Thomas Dobson's Rolling Mill for Copper: A Note on the Publisher of the Encyclopaedia

On July 27, 1814, the Philadelphia bookseller, printer, and publisher Thomas Dobson, best known for the first comprehensive encyclopedia (1789-1803), the first edition of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1789), and the first Hebrew Bible (1814) published in the United States, wrote to the firm of Paul Revere and Son in Boston to enlist their aid in persuading Congress to pass a tariff on imported processed and finished copper. Having heard that the Reveres were engaged in refining copper

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1 The Encyclopaedia, the Hebrew Bible, and many of Dobson's other publications have recently been discussed in detail by the author of this paper in Dobson's "Encyclopaedia" The Publisher, Text, and Publication of America's First "Britannica," 1789-1803 (Philadelphia, 1991). The final chapter of that book includes a brief discussion of Dobson's excursion into copper manufacturing without, however, most of the information in this article, which was unknown when the earlier study was completed.

2 As of March 6, 1811, Paul Revere himself was no longer active in the firm that he had founded and which bears his family name today. The dissolution of the firm of Paul Revere and Son, consisting only of the father and the son, Joseph Warren Revere, is reported in a notice in the Boston Gazette on May 6, 1811. The new members of the firm, still known as Paul Revere and Son, are identified as Joseph Warren Revere, Thomas S. Eayres, and Paul Revere III. The Reveres had closed their mill in 1810. The new corporation, therefore, may represent an infusion of new money prior to reopening the processing plant at Canton, Massachusetts. See Otis E. Young, Jr., "The Origins of the American Copper Industry," Journal of the Early Republic 3 (1983), 127 and Isaac F. Marcosson, Copper Heritage The Story of Revere Copper and Brass Incorporated (New York, 1955), 39-46.

3 A brief discussion of the tariff situation with respect to copper and other manufactures essential to American industry may be found in Arner, 208, Young, 126, and Maxwell Whiteman, Copper for America The Hendricks Family and a National Industry, 1755-1939 (New Brunswick, N J, 1971), 102-34.

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on a large scale, he explained in his letter, he had approached them because, as they would be well aware, under the present laws of the United States, "Copper in Plates, Bolts & Bars . . . pay [sic] no duty on importation," a situation that he felt "must operate as a discouragement to the domestic manufacture." He believed it likely, however, that new tariff rates would be established at the next session of Congress, and he hoped for the Reveres' cooperation in making the case for an import tax of "10 Cents per lb. or thereabout," which he estimated would be sufficient to protect the fledgling American industry. Although he had apparently had no previous business dealings with the Reveres, Dobson clearly anticipated a favorable response from the Massachusetts firm, which as early as 1801 had begun to operate a mill on the Neponset River and, despite a brief interruption in 1810, had been processing copper far longer than any other establishment in America.

As a publisher and printer, Dobson often appealed in his advertisements and proposals for Americans to patronize American manufacturing, hoping to translate patriotic pride and a strong sense of competitiveness with Great Britain into increased subscriptions to his own editions. Despite his use of such pleas in the past, however, his request of the Reveres cannot be explained quite so simply. Indeed, on at least one earlier occasion, the priorities of his profession had placed him on the opposite side of a similar tariff issue. In 1802, although a proposed new tariff might well have benefited the domestic typefounding industry, he was one of many Philadelphia printers who subscribed to a memorial successfully protesting an increase of 20 per cent on European type, which would have amounted to a raise of 7½ per cent over the going rate. Dobson was also probably among those who sought the elimination or reduction of the duty on imported paper in 1793, and there were several other

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4 Thomas Dobson to Paul Revere and Son, July 27, 1814, Revere Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society
5 Marcosson, 39, Young, 127
6 See, for example, Dobson's advertisement for his American edition of William Nicholson's *Natural Philosophy*, with its appeal to all Americans to buy his edition and thus "furnish proof of the preference with which Americans encourage American manufacturing", *Pennsylvania Mercury*, July 21, 1788
7 Rollo G Silver, "Printers' Lobby Model 1802," *Studies in Bibliography* 3 (1950), 212-13, reprints a memorial protesting the proposed tariff on imported type presented to Congress by the Philadelphia Company of Booksellers on March 8, 1802, and signed by Dobson (the sixth name on the list)
similar causes that he is likely to have supported as they affected his costs and margins of profit. Like others in the book and publishing trades, he had seen the price of type escalate as a result of the shortage of regulus of antimony, even before the War of 1812 began, and by 1814 he was experiencing a similar increase in the price of domestic paper, thanks in large part to profiteering by many paper manufacturers, who suddenly found themselves almost the sole source of supply for American printers and publishers. Copper, too, was in great demand, both because importation from England had ceased and because available reserves were needed for shipbuilding and other manufacturing related to the war; as hostilities continued, the price would climb from twenty to eighty cents per pound. Although copper for copperplate engraving was not a major expense for publishers, when compared to the wages of compositors and pressmen, the cost of type, or the outlay for paper, a duty on this essential material would still have meant higher prices for the final product—a consideration that should have persuaded Dobson to oppose a tariff on copper and to look forward to the resumption of commerce with Great Britain with few economic restrictions.

8 A petition presented to the House of Representatives by “sundry printers and booksellers of the city of Philadelphia” on Feb 15, 1793, citing the “extreme difficulty in securing adequate supplies of printing paper” and requesting the reduction or removal of the tariff on imported paper was rejected by Congress as detrimental to the American papermaking industry. See American State Papers: Documents Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States, from the First Session of the First to the Third Session of the Thirteenth Congress, Finance (5 vols., Washington, 1832), 1:223, no. 51, Feb 15, 1793. It seems likely that Dobson, one of the most prominent of Philadelphia’s printers and booksellers at this time, would have been a signatory to this petition, as also to another memorial, now apparently lost, presented to the Committee of Commerce and Manufactures by “sundry booksellers and printers in the city of Philadelphia praying a remission or reduction of the duty at present imposed by law, on such raw materials imported from foreign countries, as are used in the various branches of business, carried on by the memorialists” on Feb 14, 1804. This latter petition and its probable contents are discussed briefly in Rollo G. Silver, “The Book Trade and the Protective Tariff 1800-1804,” Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America 46 (1952), 43.

9 Blaming a shortage of regulus of antimony, the Philadelphia typefounding firm of Binn and Ronaldson announced an increase in the price of American-made type in 1810 but attempted to soften the blow to American printers by increasing the allowance on used type to “Twenty Dollars per hundredweight” from its previous unspecified price. New-York Commercial Advertiser, Sept 1, 1810. A year earlier, the firm began to prepare printers for this eventuality by circulating a letter explaining that the war between France and England and the aggressive policies both nations pursued toward American shipping represented a serious threat to the supply of regulus of antimony that might result in a scarcity of American type, see, for example, their notice in the Boston Patriot, Aug 23, 1809.

10 Whiteman, 102-34.
But Dobson wrote as a producer and not as a consumer of copper products. He was, he informed his correspondents, “getting a rolling Mill erected for the purpose of making . . . Copper into sheets, &c. for sheathing and other purposes.” It was in this capacity rather than as a printer or publisher that he sought to enlist the Reveres in a congeries of copper producers that included Harmon Hendricks, Levi Hollingsworth, Christopher Raborg, senior and junior, and perhaps also Charles Raborg of Baltimore,11 along with himself and his son Judah, to present a memorial to Congress on the subject of protecting American copper manufacturing from foreign competition. “The different gentlemen who are engaged in the business,” he explained to the Reveres, “should inform the Secretary of the Treasury the actual or probable extent of their manufactures” and in this way reassure government policy makers that domestic producers could indeed meet any demand for copper arising from other American industries. “The interest of the United States,” he concluded, recurring to a favorite and familiar theme in this effort to establish a new business alliance, “is connected with the encouragement of domestic Manufactures.”

As the contents of this letter indicate, Dobson had already taken decisive steps toward becoming one of the few copper producers and manufacturers then operating in the United States. Exactly a year earlier, on July 27, 1813, his son Judah had purchased from Elijah Tyson eight acres in Middletown Township and fourteen and a half additional acres in Aston Township on Chester Creek in Delaware County, including an existing sawmill and milldam rights, on property later to become known as Knowlton Mills, and it was this mill that the Dobsons were now in the process of transforming into a copper manufactory. Henry Ashmead, who reported Judah’s purchase in his History of Delaware County in 1884, was also aware that Judah had converted the sawmill into some sort of rolling mill, but he could add no definite details about the purpose of the new establishment. “Little information has been gained concerning

11 In James Lakin, Baltimore Directory and Register, for 1814-15 (Baltimore, 1814), 159, Christopher Raborg, Sr and Jr., are identified as brass founders located at 11 Water Street Possibly the other son to whom Dobson’s “and Sons” refers as also involved in copper production was Charles Raborg, whose address is given as 23 Water Street Like Dobson, the Raborg family has not previously been mentioned in connection with early attempts to establish the copper industry in America
this mill,” he wrote, “but tradition asserts that it was a copper-mill, and
the road leading from the place to Village Green is still known as Copper-
Mill road.”12 A century later, Henry S. Pearson had learned no more about
the matter and simply summarized the speculations of his predecessor,
unaccountably reducing the size of the purchase from twenty-two and a
half to eighteen acres in his discussion of Knowlton Mills but otherwise
providing no new information.13 Dobson’s letter to the Reveres makes it
possible to confirm the traditionary lore on which Ashmead was compelled
to rely by unequivocally identifying the nature of the business conducted
at the renovated mill, and it establishes that not Judah alone but both
of the Dobsons, father and son, were directly involved in the new industrial
enterprise.

Receiving no answer to his first letter to the Reveres, Dobson wrote
again on November 11 to report his unilateral initiative in the matter.
He had written on his own, he said, to Alexander Dallas, the Secretary
of the Treasury, and to Adam Seybert, a representative to Congress from
the Philadelphia district (whose Statistical Annals the Dobsons soon would
publish) seeking advice on the best course of action to achieve his desired
ends. George Campbell had in the meantime replaced Alexander Dallas,14
so there had been no response during the transition in that office, but
Seybert had replied agreeing with Dobson’s earlier suggestion that a
“Memorial signed by the refiners of Copper” would be the most logical
and probably most effective course of action. Dobson had therefore drawn
up such a document and enclosed it with his letter for the Reveres’
perusal and, he hoped, their endorsement. “If it meets your approbation,”
he suggested,

you may give it your Signature at Boston; or if you think it would be better
to draw up another form, you can draw it up more to your mind, and after
Signing, transmit it to Mr Hendricks N York ... and desire him to
give it his Signature, and send it on to me, I will sign it & send it on to

12 Henry Graham Ashmead, History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, 1884),
620-21
13 Henry S Pearson, Middletown Township, Delaware County, Pennsylvania (Media, Pa, 1985),
115 This reference was pointed out to me by members of the staff of the Delaware County
Historical Society, Media, to whom I wish to express my gratitude
14 For the dates of George Campbell and Alexander Dallas, see Mary Beth Norton et al., A
People and a Nation A History of the United States (Boston, 1982), A-22
Baltimore for the Signatures of Mr Hollingsworth & Messrs Raborg & Sons, and get them to send it on to Congress.\textsuperscript{15}

Dobson also proposed that the Reveres write individually to the “Members of Congress” from their state as “Mr Hendrick and the rest of us” were doing, and he offered to accompany the other copper manufacturers to Washington to present their case in person if that strategy seemed worthwhile. Now in his middle sixties, however, he was not anxious to undertake such a journey in November and pleaded the press of other affairs to excuse himself from the excursion at least until the following spring. “It would not be convenient for me to go this fall,” he informed the Reveres, “if you think it might be done without.”

Since Dobson had already written to or spoken with Levi Hollingsworth, a Philadelphia merchant who had relocated most of his business activities to Baltimore, he probably knew that Hollingsworth had unsuccessfully attempted his own memorial only a little more than a year earlier, on February 6, 1813, when the manufacturer sought from Congress “a duty on the importation of all copper which shall have been manufactured into sheets and bolts.”\textsuperscript{16} Acutely aware of the “uncertainty of an early resource in our own mines,” Hollingsworth had also suggested “the leaving of copper, in a crude state, . . . free from duty” as a way of promoting American manufacturing while still encouraging the importation of needed raw materials. He had informed Thomas Newton, chair of the Committee on Commerce and Manufactures, that his mills could produce approximately 100 tons per annum, and he supposed that Hendricks and the Reveres could each match or perhaps even double his output. “I cannot doubt that works in this country will, at no distant period, be constructed to refine and manufacture as much copper as can be consumed in the United States,” he predicted, but he also warned that, if some sort of effective protection was not forthcoming, “an inundation of sheet copper [upon the conclusion of the war with Britain] may force me to seek a foreign market instead of having it manufactured, as . . . I might not choose to contest with the British manufactures, which have been centuries in such progressive improvements, and which have attained

\textsuperscript{15} Thomas Dobson to Paul Revere and Son, Nov. 14, 1814, Revere Papers.

\textsuperscript{16} American State Papers; Finance, 2:602, no. 387, Feb. 6, 1813.
On this occasion, Joseph W. Revere wrote in support of Hollingsworth's unsuccessful petition; he had previously joined with his father in submitting a similar petition that, on January 21, 1808, had met with at least some success before the committee. Hollingsworth may have felt now that two new sets of signatures, the Dobsons' and the Raborgs', combined with the unpredictable economics of the ongoing war, might dictate a favorable response to another memorial and so had encouraged Dobson to draft this latest petition and appeal.

Perhaps because they were weary or skeptical of dealing so soon again with a recalcitrant Congress, who in any case could be counted on to listen in this time of war more sympathetically to a large number of shipbuilders than to a handful of copper producers, but more likely because they were unwilling to encourage competition in an industry that they dominated, the firm of Paul Revere and Son failed to respond to Dobson's second letter. Thus on December 31, he was compelled to write to them again, entreat ing them to tell him whether or not they were interested in supporting his petition and pointing out that recent disclosures concerning the "present embarrassed state of the public Treasury" made congressional approval of any scheme for producing revenue more likely than it had previously been or might soon be again. He had, however, detected in the mood of Congress an unfortunate inclination to lay on duties indiscriminately, which might result in taxing crude copper as well. At the very least, he argued, a memorial was necessary in order "to induce a discrimination, so that if the Pigs should pay, the foreign refined Copper should be taxed heavier in proportion." And he repeated again his plea that copper producers band together now and act expeditiously. "Peace must come," he said, echoing Levi Hollingsworth's argument of a year earlier, and when that took place, "the immense Capital and perfect state of the English establishments bid fair to crush our infant manufactures" if the unrestricted and untaxed importation of crude copper were to be allowed to enter the market.

17 For a summary of British advantages over the United States in the manufacture of copper, see Arner, 207-8
18 American State Papers, Finance, 2 268, no 277, Jan 21, 1808
19 Thomas Dobson to Paul Revere and Son, Dec 31, 1814, Revere Papers Dobson is here referring to the cost of prosecuting the War of 1812 and to recent revelations concerning the depleted state of the treasury, both of which occasioned great public indignation when they were made known. See, among other contemporary news stories, "A Peep into the Treasury!" Poulson's American Daily Advertiser (hereafter, Poulson's), Feb 2, 1814
copper and copper products was allowed to continue. He requested that the Reveres let him know their disposition very soon, but this plea, like its predecessors, went unheeded. The continued silence must at last have discouraged Dobson, for there is no record of any further correspondence from him to the Reveres on this or any other subject.

As a newcomer to an industry that required substantial capital to commence, and with his original investment probably still heavily encumbered by mortgages and other credit arrangements, Dobson undoubtedly felt the need for protective legislation more urgently than did the Reveres, Harmon Hendricks, or the Hollingsworths. The Reveres' failure to respond to his overtures seems to imply as much, as does also Hollingsworth's apparent willingness to allow Dobson, despite his status as a neophyte copper producer, to assume a leading role in drafting a memorial to Congress. Though they most certainly would have benefited from a revised tariff and, indeed, continued actively to pursue new regulations, both the Reveres and Hollingsworth had already established national and international sources of supply, developed loyal domestic markets, and were in a position to realize profits during the boom years for copper that could tide them over through the hard times to come. Lacking such resources, Dobson soon saw his worst fears realized, for British merchants did indeed dump copper and other products into the American market once the war had ended, not much if at all deterred by tariff legislation that was finally enacted in 1816, apparently without Dobson's direct assistance. The effects of the glut and the dramatic reduction in prices that followed were entirely predictable, as was ruefully observed by the owner of one New Jersey mill (probably Harmon Hendricks) in the census of 1820. "Establishment not paying anything," the census agent noted, prefacing his description of the manufactory with a terse remark that must have been included at the explicit desire of the mill's proprietor. "They manufacture sheathing copper, bolts, spikes, nails, [and] braziers' sheets." Many speculators and recent investors were brought to the

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20 The debate over the new tariff also found its way into the newspapers of the period. See "Congress, In Senate, Thursday, December 15," New-York Commercial Advertiser, Dec 19, 1815, for a synopsis of the discussion concerning copper, paper, and other materials of interest to American printers and publishers. See also Young, 127, 130

21 United States Congress, Digest of Accounts of Manufacturing Establishments in the United States, and Their Manufactures (Washington, 1823), 13*
brink of ruin by the collapse of the domestic trade, Dobson probably among the number, as the American economy in general entered into a protracted period of depression (1817-22) from which it would not fully recover for five painful years.

Having ventured so much, however, Dobson was in no financial position to abandon his copper manufactory without a serious effort to recover his investment. The earliest advertisement for "BOILER COPPER . . . For sale by Thomas Dobson, No. 41 South Second street" appeared on July 7, 1817, indicating that both a great deal of time and a large outlay of capital were necessary to convert the sawmill Judah Dobson had purchased nearly four years earlier into a productive rolling mill for copper and to erect the necessary furnaces and smelters. Never one to enter into an enterprise without intending to turn out the finest product available, Dobson offered "THICK COPPER, 3.16 and 4.16 of the best quality, suitable for the boilers of steam engines," as well as "the very best Brazier's Copper," and asserted that his mill had the capacity to execute all orders with expedition and "on moderate terms." He ran this advertisement several more times in the same newspaper until November 28, when he altered it slightly by adding the "Finest Copper for Engravers, different sizes" to his list of available products, thereby uniting his interests as a publisher and printer with his new career as an industrial entrepreneur and copper processor. At another time, and under almost any other circumstances, he might have been able to make the establishment pay simply on the strength of the energy and determination that he brought to the enterprise.

The most detailed advertisement for copper products that Dobson placed in local newspapers appeared in Poulson's American Daily Advertiser on March 24, 1818. The advertisement reveals that he was learning more about his product, becoming more confident in his ability to manufacture copper of high quality, and diversifying the production capabilities of his mill. He seemed, indeed, despite his apparent lack of professional preparation for the business, on the verge of becoming a major presence in the early American copper industry, displaying the same perseverance that had made him for a time one of the most important and respected publishers in the United States.

22 Poulson's.
SUPERIOR COPPER. THOMAS DOBSON, offers for sale THICK COPPER, in sheets, suitable for the Boilers of Steam Engines—completely refined, and which will be more durable than any of inferior quality. . . . Still Patterns and sheets in various sizes for Braziers, of the very best quality. Plates for Engravers of various sizes and of the purest kind. Copper wire for the use of Jewellers, &c. Various descriptions of Copper for the use of Shipping Bolts, Sheeting Copper, &c. executed at short notice. Orders addressed to Thomas Dobson, No. 41 South Second street, Philadelphia, will be punctually attended to; and no doubt is entertained that the article will give entire satisfaction to those who wish it. 23

With an ever-expanding list of manufactured items, these advertisements invite speculation about Dobson's eventual plans as a bookseller, publisher, and printer. It was not unusual, of course, for printers and publishers to invest in some industry allied with their principal business, most commonly by purchasing an interest in or becoming owners of their own paper mills. Joseph Crukshank, for example, an associate of Dobson's in many enterprises (including the Encyclopaedia), was involved in a long-term partnership with the papermaker Morris Truman, and the bookseller and publisher John Conrad held an interest with the New York publisher and printer Samuel Campbell in a paper mill along the Wissahickon Creek. 24 Dobson's good friend and business associate William Young, another prominent publisher and bookseller, invested in papermaking at the Delaware Mills, so successfully, as matters turned out, that he eventually forsook the bookselling business altogether in favor of paper manufacturing and wholesaling. Later, he would transform his paper mill into a

23 Poulson's, March 24, 1818
24 Crukshank and Truman's mill is briefly described in Thomas L. Gravell and George Miller, A Catalogue of American Watermarks, 1690-1835 (New York, 1979), 207, item 178. Items 35 and 36 in the same Catalogue, 166-67, describe two different mills owned by Samuel Campbell, both of them on Third River, near Passaic, New Jersey. John Conrad's interest in a paper mill on the Wissahickon rented or leased from Campbell is revealed in an advertisement in Poulson's, Oct 4, 1816. Another bookseller, printer, and publisher with interests in paper manufacturing was the New Yorker George F Hopkins, Poulson's, Oct 17, 1811. For a discussion of the strategy of branching out into paper manufacturing and other enterprises related to bookselling and publishing, see Rosalind Remer, "The Creation of an American Book Trade: Philadelphia Publishing in the New Republic, 1790-1830," Ph D diss, University of California, Berkeley, 1991, 132-37
mill for manufacturing cotton and woolen goods and clothing.\textsuperscript{25} Moreover, the war years and those immediately preceding and following them were difficult ones for booksellers in the United States. The market was glutted and depressed by cheap publications, weekly auctions of used books at discounted prices, and half-price and wholesale book stores that easily undersold their more traditional competitors. Many established bookselling firms became insolvent or left the business for more lucrative pursuits, adding their remaindered stock to the ever-growing surplus sold through wholesale and auction outlets and thus compounding the problem for the booksellers who continued in the profession.\textsuperscript{26} That Dobson may have been among those considering a withdrawal from the business is suggested by a pronounced decline in his publishing activity after 1814,\textsuperscript{27} by the persistence with which, for a while, he pursued the manufacture and sale of copper, and by his investments in coal, slate, and other materials more remote than copper from the bookselling business, in which he had made his reputation and which now provided a dwindling but still marginally dependable source of revenue.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{25} For an account of William Young and the Delaware Paper Mills, see Gravell and Miller, 212, item 198 Key advertisements that chart Young’s transformation from a paper manufacturer into a manufacturer of woolen goods and his gradual withdrawal from bookselling and paper retailing and wholesaling appear in the Philadelphia Gazette, Oct 19, 1801 (Young’s sale of his bookstore to William Woodhouse) and the United States Gazette, Feb 14, 1805 (the transfer of the Delaware Paper Mills Warehouse and the Whitehall Printing Office to William Bonnell and George Fulton) Many advertisements for Young’s woolen goods appear in Philadelphia newspapers, e.g., the large advertisement for the “Woolen & Cotton Warehouse” in John Binns’s Democratic Press, June 15, 1816, or “William Young, Son & Co, Manufacturers of Superfine Menno, Cassimere, Sattinets & Fancy Cords” in the same newspaper, Feb 20, 1816

\textsuperscript{26} William Duane, for example, editor and proprietor of the Aurora General Advertiser, blamed the depressed state of business for his decision to sell off the stock of his bookstore at the end of 1811 and to concentrate on newspaper publishing instead Announcements of insolvencies, constable’s and sheriff’s sales, and book auctions are commonly encountered in the pages of Philadelphia’s newspapers during the years 1812-15 and, indeed, until the early 1820s, see, for example, the Aurora General Advertiser, July 9, 1812 Auctioneers frequently added special announcements to their regular weekly sales lists of books summarizing the contents of some gentleman’s library or some bookseller’s stock in trade that were now to be offered to the public at greatly reduced prices A discussion of some of the major insolvencies during this period and their ripple effect throughout the American bookselling profession may be found in Remer, “Creation of an American Book Trade,” 182-94

\textsuperscript{27} For an overview of Dobson’s publications after 1814, see Arner, app C, “Checklist of Titles,” 269-73 Nearly all of the titles listed there, moreover, are medical works aimed at a restricted local audience of physicians and students and were not published in large editions

\textsuperscript{28} An advertisement in Poulton’s, Nov 12, 1813, identifies Thomas Dobson as president of the Mutual Assistance Coal Company and calls for a payment of five dollars dues plus an initial installment of fifteen dollars from any shareholder who may still be in arrears Dobson is identified
At this critical juncture in his career, however, Dobson's health began to fail. On February 1, 1817, he had taken his son Judah into full partnership in the bookselling business, a move that probably extended to the copper manufactory as well but which could not have much alleviated accumulating financial pressure by the infusion of new capital into either enterprise. It was fortunate nonetheless that he had made this move. On March 7, 1818, his wife of forty-one years, Jean Paton Dobson, died, and shortly thereafter he himself suffered the first of several debilitating strokes that left him unable to pursue his business; another apparent stroke around 1819 deprived him of speech for the four final, painful years of his life and contributed to his death from "lethargy" on March 9, 1823. After 1818, Dobson's name no longer

as one of the commissioners of the newly formed Pennsylvania Slate Company in an announcement in the same newspaper on March 21, 1805, the act incorporating the company under Pennsylvania law is reported as item forty-three in a list of legislative actions concluded by the Pennsylvania Assembly during its sessions in 1804, United States Gazette, April 15, 1805. Dobson was still actively concerned in promoting coal as late as 1818, as a notice in Relf's Philadelphia Gazette, June 5, 1818, of a seam of coal newly discovered near New Castle, Delaware, attests. Such public announcements make it clear that Dobson entertained entrepreneurial interests extending well beyond the type of investments traditional for booksellers and publishers, they suggest that the confluence of copper producing with his publishing activities was probably only coincidental rather than central to his efforts to become involved in copper manufacturing.

H Glenn and Maude O Brown, accepting the authority of J Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott's History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884 (3 vols, Philadelphia, 1884) and Albert Henry Smyth's Philadelphia Magazines and Their Contributors, 1741-1850 (Philadelphia, 1892), date the formation of Dobson's partnership with his son as 1811. "A Directory of the Book-Arts and Book Trade in Philadelphia to 1820 including Painters and Engravers," Bulletin of the New York Public Library 53 (May 1949), 392. The correct date, February 1, 1817, is established by a circular letter announcing the partnership that Dobson sent to selected customers, friends, and professional acquaintances, among them Tench Coxe, see microfilm edition of the Papers of Tench Coxe, reel 32, Printed Materials: Circulars, Broadsides, Printed Forms & Miscellaneous Printed Matter, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter, HSP), distributed by UMI Press, Ann Arbor.

No advertisement for copper identifies the firm as Thomas Dobson and Son, but, as previously noted, the land on which the copper mill was erected was originally purchased by Judah Dobson. No advertisement for the Dobsons' copper has been found of later date than 1819, suggesting that the venture, for all the energy and money that had been poured into it, was short-lived. Debts contracted in this enterprise almost certainly contributed significantly to the eventual failure of the firm in the bookselling business as well.

The death of Jean Paton Dobson is reported in Poulson's, March 9, 1818. Details of the last days of Thomas Dobson have been taken from "The Death of Thomas Dobson," New England Galaxy and Masonic Magazine 6, no 285 (March 28, 1823), 4. This eulogy, apparently written by someone whom Dobson had taken in and raised in his family, is reprinted from Poulson's, March 15, 1823. The appearance in a masonic magazine of this account of Dobson's last illness, death, and funeral, the corsege attended by "a large number of his acquaintances
appears on advertisements for copper products, though the firm continued to import, publish, and market books under the name of Thomas Dobson and Son until May 14, 1821, when the partnership was legally dissolved and the assets assigned to trustees for the payment of creditors.32

Judah Dobson kept alive his father’s dream of a major copper manufactory, at least for a short while, and even appears to have attempted to enlarge and expand upon it. In the final advertisement thus far located for the products of the Dobsons’ mill, the name of the Dobsons’ copper company is given as the American Copper Warehouse, although the address of “No. 41, South Second Street” leaves no doubt as to the ownership of the establishment.33 The full-page advertisement offers “Copper, of a superior quality, such as Brazier’s Copper, Steam Boiler Plates, Sheathing, &c. &c.” in “any Pattern, Weight, or Size,” as well as “COPPER PLATES, For Engravers.” The text is substantially unchanged from earlier advertisements, but the size of this announcement and its inclusion in a city directory, where it was meant to attract the attention primarily of other merchants,34 suggest that at this point Judah was still serious about carrying on the business of processing, manufacturing, and retailing and wholesaling copper products.

The times were not yet propitious, however, for the development of an American copper manufactory. As Otis Young, Jr., has written, the industry “could not get itself launched. Tariff protection had been won, Welsh technicians could be recruited, but up to 1840 the costs of overland

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32 Notices of insolvency and the dissolution of the partnership of Thomas Dobson and Son are dated May 14, the day on which their insolency petition was heard by the Court of Common Pleas, Relf’s Philadelphia Gazette, May 19, 1821. It may also be worth noting that as early as Oct 1, 1819, the Dobsons were trying to avoid this desperate exigency and fend off insolvency by advertising to the trade their “very large and valuable stock of books at such prices as shall make it an object for persons wishing to purchase”, Democratic Press, Oct 9, 1819. This is the earliest notice thus far discovered that indicates their intention to quit the bookselling business or that hints of mounting financial difficulties.

33 John Adems Paxton, Philadelphia Directory and Register for 1819, unpaginated advertising section.

34 “Directories are, by nature and origin, instruments of commerce. The distinguishing characteristic of the directory is that its purpose is commercial”, Jane E Norton, Guide to the National and Provincial Directories of England and Wales, Excluding London, Published Before 1856 (London, 1950), 1.
transportation of coal, together with the sharp reaction of the Swansea producers to any threat of competition, kept the industry walking the edge of failure."\(^{35}\) Certainly, the Dobson family’s resources were not up to the long wait that would have been required to establish their mill in Delaware County on a firm financial footing and to begin to turn a profit.\(^{36}\) Moreover, the “gentle” Judah Dobson, as he was remembered by some of his colleagues in the printing and bookselling business,\(^ {37}\) does not seem to have possessed his father’s determination or entrepreneurial instincts. Though he tried his hand at publishing and remained a bookseller until 1845, he operated on a much smaller scale than his father before him had done, mainly as an importer of choice foreign titles for a select Philadelphia audience.\(^ {38}\) In April 1821, he began the long, tedious

\(^{35}\) Young, 130

\(^{36}\) Insolvency records show that in order to publish their last title, a modest American edition of Henry Hallam’s *View of the State of Europe During the Middle Ages*, the Dobsons had to borrow from Thomas Dobson’s son-in-law, Dr James Gallagher, who married Dobson’s daughter Margaret on Jan 12, 1797, *Philadelphia Minerva*, Jan 21, 1797. The firm was also heavily indebted to Gallagher generally, identifying him as their principal creditor, and specifying as well their indebtedness to Benjamin Gaskell, bookbinder, James Ronaldson, typefounder, James Thackara, engraver, William Fry, printer, and Thomas Ames, paper manufacturer, among others. No specific mention is made of outstanding indebtedness related to the copper mill, but expenses arising from that enterprise seem likely to have been included among the “large Sums of money” for which the Dobsons were obligated and which occasioned their insolvency. Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas, Insolvency Records, May 15, 1821, City of Philadelphia.

\(^{37}\) A brief sketch characterizing Judah Dobson in this fashion appears in one of a series of articles entitled “The Printers of Philadelphia,” *Printers’ Circular* 3 (May 1868), [69]. The article also contains misinformation about Thomas Dobson, asserting, for example, that he and not Samuel F. Bradford published the American edition of Abraham Rees’s *Cyclopaedia* (a mistake that has been many times repeated) and claiming that he “tried various other heavy works” but “eventually sunk under his various labors and losses, leaving his fortune and his fame” to Judah. A modicum of fame there might have been, but it is clear that Dobson left no fortune. Judah tried his hand at publishing various specialized magazines and medical journals, he also imported European books on special order—an odd enterprise considering his father’s seminal role in promoting American publications—and retired from the bookselling business in 1845, styling himself as a “gentleman” in city directories thereafter. See also note 36.

\(^{38}\) Judah Dobson was born in 1790 and died Sept 1850, John McAllister, Jr, to Charles A Poulson, Oct 24, 1855, John McAllister Scrapbook, HSP. On June 1, 1820, he married Susan Poulson, only daughter of Zachariah Poulson, Jr, editor, publisher, and proprietor of *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser* (in the pages of which their marriage was announced on June 3, 1820). Following his father’s death, he must have disposed of the house and bookstore at 41 South Second Street, for his address in the city directory for 1824 is given as 106 Chestnut Street, next door to Zachariah Poulson’s printing office, Robert Dealver, *Philadelphia Directory, for 1824* (Philadelphia, 1824), n p. The index to that directory, however, still lists Thomas Dobson and Son, booksellers, at the old address. In 1825, Judah’s address appears (perhaps as the result of a compositor’s or proofreader’s error) as 103 Chestnut Street, Thomas Wilson,
process of divesting himself of his father’s and the firm’s stock in trade, offering at auction through Thomas Willing, Silas E. Weir and Company “to close a concern” a large quantity of books and stationery, including “38 copies Dobson’s Encyclopaedia, with supplement, complete, 21 vols. in boards” and other valuable titles. The next month, as previously noted, the company was legally dissolved, although their creditors allowed them to offer as “T. Dobson & J. Dobson, Agents” their remaining assortment of “Books & Stationary [sic] . . . at very reduced prices” in advertisements that appeared irregularly in Poulson’s and other Philadelphia newspapers through December 31, 1821. On that significant evening the printing office and bookstore at “No 41, South Second-street,” once a well-known literary landmark in the city and an address familiar to readers throughout the nation, closed its doors to the bookselling business forever.

Judah Dobson had still to dispose of the copper mill, however. This he attempted for the first time, on February 26, 1822, in the newspaper advertisement, reprinted below. It reveals not only the location of the mill and the mill’s dimensions, thus providing useful information for the history of American manufacturing. It also indicates that the Dobsons had made substantial improvements to the property they had purchased in 1813, including the erection of a smelting furnace. They had also more than doubled their holdings of land from twenty-three to nearly fifty acres. The advertisement discloses that Thomas Dobson had made a large investment in machinery, determined to install only the best equipment in order to produce the highest quality products. Being located in a “situation remarkably healthy and pleasant,” the mill site and its main dwelling house may have served the Dobsons as a summer refuge from outbreaks of yellow fever and other epidemic diseases that continued periodically to plague Philadelphia well into the nineteenth century. Finally, the

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Directory and Stranger’s Guide (Philadelphia, 1825), 43 Subsequent addresses are 106 Chestnut Street (1837) and 108 Chestnut Street (1840), this last is also the address of Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser. Both 106 and 108 Chestnut Street continued to be used as business addresses until Judah’s retirement, see, for example, the advertisement for “J DOBSON, BOOKSELLER, No 108 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Importer of English, French, Spanish, German, and Other Foreign Books Orders for American Books Supplied,” in J R Savage, Philadelphia Circulating Business Directory (Philadelphia, 1838), 13

39 Poulson’s, April 11, 1821
text of the advertisement suggests that Thomas and Judah Dobson may also have leased some of their land to stone cutters, selling building materials for houses and other milling establishments in the nearby cities and settlements, although this must remain conjecture.40

FOR SALE. A Capital Mill Seat and Mill, Suitable for rolling Copper or Iron, Nail Works, Cotton, Woolen, or any other Manufacturing, with a sufficient power for Works on a very large Scale. This valuable Mill is situated most conveniently for water or land carriage to and from Philadelphia, being about 14 miles distant from it by the new turnpike, about 4 miles from Chester, 3½ miles from Marcus Hook, from both places there are Packets to Philadelphia, and about 2½ miles from the tide water of Chester creek. It lies on Chester creek, a very large and powerful stream, which runs through the property. The Dam is very large and it has the advantage of having a very short Race of great width, with the greatest abundance of water for any purpose for which it may be wanted, with a Fall of about 10 feet.

The Mill House is 86 by 38 feet, and contains Rolling Apparatus of the most approved and substantial kind, much larger and stronger than usual, all of Iron, originally intended for, and employed in, the Rolling of Copper. There is also a House 30 feet by 50 feet, containing Furnaces, but so situated that it may, with little trouble or expense, be converted into a Mill, as it has the command of water. There are also 2 Dwelling Houses, and about 50 acres of Land, partly Wood Land.—There are quarries of excellent Stone on the property, on both sides of the creek. The situation is remarkably healthy and pleasant. A property is seldom offered to the attention of

40 At the time Dobson built his printing office of stone (1788), that material was not much in use in Philadelphia, although it would become increasingly popular for dwellings and commercial establishments in the early nineteenth century. It has been suggested (Remer, 113) that Dobson chose stone so that his establishment would stand out as a landmark among rows of shops built of brick. If so, his strategy succeeded in ways that may have surprised even him, immortalizing his trademark address, for example, as part of a playful American interpolation (probably written by the general editor, Alexander Wilson) in the article “Building” in Samuel F. Bradford’s edition of Abraham Rees’s nineteenth-century Cyclopaedia. Although stone is an excellent building material, abundant in Pennsylvania, that article asserts, “there was, until very lately, but one good stone house in the then metropolis of the United States.” This fact, the article goes on to say, will account for “an odd kind of impromature [sic] to be found in the title pages of many valuable and expensive works, published in a city containing 70,000 inhabitants, which the reader’s own recollection will suggest to him.” For Alexander Wilson’s tenure as general editor of the American edition of Rees’s Cyclopaedia (between April 1806 and the summer of 1811), see Clark Hunter, ed., The Life and Letters of Alexander Wilson (Philadelphia, 1983), 79-82, 104
MANUFACTURERS, combining so many advantages. The terms will be reasonable, and a considerable portion of the purchase money may remain on mortgage. Offers will be received and further information given by T. Dobson & J. Dobson, Agents, No. 41, South Second-street, Philadelphia. 41

In the depressed economy of the early 1820s, Judah Dobson was unable to dispose of the mill and millsite property speedily enough to satisfy the creditors. Thus on April 20, 1822, responsibility for selling the property was turned over to J.W. Lippincott and Company, who offered it at a public auction initially scheduled for May 1. 42 The sale was twice postponed, however, and did not finally take place until “13th May, at half past 7 o’clock in the evening, at the Merchants’ Coffee House.” 43 Even then, buyers were not immediately forthcoming, and it was not until November 6, 1822, that ownership of the mill was at last transferred to Samuel Love by John Vaughn and John Hart, “assignees of Thomas and Judah Dobson,” who as friends of the Dobson family had accepted legal responsibility for disposing of all of the Dobsons’ property for the benefit of the creditors. 44 Love converted the buildings into a cotton mill and retained title until February 9, 1825, when he sold it to John D. Carter. 45 The subsequent history of the mill and a description of its industrial capacity are included in the Report of the Committee of Delaware County on the Subject of Manufactories, Unimproved Mill Seats, &c. in Said County (1826), which was prepared by Benjamin Pearson (who owned several mills in the county), and in Ashmead’s History of Delaware County (1884), in which it is recorded that the buildings erected at such great expense by Thomas and Judah Dobson and their immediate successors were “entirely consumed by fire” on January 7, 1834. 46

The untimely demise of the American Copper Warehouse and the sale of the mill that marked the end of Thomas Dobson’s ill-fated

41 Poulson’s, Feb 26, 1822
42 Poulson’s, April 22, 1822
43 Poulson’s, May 8, 1822
44 John Vaughn and John Hart are identified as the assignees for Dobson’s estate in the notice of insolvency in Relf’s Philadelphia Gazette, May 19, 1821
45 Ashmead, 621, Pearson, 115
46 Ashmead, 621
venture into copper manufacturing may be ascribed to a number of causes that have already been mentioned in this paper. These include the failure of Congress to offer adequate tariff protection to the struggling industry, the depressed economy of the United States during the five or six years immediately following the War of 1812 (which may itself be blamed at least in part on the want of protective legislation), and, perhaps, the lack of a sufficient supply of raw materials and other essential resources and of a transportation system that would have provided access to national markets. It also seems worth noting that the entrepreneurial environment in 1813, when Dobson first purchased the millsite on Chester Creek and began to erect his mill and foundry, was far different from what it had been two decades earlier when he undertook publication of the *Encyclopaedia*, and that Dobson himself may not have been fully aware of all the differences. In achieving his earlier success, a truly remarkable accomplishment for the time and place, Dobson was in the forefront of the publishing profession and could count on the good will and cooperation of other publishers and booksellers, who must at least have tacitly agreed not to import or try to sell the competing third edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in order to benefit not only Dobson but the American publishing industry in general. 47 Any gain in his prestige accrued to the profession as well, enhancing the credibility of everyone connected with the trade. Moreover, because of the existing credit system, Dobson was able to distribute and defer the cost of his undertaking, selling shares to other booksellers and exchanging services and notes of hand and coming to agreements with other publishers and printers, as well as paper manufacturers, engravers, and other artisans, to stave off insolvency at critical moments during the book's production (such as after the fire of September 8, 1793, that nearly destroyed his printing office). 48 It does not seem an exaggeration to say that the *Encyclopaedia* was as much the collective product of the cooperative credit system established by the book trade in the early United States as it was the individual achievement of a single persevering publisher, and recognition of this fact only enhances

47 Remer, 105-32, discusses such cooperative arrangements among booksellers and publishers
48 The fire was reported in detail in the General Advertiser and John Dunlap's Daily Advertiser, Sept 9, 1793, and in the Gazette of the United States, Sept 11, 1793
the importance of the work in the history of American publishing and printing.49

A quite different set of circumstances had come into existence by the time Dobson attempted to enter the business of processing and refining copper. Notwithstanding Levi Hollingsworth’s and Harmon Hendricks’s apparent willingness to deal with Dobson as an equal, the new entrepreneurial world was one of competition rather than cooperation, and the difference was decisive. Both the publication of the *Encyclopaedia* and Dobson’s venture into copper took place within the shadow of British dominance, but in the second instance Dobson had to make his way against entrenched British and American competitors. He could no longer count on patriotic appeals to help him make his case, since they could be and often were employed by others in the business and had also lost much of their appeal in the intervening years. The Reveres’ silence suggests that they regarded him as an interloper in an industry they virtually controlled and saw no reason to encourage his intrusion, however patriotically he might present himself, although they were willing out of necessity to ally themselves with more established firms like those of Hollingsworth and Hendricks. Lacking a supportive network of creditors whose economic destinies were closely tied to his own, Dobson was unable to weather in his new undertaking the harsh economic climate of the second decade of the nineteenth century as he was able to do in bookselling, at least until that business, too, became entangled in the debts, expenses, and continuing demands for capital arising from the copper mill. In addition, despite his interest in slate, coal, copper, and other commodities that seem to lie beyond the purview of the printing office or the immediate parameters of publishing, his belated partnership with his son suggests that he continued to think of business as primarily a family affair, a reflection of his training as an eighteenth-century bookseller rather than an indication of his understanding of the world of nineteenth-century business enterprise. There is some indication in his renaming of the company as the American Copper Warehouse and in the advertisement in the Philadelphia directory that he or his son Judah had at last begun to think nationally as he had done so

49 The most thorough discussion of the credit system existing among early American publishers, printers, and their suppliers may be found in Remer, 154-99.
many years before as publisher, but the shift in market strategy, if that is indeed what these small changes signify, came too late to save the undertaking. Surveying the history of the copper business in America, one can only wonder how many other small and short-lived firms such as the Dobsons' arose and disappeared during this transitional period and what their accumulated chronicles, could they be recovered, might add to our understanding of these formative years for all aspects of the national culture.  

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50 Few records of the firm of Thomas Dobson and Son appear to have survived insolvency and dissolution, and none of those pertain to copper. Thus nothing can be learned and little can be reliably surmised about patterns of investment, productivity, or loss and profit. Because the venture was undertaken and appears to have been concluded (all but the final sale of the copper mill, that is) between two decennial censuses, there is not even the general but often helpful information customarily preserved in such reports.