

## Beyond Big House Publishers: A New Map of Bookselling in 19th-Century New York City

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Critical narratives of the 19th-century American book trade traditionally focus on the rise of the urban big-house publisher and emphasize a clustered network of large book firms fueled by the camaraderie and ambition of exceptional white men. And while it is true that the rise of the American publishing house was a pivotal moment in bookselling, these narratives elide the hundreds of smaller urban bookstores that conducted business around and with these firms. These bookstores resist the dominant critical narrative, instead offering alternative perspectives on the 19th-century book market, the contours of local book cultures, and the character of an emerging urban metropolis. These bookstores are listening-posts for the voices of muted booksellers who can tell new stories about the entrepreneurial efforts and rich contributions of women and men of color to the antebellum New York City book trade.

Using GIS mapping and historical 3D reconstruction, this presentation traces a diverse bookselling landscape. While mapping can be fairly critiqued as abstracting and dehumanizing, each point on a newly-constituted map plots an individual left out of the dominant critical narrative and whose story and voice may be further discerned in the historical record. By toggling between the aggregate map and the particulars of specific booksellers, including David Ruggles, the first African-American bookstore owner, and the Rush sisters, who operated a small store on the fringes of the city in 1860, this presentation attends to the multiple scales and layers of antebellum New York City bookselling. This repopulated history expands the critical narrative of 19th-century American bookselling, enriches our understanding of the diverse individuals and stores that shaped the book market, and offers methods for attending to these “lost voices” more intentionally.

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