time. The first appearance of NY-FMS is in the May 1820 issue of *MM*. The secretary, Caroline Matilda Thayer, includes a greeting from the Board of Managers, accounts for the society’s current finances (less than stellar, according to the tone of the report), reports on the official status of the society (as of September 1819), provides a sort of a mission statement for the society, and finally makes a call for even more participation on the part of members. This call is characteristic of the tone of the NY-FMS’s writing. “Let us then redouble our exertions,” Thayer enjoinders members, “let us cheerfully submit to any privation which duty demands, and make every exertion which prudence justifies, and we cannot fail of success” (“First Annual Report” 197). It is hard to imagine a contemporary business text

encouraging shareholders to “cheerfully” submit to a profit loss, but again, as Douglas notes, nineteenth-century business writing was still in part that of the gentleman who saw business not as “an impersonal and silent working of offices and bureaucracies” but frequently as direct human interaction (126).

As a corporately structured organization, NY-FMS needed its subscription members (shareholders) to be informed of its mission statement and to approve it. Thus, the next part of the First Annual Report exhibits the origins of company mission statements. Whereas the beginning of the report gives a predictable call to women to support men in missionary work, the mission statement portion of the First Annual Report is audacious in its scope, but perhaps not unreasonable given the wealth of other missionary societies at the time. In any case, the concerns of these women were truly global and they do not seem bothered by a lack of funds; rather “a boundless field for Missionary exertions presents itself to our view,” with missionary concerns stretching from “our frontiers” to Asia and Africa (Thayer, “First Annual Report” 196). Although it is clear that for these women, there is and can be no other option than Christianity, Methodism, and “civilized” life, their writing reflects a certain respect for indigenous Americans and an acknowledgement that not all interaction with “civilized men” has been for the better. In any case, the business goal of the Board of Managers is clear: they have concluded that the purview of NY-FMS should be mainly limited to indigenous Americans, French Louisiana, and Spanish South America (Thayer, “First Annual Report” 196).

Any business with shareholders needs to accurately inform its investors of the business’s current financial state, including the strength of investment and company profits (or lack thereof). Once again, within its Second Annual Report, NY-FMS is adapting and inventing what were at the time new forms of corporate communication. The Second Annual Report of NY-FMS appears in the July 1821 issue of *MM* and is signed C. M. Thayer, Secretary (Caroline Matilde Thayer), and is likely the same C.M. Thayer that appears on other reports in the *MM*. There are two things of note in regards to the Second Annual Report. First, although more effusive in style than our twenty-first century business documents, this report follows a familiar structure, making sure that each shareholder knows the health of the membership, how funds are being used, and gets a chance to approve (or not approve) policy changes. The report presents the current membership numbers, accounts for the use of membership dues, makes allowances for why the numbers are not as high as they should be, and asks for approval (after the fact) of a policy change. Like any business report, whether for-profit or non-profit, it ends on the familiar note of what needs to be improved. Second, I want to highlight the innovative business practices that NY-FMS used with subscription-style fund-raising. This was an efficient way to get many people to contribute small amounts that

added up to large amounts and to move capital to the auxiliary's projects as well as back to the parent society. In using subscription fund-raising to raise investments, in using corporate communication, and in using corporate structure, the women of NY-FMS actively developed the corporation as an economic technology.

For a non-profit business dependent on subscription fund-raising, the number of members and their health wasn't just an issue of Christian concern. It was a monetary one as well. Death or failure to renew membership would mean a loss of shareholders and therefore funds for the organization. Thus, the Second Annual Report format Thayer uses is familiar to us in the twenty-first century, with membership numbers and the financial state of the organization included. Thayer begins by noting the present membership and current finances:

None of our numbers have been taken from us by death; and though the causes to which we alluded in our last Annual Report, viz., the depression of business, and consequent pecuniary embarrassments, have still operated to lessen our resources, we have been enabled to collect the sum of \$122 which we present to the parent Institution, with our warm hopes and fervent prayers that the design for which it is given may be answered in the conversion of the many immortal soul. ("Second Annual Report" 278)

Subscription investment would prove particularly popular with women throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, but would not be the only form of investment. As Cayton notes, "Women's contributions included not only direct contributions but also bequests, sales of jewelry and cloth, the proceeds of mite boxes, and money saved by forgoing the use of sugar for a year" (85-86). NY-FMS followed this trend, accepting goods as well as money when they created a circulating library for the Wyandot Mission in 1826 (Lamplin 108-109).

As a corporately structured organization, NY-FMS needed its shareholders to support changes to operating procedures. This ensures consensus on the part of the shareholders and provides a check to the Board of Managers, but nonetheless having to gather approval from geographically-dispersed members could be frustrating for those in managerial positions. The next part of the report asks for a name change approval, with the Board of Managers wanting to change from a Bible Society to a Missionary Society; in regards to the latter, the Board of Managers asks that members support this decision on the part of the Board. Here, the Board of Managers explains, "The general conference have thought proper to limit the operations of the parent Society exclusively, leaving the distribution of the Holy Scriptures to those effective



Institutions which are organized expressly for that purpose" (Thayer, "Second Annual Report" 278-279). Not only has the parent institution streamlined its purpose, but NY-FMS itself has had trouble with members holding both missionary and bible society membership, something for which "we experienced no little embarrassment" (278-279). The Board is hoping that there will be minimal objection on the part of members: "This objection to our Constitution being now removed, we are encouraged to look for the cooperation of our sisters who have hitherto withheld their support from motives which we cordially respect" (278-279).

Fund-raising and the corporate purpose of public good (and pride in "this commercial city") mingle in the next part of the report. The report then turns outward, commenting on the activities of the new and sundry auxiliaries that have been established throughout New England: a Female Association at Albany, whose Second Annual Report appears in *MM* in 1825, a Boston auxiliary, and even an auxiliary society in rural Maine. This "remote" society the Board intends as motivation to its members. The women of this society scraped together twenty dollars for their pastor's lifetime membership to the parent missionary society, one-sixth of NY-FMS's total contribution. This may not seem like much, but these New York women were the well-to-do and elite of the Methodist church, and presumably would have had far greater means than women in rural Maine. With this example, the Board gently chastises its members:

When we compared our means, in this commercial city, with those scattered inhabitants of a country circuit, we at once recognize the principle upon which our Savior predicated his approbation of the widow who cast her two mites in the treasury. We have given of our abundance, but they have contributed of their poverty. May such examples stimulate us to increased exertions, and may we enter upon the duties of another year with a realizing sense of our responsibility! (Thayer, "Second Annual Report" 278-279)

This call to the wealthy Methodist women of New York was no new call. From the start, the Society's leaders had intoned the responsibility of well-to-do Methodist women to support the activities of others. Even at the organizational meeting of NY-FMS in 1819, Thayer, Mary Mason, and a Miss S. Brewer called for all females of the Methodist Episcopal church to apply themselves to fund-raising and society membership (Daggett 78).

NY-FMS operated at the forefront of American mission work, abroad and at home. After the inclusion of its second annual report, NY-FMS continues to appear sporadically in *MM*. However, in 1826, NY-FMS supplies copies of two letters to *MM*—one from Susan Lamplin, NY-FMS's secretary, to

Reverend James B. Finely, superintendent of the Wyandot mission, and the other a reply from the Wyandot mission itself, signed Between the Logs, John Hicks, Monocue, Matthew Peacock, and the School committee and chiefs of the nation, including Esq. Gray Eyes, James Big Tree, James Harryhoot, Joseph Willams and classleader Geo. Punch (chief). The Wyandot mission at the time was the major mission for the Methodists and arguably the only successful mission in America to this point. The success at the Wyandot mission, with nearly 4,000 Native American Methodist members, spurred an explosion among Methodist missions for the next twenty years, with “missions among some thirty-five tribes” and over two hundred Methodist preachers (Hempton 155). It is incredibly fitting that businesswomen were part of Wyandot.

## Conclusion

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the development of corporate communication is that it did not grow out of earlier rhetorical models (Yates 65). Rather, the early American republic represents a period in which businesses struggled to create new forms of communication for which they had few, or, in the case of Brockman’s steamboat incident reports, no earlier models. Businesses had to adapt, add, and invent forms—from factory floor regulation broadsheets to technical instruction manuals to annual stockholder reports. Methods of keeping track of people and things (goods, expenditures, profits, and times, for example) also needed to be developed. Formal accounting blossomed over the course of the nineteenth century, with Bentley and Leonard listing nearly five times as many accounting textbooks and guides from 1851-1900 than from 1791-1850 (6). In a time where corporations by definition were for the public good, NY-FMS demonstrates the use of the technologies of the corporation and of corporate communication by women to manage people, funds, goods, and even the reactions of shareholders across great distances. Women in business needed to use the visible hand of management for such organizations to function efficiently; as women used such technologies, they developed them, playing a crucial role in the development of corporate communication.

Again, in contrast to Yates, who sees corporate communication and organization as having been primarily developed by the railroads and manufacturing (100), I see the innovations of non-profit business (much of which was religiously-affiliated) pre-dating those of the railroads. As Wigger reminds us, religious movements such as Methodism were fundamentally women’s movements—spurred by and supported by women. Thus, I believe that thorough studies into business communication in the early American republic must consider not only non-profit corporations but also women’s participation in

these corporations. In light of these records, however, “participation” seems too light a word, perpetuating the omission of women from the narrative of work, and ascribing twenty-first century values (in which non-profit work is frequently defined in opposition to work and business) to the nineteenth century. For example, Shaver calls such omissions “especially unfortunate considering the seriousness with which women pursued these occupations and the emphasis that antebellum churches placed on these evangelical pursuits” (96). Shaver also warns readers against categorizing women’s benevolent work as small or insignificant (104). Although I agree with Shaver that a contribution of women in the early American republic was to lay foundation for the women who would follow, such as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union or the Women’s Foreign Missionary Society, it was not their only contribution or their greatest. Women, such as those of NY-FMS, were not only benevolent organizers but also businesswomen.

Finally, examining women’s corporate communication expands the narrative of work. As Boydston and Shaver argue, history at large and Writing Studies in particular have failed to recognize women’s work *as work*. This happens even though women “often acquired and exercised many of the same skills that men used in the marketplace” (Shaver 83). Yet such a point of view still separates women from the marketplace and divorces their work from the economy. Arguably women’s work did sometimes operate in less visible places of the economy, as is the case with Hartigan-O’Connor’s example of women’s domestic economy—selling eggs and other small items. At the same time, women’s work did operate more centrally and visibly, as when in 1833 Baltimore seamstresses went on strike and published their resolutions in the *American* (Rockman 133). In much the same way, the reality of women’s work had to be recognized, as “Self-supporting women composed a large enough segment of the laboring population to warrant official concern whenever the city’s economy slowed” (Rockman 136). Rockman then notes that in 1805, when the city was finding it difficult to support out-of-work women, a benevolent society was proposed (137). The proposed society never came to fruition, but such an example shows the breadth of women’s work. Women at lower economic levels worked as seamstresses, hucksters, and domestic servants, while women at higher economic levels worked as corporate managers for the public services meant to serve other women. Only by continuing to map women’s work and the work of other under-represented groups, such as laborers and the enslaved, can scholars re-write the narrative of work and of business beyond “white,” “male,” and “public.”

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