
From Boston, MA, to Kingsport, TN: Joseph Hamblen Sears
(1865–1946), a Forgotten Figure in American Publishing

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JOSEPH SEARS DIES; HEADED BOOK FIRMS
Ex-President of Appleton Co. and Own Concerns
Once Writer, Magazine Aide

So began Joseph Sears's obituary in the *New York Times* on 17 February 1946. The *Kingsport Times-News* ran one on its front page on the same day and *Publishers Weekly* issued one on 8 March. The first motive for this article is to fill in a gap, as this important publisher has not been the object of any scholarly monograph. Sears was an item in Charles A. Madison's *Book Publishing in America*; John Tebbel summed up his career before and after he became president of D. Appleton; and his company, the J.H. Sears Publishing Company, received a four-paragraph article in volume 46 of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*.¹ His many activities were mentioned in his lifetime, but in *A History of the Book in America*, the name Sears, or that of his company, appears no more often than that of the Kingsport

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¹ Charles A. Madison, *Book Publishing in America* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966); John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the U.S.*, vol. 2, *The Expansion of an Industry, 1865–1919*, and vol. 3, *The Golden Age Between Two Wars, 1920–1940* (NY: Bowker, 1975–78); *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, s.v. "Sears Publishing Co." (Detroit: Gale Research, 1986), 46: 331–32.

Press, a very special experiment in printing and publishing located in Tennessee.²

The second motive is to argue that Sears occupied an interesting position in the history of American publishing in the last years of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century – as a writer, a chronicler, a businessman, and an editor. In a period of technological progress, intense competition among producers of print, federal control of textual contents, and readers' evolving habits and tastes, his actions and his comments show a discreet but firm middle-ground stand. After the American acceptance of international copyright and before the presence (and later, the pre-eminence) of literary agents, publishers had direct contact with authors submitting their manuscripts, and so the exchanges between these two groups throw light not only on the concerns and manners of publishers, but on those of the authors as well. The third motive of this short study is thus to put those interested in American cultural, and more precisely, literary, history in touch with a number of forgotten titles and authors. In other words, we hope to make this an instance of “the return of the publisher to book history,” as hailed and exemplified by Alistair McCleery early in the twenty-first century.³

This research has proved as frustrating as it was rewarding. We can mention at least four probable reasons for the deficiencies in expected data: first, in some national magazines, contributions were not signed; further, many editorial decisions were made by a team, so that one cannot always identify the role of each participant; in addition, Joseph Hamblen Sears seems to have been a reserved individual – he never bragged in his interviews, and was not definite about his role even in a memoir; and last but not least, the paucity of archives can be attributed to several accidents and perhaps to an absence of desire to leave precise traces of some transactions.⁴

We shall focus first on the individual, that is, on J.H. Sears's background, education, and experience, and outline the stages in his career, before moving on to the publisher in his professional context, and finally, showing how, behind his various postures as a writer, he

² *A History of the Book in America*, ed. Carl F. Kaestle and Janice Radway, vol. 4, *Print in Motion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

³ Alistair McCleery, “The Return of the Publisher to Book History: The Case of Allan Lane,” *Book History* 5 (2002): 161–85.

⁴ This is not an exceptional case, as shown by the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP) project on “lost archives,” which was launched by Simon Eliot in the spring of 2013.

expressed a clear-sighted sensitivity to change. Our purpose is to point to the importance of an individual whose personal voice and actions played a role in American publishing, yet who has been neglected or undervalued because he stood in an undefined zone, somewhere between conservatism and radicalism.

Joseph Hamblen Sears belonged to the Boston elite, to an old New England family, although not a dynasty of publishers. His father, J. Henry Sears (1829–1912), from Brewster, Cape Cod, made a fortune on the sea as a brilliant captain and shipping merchant. He acquired a vast knowledge of foreign seas and lands and wrote *Brewster Shipmasters*, an illustrated description of those adventurous and smart men and their ships, which was published in 1906.⁵ The captain's son followed the fashion in upper-class education, and attended the Roxbury Latin School, then Harvard University, from which he graduated in 1889. But he was already making his own way, having taken on a job for a while, and having gone to study temporarily in Berlin (Imperial University) and in Paris (École des sciences politiques) before returning to Harvard, where he became editor of *The Crimson*. Sears also became a member of several clubs, like the Harvard Club in Boston, the Union Club in New York, and the Garrick Club in London, which added to his upper-class connections. In 1891, he married Anna Wentworth Caldwell, who also had an extensive family tree and belonged to high society. They had a daughter, Penelope, and family events like her marriage to Sherman Phelps Platt in 1917 were reported in the “social pages” of the *New York Tribune*.

Sears started writing books early and soon found publishers. Between 1895 and 1899, the Chautauqua Press, then Harper & Brothers, issued two of his non-fiction works, *Governments of the World Today: An Outline for the Use of Newspaper Readers*, which was a description of the political frameworks of forty-five states of the world, and *Fur and Feather Tales*, a first-person narrative of wanderings in nature and encounters with various picturesque characters. From then on, Sears never left the world of print. He was hired as an assistant by several national magazines, where he gained experience. He worked

⁵ There have been so many Seases that the author of this article is thankful to several descendants, Ray L. Sears III in particular, for providing reliable information. Sears III, a fifth cousin of Joseph and a historian of the family, wrote: “We are also cousins on thirty-two other lineages. The folks on Cape Cod all married their cousins for hundreds of years.” Ray L. Sears III, email message to the author, July 2012.

for *Cosmopolitan* (then a family magazine), and for *The Youth's Companion* in its later phase (which also addressed the whole family, and gained a large circulation thanks to improvements in editorial matter and to the inclusion of "premium offerings").

Sears then entered the Harper constellation, making his way in several of its magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* (a weekly for women) and *Harper's Weekly*, where he worked with Colonel George Brinton McClellan Harvey (1864–1928), the man who would soon buy not only the magazine but also Harper & Brothers itself. Harvey was more than a smart businessman: in the early years of the twentieth century, he was proud of granting Mark Twain a lifelong contract for every word he wrote; he also extolled W.D. Howells as "the greatest artist in America." The Harper magazines had been suffering. Some had depended too heavily on British texts that escaped copyright and were slow in adjusting to "the great changes taking place in the public taste."⁶ Difficulties also stemmed from the company's refusal to sell advertising space in *Harper's Magazine*.⁷ Sears worked on the editorial staff and wrote many texts, but one cannot tell which, as the list of contributors appeared on the front page only. As Dowgray explains: "pressure for anonymity existed during a major part of the 19th century; anonymity and pseudonymity afforded a better protection of the person, were alluring to readers' eyes."⁸ This confirms another study: "A curious feature in the Magazines' early policy was the length of time during which, owing to the influence of the English last century magazines, the names of the authors were omitted – except the supposedly more important ones."⁹ When, in spite of great literary "coups," like securing the hard-fought rights to Arthur Conan Doyle's *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* in 1891, Harper & Brothers, having lagged behind rival publishers in commercial practices, went into receivership in 1900, it was George McClellan Harvey who helped rescue it.¹⁰

Next Sears joined Appleton. Shortly after the death of the last of its founder's five sons, it was revealed that the old family firm was

⁶ John Gray Laird Dowgray, Jr., "A History of Harper's Literary Magazines 1850–1900" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1956), 25.

⁷ Gerard R. Wolfe, *The House of Appleton* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1981), 294.

⁸ Dowgray, "Harper's Literary Magazines," 33.

⁹ Robert Shackleton, *The Story of Harper's Magazines 1850–1917* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917), 38. Many publishers had anonymous or pseudonymous series.

¹⁰ Wolfe, *The House of Appleton*, 294–97.

deeply in debt. Sears, after ten years with Harper & Brothers, was asked by the Appleton reorganization committee to submit a report on ways of restoring the strength of the house.¹¹ His report was accepted, and in 1904 he became president of Appleton. (William Worthen Appleton was chairman of the board.) He held the position until 1919. His retirement was probably due to health problems brought on by his additional work as director of war publicity for the state of New York during the First World War.

Not very long afterwards, in 1922, owing to his private connections with John B. Dennis, a partner in the banking firm Blair & Company, Sears reappeared and was at the heart of major discussions inside the Kingsport Press, in Kingsport, Tennessee. His daughter, Penelope Phelps, and her husband moved there. Frank E. Comparato writes: "With final backing of J.J. Little and Ives to set up and run the plant, Sears began to organize a New York sales force (J.H. Sears & Co) to exploit the output."¹² Many changes took place, including the incorporation of the firm, but success only lasted until 1934. J.H. Sears & Company was then sold to Dodd, Mead & Company for a token sum. The publishing career of Joseph Hamblen Sears did not end on a success, but ups and down were not peculiar to him, as we have already hinted. His wife died in 1937 and after a while he went back to Kingsport, where his daughter still lived. He remained there until his death in 1946.

In 1977, in a long recorded interview, J.H. Sears's grandson, Stuart Phelps Platt, who spent part of his youth in Kingsport and later went on to work for Dodd, Mead & Company, eventually becoming its president in 1964, said of his maternal grandfather: "I guess he was the one who got me interested in books themselves, the physical feel of books ... he gave me at an early age a small printing press, a hand-printing press."¹³ J.H. Sears's interest in all aspects of the book was life-long, as shown in his correspondence. Even though we cannot find details of his work for the *Harper* magazines, his ascent from copying letters to being "associated with George Harvey in the

¹¹ On the reasons for Appleton's failure in 1900, see Madeleine B. Stern, *Publishers for Mass Entertainment in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1980), 17–25.

¹² Frank E. Comparato, *Books for the Millions: A History of the Men Whose Methods and Machines Packaged the Printed Word* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole, 1971) 308–9.

¹³ Sherman Phelps Platt, Jr., *The Reminiscences of Sherman Phelps Platt, Jr.*, Margot Honig, five audiocassettes recorded February to April 1977, Columbia University Library.

development of both business and literary plans” was underlined in a *Printers’ Ink* article on the house of Appleton. The article went on to praise the new president: “His training has been broad, sound and essentially modern, so that he is a man from whom something may be expected.”¹⁴ One should keep in mind that Appleton was not only a publishing firm, but also the owner of a manufacturing company and of most of the stock in the Johnson Encyclopedia Company, with which it had merged in the reorganization. Appleton thus acquired a marble renaissance building on Fifth Avenue in 1902, which became its headquarters. The Johnson Encyclopedia Company had apparently sold too many subscriptions on the instalment plan and had to borrow heavily from banks but was unable to pay back the loans.¹⁵ Sears’s role from then on was to make publishing decisions and arrange for practical measures.

One of Sears’s first decisions as president was to buy a monthly magazine, which he thought was missing from Appleton. In the above-mentioned *Printers’ Ink* article, Sears was quoted listing the different functions a magazine could perform to increase the demand for the publisher’s books: “it becomes the banner of a house ... it can announce new books ... it is an advantage in obtaining authors’ books, largely by means of the serials.”¹⁶ Among thirty-four offerings, he had chosen *The Booklovers Magazine*, which became *Appleton’s Booklovers Magazine* before “Booklovers” was dropped. What could readers find in the issues from January to June 1907? Abundantly illustrated, and more expensive than earlier issues, they contained the portraits of various celebrities and short stories or serialized fiction by contemporary American and foreign writers. Some of these writers have since found their place in the canon, like Joseph Conrad, Henry James, Edith Wharton, or Maxim Gorky, while others were successful at the time, like R.W. Chambers (1865–1933), or Zona Gale (1874–1938). Gale, a modernist, was the first woman to win the Pulitzer prize for drama, in 1921, for her adaptation of her novel *Miss Lulu Bett*, published by Appleton. The magazine also included

¹⁴ *Printers’ Ink* 53, no. 3 (1905), HathiTrust Digital Library.

¹⁵ Wolfe, *The House of Appleton*, 294–96.

¹⁶ This explains why Richard Ohmann, after noting that monthlies went from a circulation of eighteen million in 1890 to sixty-four million in 1905, says “the magazine was a signifier.” Richard Ohmann, “Diverging Paths: Books and Magazines in the Transition to Corporate Capitalism,” in *Print in Motion*, vol. 4 of *A History of the Book in America*, ed. C.F. Kaestle and J.A. Radway (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2009), 106.

essays, more or less analytical, on travel, village art, world cities, and a detailed report on a cultural revolution, namely, the Royal Italian Opera performing before spectators of all social strata in the People's Theater in Manhattan's Lower East Side. All the fiction was by Appleton authors, of course. Space was also devoted to advertising, but perhaps not enough.

The magazine "got off to a promising second start" but unfortunately "fell between two stools," as it was neither quite elite enough nor popular enough to bring in sufficient funds. It was suddenly suspended by the board in 1909.¹⁷ From then on, Sears negotiated with outside magazines for the serialization of Appleton's authors. For Edith Wharton's novels *The House of Mirth* and *Summer*, he arranged for serialization in *Cosmopolitan* in 1916 and in *McClure's Magazine* in 1917, respectively. The terms offered were so attractive that Wharton left her publisher, Charles Scribner's Sons.

Sears did not work alone. In 1911 he brought a highly competent man, Rutger Bleeker Jewett (1867-1935), onto the editorial board, as editor and vice-president, and in 1912, he attracted John W. Hiltman (1862-1935), another strong personality, who also became vice-president and editor-in-chief. In 1919, the latter succeeded Sears as president. It is not always easy to define the precise role of each, as we have no detailed record of their discussions. Magazines were only one of the multiple elements such major publishers played with. A publisher like Appleton handled many "libraries," or series – "books in a named cluster of books, a programmatic and cohesive approach with an overall title and growing cumulatively, such as Hachette's 'Bibliothèque des chemins de fer' ... or Routledge's 'Railway library.'"¹⁸ The age of the old "reprint libraries" of the nineteenth century was over, and some of the new series launched under Sears were: The World's Great Books, which covered different fields, Appleton's Historic Lives, and an English Classics series, among many. More innovative was a practical book series for businessmen, which turned out to be very successful. Other assets of Appleton included encyclopedias like *Appleton's Scientific Library* (sixty volumes) and *Appleton's Universal Cyclopaedia*, as well as textbooks.

¹⁷ Samuel C. Chew, *Fruit Among the Leaves: An Anniversary Anthology* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1950), 53-54.

¹⁸ John Spiers, "Wondering about 'the Causes of Causes': The Publisher's Series, Its Cultural Work and Meanings," in *Authors, Publishers and the Shaping of Taste*, vol. 1 of *The Culture of the Publisher's Series*, ed. John Spiers (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1-61 (23).

In 1904, the publisher's backlist included four thousand titles, of which a quarter were fiction.¹⁹

The expansion of schooling²⁰ was of course a positive trend, not only in view of textbooks, but also in view of potential readers of general trade books, even though the distinctions that came gradually into usage between lowbrow, middlebrow, and highbrow were to remain. Sears was highly conscious of an increased appetite for reading, and reading for different purposes, among citizens of all ages. He was pleased to find that the representation of Appleton's standard reader was not "the Methodist lady," which he described as Harper's.²¹

Sears often negotiated with other publishers or magazines, both American and foreign, for various rights and, of course, corresponded with authors. Here, rich archives are available at Indiana University's Lilly Library, in Bloomington, which has a large Appleton-Century collection, and they are informative about business practices, about some authors, about Sears himself, and about readers. For instance, in 1906, the widow of Frank Stockton, author of the novel *Kate Bonnett* (1902), was glad Appleton had found a Canadian publisher, the Copp Clark Company, for a cheap edition, but wrote this: "I have such a contempt for paper-covered books – novels especially – that it disturbs my mind to think of any book of my husband's in such stress." This American distaste for paper-covered books, which was not found to the same degree in France, for example, is confirmed by other testimonies. In January 1910, Appleton entered into an agreement with another Canadian firm, the Methodist Book and Publishing House, headed for forty years by a strong personality, William Briggs. By the terms of the agreement, Appleton was to allow Briggs to reprint the Appleton bestseller *David Harum*, by Edward N. Westcott, in a cheap edition, and to consider printing one of Briggs's books in exchange. Appleton wanted to receive its due (50 cents per copy, on 5000 copies) as soon as each half of the total was printed, or all at once, supposing the whole number did not get

¹⁹ Wolfe, *The House of Appleton*, 297.

²⁰ See William Vance Trollinger, Jr., and Carl F. Kaestle, "Highbrow and Middlebrow Magazines in 1920," in *Literacy in the United States*, Carl F. Kaestle et al., (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 204–24 (205). "Among Americans in their late fifties in 1920, about 2.5 percent had graduated from high school, whereas about 16 percent of seventeen-year olds in 1920 had graduated."

²¹ Joseph Sears, "And This Too, Shall Pass" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), typescript, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. See Appendix 1.

into print, but the Canadian company wanted to pay for sold copies only. This disagreement went on from January to July and was not quite over even then.²²

Sears himself dealt with the authors directly as a rule, and entertained a huge, largely handwritten correspondence, often with allusions to personal conversations and phone calls. He spent time in the London office of Appleton and established or maintained many contacts there and in Paris. Although from the authors' letters the exchanges appear to have been most cordial, personal relationships did not prevent the publisher from pressing his points. Beyond some important discussions about the renewing or signing of contracts, many exchanges dealt with financial matters and material details concerning printing, while a significant minority expressed the publisher's concern with potential censorship.

George Bancroft's *History of the United States from the Discovery of the American Continent to the Establishment of the New Constitution in 1789* had first been published by Little, Brown and Company, but after 1883 was reprinted by Appleton, for whom it was an important asset. George Bancroft's heir, also called Bancroft, disliked dealing directly with the publisher and told Sears so politely from his French retreat in Agen. The younger Bancroft did not reply to questions of further editions, or of a condensed edition, which made publishing decisions difficult. Then there was the question of a revised edition, and, in 1913, Appleton asked Bancroft to accept a breach of contract, that is, a lower royalty of only seven cents per copy, for a set of joint works including those of George Bancroft and another historian of the United States, John Bach McMaster, in fourteen volumes, to be sold by subscription by trade agents.²³ The literary executor kept silent. Eventually, the firm published an eighteen-volume uniform edition of these works plus various historical compilations. Conversely, Gilbert Parker, the Canadian-born historical novelist, was very particular. He, like several fellow writers, was solicited to accept different new editions, always for a different audience and always with lower royalties: holiday editions, library editions, and collected editions.

²² Letters from the Appleton Collection. On the Canadian background and William Briggs in particular, see Eli MacLaren, "Living With the 1875 Act: William Briggs: Printer, Binder, Distributor," in *Dominion and Agency: Copyright and the Structuring of the Canadian Book Trade 1867-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 102-21.

²³ December 1915.

It was gratifying for Sears to have convinced Edith Wharton, whom he met in London, to leave Scribner's and come over to Appleton for her next works.²⁴ This arrangement began in 1912 and continued at least until she received the Pulitzer Prize (along with Zona Gale) for *The Age of Innocence* in 1921.²⁵ Before *The Age of Innocence* was released, Sears had arranged for *Cosmopolitan* to buy "all serial rights in the English language on her next novels" for \$12,500. "Anything you write should have the highest royalty, and twenty percent of the retail price is the highest we have paid to anyone," he wrote to her in 1918.²⁶ After Wharton's anti-war novel *A Son at the Front* came out, he wrote to her again, criticizing his fellow citizens: "it is almost grotesque to see the aversion of the public, since the Armistice, for such books."²⁷ Curiously, this book is seldom mentioned by critics anymore.

Another novelist, Robert W. Chambers, brought from Harper to Appleton by Sears in 1904, stayed with Appleton for the rest of his very successful career. Chambers was promised star treatment for all his novels as well as special advertising,²⁸ and in 1905 he wrote to Sears: "it would be most agreeable to me to renew the agreement for another year upon the same terms, and to express my satisfaction with our relations, personal as well as business ... This is due to you personally and to every member of the house."²⁹ The following year, *The Fighting Chance* was part of an exceptional bestseller fiction list in *Publishers Weekly*, which was also the first all-American list, and included Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, Ellen Glasgow's *The Wheel of Life*, Winston Churchill's³⁰ *Coniston*, and Owen Wister's *Lady Baltimore*. Chambers's book was also on the Canadian bestseller list. About two hundred thousand copies of *The Fighting Chance* were sold in a few weeks.³¹

²⁴ Sears, "And This Too," 85.

²⁵ Wharton often complained to Sears or to Jewett about misprints, which they corrected as soon as they could.

²⁶ Hermione Lee, *Edith Wharton* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2007), 420–21.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 595.

²⁸ 8 August 1904.

²⁹ 9 July 1905.

³⁰ Churchill (1871–1947), unrelated to the British statesman of the same name, was a very successful American novelist who wrote both historical and contemporary novels. Another of his bestsellers was *Richard Carvel*.

³¹ Alice Payne Hackett and J.H. Burke, *Eighty Years of Best Sellers 1895–1975* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1977), 70.

Hall Caine (1853–1931), from the Isle of Man, was a highly popular author of romances, and he too came to Appleton. There were occasionally arguments and misunderstandings between him and Sears.³² In 1908, Caine was asked to agree to an experiment with P.F. Collier & Son, “the largest subscription booksellers in the country,” who might sell a collected, or partially collected edition of his works, in six volumes. This arrangement meant lower royalties, but Collier’s success with Conan Doyle, for example, had been striking, and, in typical fashion, Sears wrote: “the attempt is to reach the ‘ten million’ class against the ‘ten thousand’ class.”³³ In another instance, there was a problem with Caine’s book, *My Story*, because the author had allowed Heinemann in Britain to issue it at a very low price so that Appleton could not sell it to be serialized; Sears offered to serialize *My Story* in *Appleton’s Magazine* nevertheless.

Sears and his colleagues kept negotiating with authors or their estates for cheaper editions. In 1917, in a letter to the literary executor of Stephen Crane’s estate, there was the suggestion of a plan: the issue of “a uniform cheap edition” of Crane’s books, by then all out of print except for *The Red Badge of Courage*. The letter writer argued: “There is unquestionably a field for cheap cloth-bound books . . . It exists all over the country among people who cannot or will not spend more than a small amount for a book.”³⁴ This plan had also been applied earlier to Edward Noyes Westcott for a “popular edition” of *David Harum*,³⁵ to Conan Doyle for *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard*, and to General Fitzhugh Lee for an edition of his book on his uncle, *A Biography of Robert E. Lee*.

Gradually, as books intended specifically for use in schools increased in importance, publishers hoped for the adoption of their editions by classes or schools or, in some cases, by “pupils circles,” who would select volumes for “supplementary reading.” A woman called Grace Shoup, in Indianapolis, was asked in 1911 to outline possible contents from Kipling’s works for a series of readers for different grades, starting from the fourth grade. Her careful work of several months was appreciated and she came to accept the price offered, which seemed low to her: \$100 for the fourth grade reader, \$50 for seventh and eighth, and \$25 for the higher-level one. Later on,

³² For example, Caine once wrote a furious letter to Sears, then apologized at the end of it. Lilly Library collection, January 1913.

³³ 17 July 1908.

³⁴ 7 August 1917.

³⁵ March 1904.

there was a chance of selling some of those readers in China through a Chinese-American Publishing Company.³⁶ Most authors or their representatives ended up accepting the publisher's terms in the hope of finding more readers and possibly earning more in the end.

In 1907, Appleton published *Memories of My Life*, by Sarah Bernhardt. When a rumour spread that it had been ghostwritten, Sears defended Bernhardt, saying he had gone over the text with her in Paris and had seen her notebooks.³⁷ Readers' interest Bernhardt's memoirs remained lively. A few years later, Appleton was asked by *The Ladies Home Journal* for permission to reprint extracts of the book along with some new articles Bernhardt had given them. Bernhardt followed Appleton's recommendation to accept, for "good advertising."³⁸ In 1917, Appleton received a more uncommon request: *The Jewish Morning Journal* asked Sears for permission to serialize a Yiddish translation of Bernhardt's book and offered fifty dollars. The house agreed, but included provisions for a single publication and the regular mention of its granting permission.³⁹

Sears's ideas on book promotion appear also in a series of letters written between 1913 and 1916 to the German-American psychologist Hugo Münsterberg (1863–1916), then a professor at Harvard University. Münsterberg had already published many books with Houghton Mifflin Company and Doubleday, Page & Company, but Appleton won him over for what were to be his last books, *Psychology, General and Applied* (1914), *The War and America* (1914), *Tomorrow Letters to a Friend in Germany* (1916) and *Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916). In 1913, Münsterberg and Sears discussed the promotion of a novel by Münsterberg's daughter Margarete, *Anna Borden's Career*, recently published by Appleton. Sears explained that readers sought entertainment first when reading a novel and could find it in the book's heroine. He then went on to ask the father and daughter if they had suggestions for the style of advertising to be used for the novel in the "literary page[s]" of fifteen to twenty newspapers that Sears had chosen. Münsterberg declined a suggestion by Sears that he write an article on the book himself, signed or unsigned. Then Sears replied to a complaint on the cheap look of the volume, explaining that the "yellow tint" of the paper, which father and daughter disliked,

³⁶ Lilly Library Manuscript Collection.

³⁷ Wolfe, *The House of Appleton*, 315.

³⁸ 10 February 1911.

³⁹ 26 April 1917.

had not been chosen to save money, but rather, “because booksellers tell us that pure white paper (blue white) is considered by people to look cheap.”⁴⁰ The same attention, of course, was given to the father’s own books and projects. In a further collaboration, Sears asked Münsterberg, a specialist of persuasion, to address all their salesmen, which resulted in the appointment of fifteen to twenty salesmen to sell textbooks.⁴¹ Another letter describes the three ways of promoting a book: through subscription agents, by sending circulars to classified lists, and by newspaper advertising.⁴² They had many further plans when Münsterberg died suddenly on a lecture platform that December.

In his unpublished memoir, Sears speaks of changes in levels of tolerance and pays homage to two important Appleton authors, “two men who revolted from the smugness of recent past,” namely, George Moore and David Graham Phillips.⁴³ Both were very different from most of the authors mentioned above. Moore, an Irishman, wrote about sex with a frankness that, early in the twentieth century, created more problems in the United States than in Britain. A letter from Charles Scribner to a British publisher in 1911 bears witness to the American sensibility: “So many of the well-known English authors – like Wells, Bennett, Moore and others – are too free and coarse in their handling of delicate questions to suit us.”⁴⁴

Phillips, like Samuel Hopkins Adams, was one of the “muckrakers.” He exposed cases of public corruption in *The Great God Success* and of male chauvinism in *The Hungry Heart*. Sears brought him, a prolific writer who was already known, to Appleton in 1906. Sears did not hesitate to publish *The Hungry Heart* in 1909. In 1911, Phillips completed an even bolder novel which he had worked on for ten years, to be called *Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise*. Before its publication was even discussed, he was murdered in Gramercy Park, Manhattan. His killer, a disturbed young man who believed his sister had been dishonoured by a portrayal in Phillips’s fiction, then killed himself on the spot. Phillips was not alive to hear Sears say in a 1913 interview

⁴⁰ 3 September 1913, Hugo Münsterberg Collection, 1890–1916, Rare Books and Manuscripts Department, Boston Public Library.

⁴¹ 5 November 1915.

⁴² 18 April 1916.

⁴³ Sears, “And This Too,” 62.

⁴⁴ Roger Burlingame, *Of Making Many Books: A Hundred Years of Reading, Writing and Publishing* (New York: Scribner’s, 1946; University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 86. Citations refer to the 1996 edition.

that “concepts of ‘morality’ and ‘immorality’ of books change as do dress fashions,” that “morality depends on the way it’s bound,” and that some books “have too serious a side, their pictures of life are too awful to appeal to people who would read them only for their so-called salacious qualities.”⁴⁵ Sears went on to admit that Appleton had not yet issued *Susan Lenox* for that reason. He summed up his personal opinion that *Susan Lenox* was “the most awful book I’ve ever read – but, to me, there is not an immoral thing in it.” In those years the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, headed from 1915 on by Anthony Comstock’s successor, John Sumner, was very active in taking “sinners” to court. Hearst’s magazine was taken to court in 1915 when it began serializing *Susan Lenox*, but the case was dismissed.⁴⁶ When, in 1917, the house of Appleton eventually decided to publish that story of a young woman driven to prostitution by circumstances unfair to women, it was threatened by Sumner, but “J.H. Sears was not intimidated.”⁴⁷ Sumner, however, wrote to Sears, explaining that the text, as it stood, violated the law prohibiting the circulation of obscene matter. Letters were exchanged. Sears extolled the literary virtues of the novel and the author’s intention “to awaken the American people to a high moral sense” and asked Sumner if he had read the book. Sumner replied by filing a complaint. The author’s literary executrix, his sister, asked Sears to compromise with an expurgated version. He did so and the complaint was withdrawn. The first edition was retracted. The second, in which volume 1 had shrunk from 505 pages to 474, and volume 2 from 560 pages to 490, came out in 1917. *Susan Lenox* met with huge success, and was eulogized in particular by H.G. Wells and H.L. Mencken.⁴⁸ Similarly, in 1900, Theodore Dreiser himself had expurgated *Sister Carrie*, his story of an ambitious, independent woman who played the social game without scruples and won, in order that Doubleday would publish a few copies, and the restored text appeared only in 1981.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ “The Men Who Publish Books ... Joseph H. Sears,” Gossip of Publishers and Authors in Bookland, *The Sun*, 4 October 1913.

⁴⁶ Paul Boyer, *Purity in Print: Book Censorship in America from the Gilded Age to the Computer Age*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 48.

⁴⁷ Isaac Marcossou, *D.G. Phillips and His Times* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1932), 257–58; Boyer, *Purity in Print*, 49.

⁴⁸ *Susan Lenox* would later become a Hollywood movie, starring Clark Gable and Greta Garbo, in 1931.

⁴⁹ Burlingame, *Of Making Many Books*.

These female characters, however, were almost tame compared with Defoe's Roxana and Moll Flanders in Britain in the 1720s.

In spite of his liberal views and humorous pronouncements, Sears looked after his firm's welfare and avoided certain risks (which sometimes led him into skirmishes with George Moore, to whose tenacity he paid homage afterwards). Following several other works by Moore published by Appleton at the turn of the century, came the collection *Memoirs of My Dead Life* in 1906. The book was read on its English proofs and accepted, but Moore soon heard that two stories, "The Lovers of Orelay" and "In the Luxemburg Gardens," would have to be omitted from the volume. He protested so vehemently that Sears wrote back to say that Appleton would retain the two stories, "only cutting out a few passages." Moore retorted, "after all, is it not an honour to be bowdlerized? Only the best are deemed dangerous,"⁵⁰ and remained so angry that he requested the publisher to include his "Apologia pro scriptis meis" as a preface. Moore had expressed complaints before. One had concerned the omission, from the preface of the American edition of *The Lake*, of his "epistle" to his friend, the French novelist Édouard Dujardin, perhaps because the words "virgin" and "semi-virgin" appeared in two metaphors. This time, Sears acquiesced, and the volume of stories did include the sixty-one-page-long apologia. It is an essay that explores, through various great authors, the link between inspiration and sexual impulses, and praises the wisdom of the Eastern sages – a worthy echo of Théophile Gautier's sparkling preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1834). George Moore wrote to W.W. Appleton: "I received a letter from Mr. Sears yesterday and the proofs of the 'Apologia.' He tells me that it is first-rate, says it could not be better ... as you see, you Americans will have no excuse for not advancing morally."⁵¹ Appleton retained this essay in its later editions, and went on to publish several of Moore's autobiographical works.

Moore exemplifies another observation made by Sears in his 1913 interview: "Most things in fiction, including drama, start in Paris ... The wise publisher watches France, the migration to England, and selects the right time for an appearance here."⁵² French historians of British literature made a similar observation: Moore's development "represents one of the extreme stages reached, in Great Britain, by

⁵⁰ 8 October 1906.

⁵¹ 12 November 1906.

⁵² "Men Who Publish Books," *The Sun*, 4 October 1913.

the contagious craving for aggressive truth which had come over from France.”⁵³ Bold new works were then translated, such as Karin Michaelis’s *The Dangerous Age* (1911) or imitated, such as Romain Rolland’s *Jean-Christophe* (1904–12). Sears’s comment accords with Walter Benjamin’s celebrated essay, “Paris – Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” and Pascale Casanova’s conception of it as a “literature city” (“*ville-littérature*”)⁵⁴

When, in 1919, Sears left Appleton, *Publishers Weekly* wrote: “under his direction this great publishing business has been steadily rebuilt ... among the newer enterprises have been the well-known Appleton business books series, the large investment in revising the *New Practical Encyclopaedia* ... In the field of general publications, the firm has had many successes to its credit.”⁵⁵ Gerard R. Wolfe writes that Sears “did succeed in turning a small profit.”⁵⁶ John W. Hiltman, whose ideas were different on some points, succeeded him, and was dynamic, but Appleton was to merge with the Century Company in 1933.

J.H. Sears recovered enough to embark on the adventure to Kingsport, Tennessee. That city was, first, an instance of American capitalist industrial creativity at the beginning of the twentieth century, and second, a unique case in the world of publishing, as it brought together all the elements needed to make cheaply priced, but not cheap-looking, books in huge numbers, in what became the Kingsport Press. Most published sources on the history of Kingsport are unfortunately self-congratulatory and idealized (often overlooking the city’s experiences with racism), as the title *Kingsport: A Romance of Industry*, by Howard Long, editor of the *Kingsport Times*, suggests.⁵⁷ A similar title is found in John A. Piquet’s *Kingsport: City of Industries, Schools, Churches and Homes* (Kingsport: Rotary Club, 1937), which Sears revised as *Kingsport: The Planned Industrial City* (1946). The only critical study, with nearly the same title, *Kingsport, Tennessee: A Planned Industrial City*, was written by Margaret Ripley

⁵³ Émile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, *A History of English Literature* (rev. ed. London: Dent & Sons, 1957), 1289.

⁵⁴ Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres* (Paris: le Seuil, 1999), 41. Benjamin’s 1939 essay can be found online in French at http://www.uqac.quebec.ca/zone30/Classiques_des_sciences_sociales/index.html

⁵⁵ 20 December 1919.

⁵⁶ Wolfe, *The House of Appleton*, 333.

⁵⁷ Howard Long, *Kingsport: A Romance of Industry* (Johnson City, TN: Overmountain Press, 1928; repr., 1993).

Wolfe and published in 1987 (with a 1994 reprint) by the University Press of Kentucky. In Wolfe's work, we learn in the introduction, without explanation, that much of the documentation on the city was destroyed. Actually, the major event that concerns this essay took place in 1988, when Quebecor World, the final owner of the Kingsport Press, gave the city the one million square feet on which the press used to stand. The city destroyed most of the buildings, from which only a few random documents on the Kingsport Press were saved by a volunteer.⁵⁸

Nobody would have thought of creating a modern industrial city in that unassuming town of upper East Tennessee until the Clinchfield Railway, financed by the New York bank Blair & Company, arrived in the Appalachian mountains in 1915. Soon after, thanks to railway access, several New York banks purchased coalfields in the area, where water, land, and cheap labour were readily available.⁵⁹ The modern city of Kingsport was designed by the urban specialist Fred Nolen, and financed and organized by the Kingsport Improvement Corporation. It was run by John B. Dennis (of Blair & Company) and J. Fred Johnson, and was incorporated in 1917. Kingsport was not a "company town," but attracted a large number of industrial plants: cement, textile, glass, and hosiery mills, for example. In Long's book, a list of the firms and their products includes fifteen different plants.⁶⁰ The last one is the Kingsport Press. It was founded by the J.J. Little and Ives Company, bookmakers. Its leaders were John B. Dennis, John Nolan, and perhaps Joseph Sears, who came into the venture as a friend of Dennis, and knew local businessman Fred Johnson.⁶¹ The state of Tennessee had an exceptional record in publishing, and with several firms already available locally, the men envisioned a book manufacturing plant capable of producing inexpensive books. They gradually attracted other firms like the Mead Pulp and Paper Company, which built a paper mill, acquired the pulp mill, and took over a textile plant called the Borden Mills. They used fast Hoe presses. Long explains: "In spite of the fact that they are not related by ownership, the majority of the industries of Kingsport interlock in

⁵⁸ Kingsport City Hall, email message to the author, 1 July 2013.

⁵⁹ Long, *Kingsport*, 81–90.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶¹ In an email message to the author, September 2013, Mrs. Nancy Van Orden, the daughter of Penelope Sears and Sherman Phelps Platt, who was born and raised in Kingsport, remembered the frequent visits of these men to her home.

certain of their activities.”⁶² The press first bore the name “J.J. Little & Ives Co.,” and had Louis M. Adams as its president until 1925.

In 1922, once the press was ready⁶³ to produce clothbound books in huge quantities (an average of two million volumes a month) more cheaply than any other company, thanks above everything to the immediate availability of every industry and to innovative techniques, it faced the massive challenge of distribution. J.H. Sears, whether or not he first had the idea, was called upon to work in New York in a house under his name to sell the books to department stores. In the early years, clothbound classics of 256 pages were sold for ten cents in over a thousand Woolworth five-and-ten stores. They sold twenty million copies of twenty titles.⁶⁴

Most Kingsport Press titles were not so different from the Appleton reprints of old and modern classics out of copyright, but some were under copyright. Whatever the series, each volume indicated “Manufactured complete by the Kingsport Press Kingsport, Tennessee.” The arrangement with Woolworth, then with Sears Roebuck & Company (no personal connection), worked, at least for some time, under the name Royal Blue Library. It facilitated a wide access to those texts, but could imply their silent abridgment to conform to the series’ uniform length, as was done with *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.⁶⁵

The second president of the press was, for twenty-nine years, Colonel E. Woodman Palmer, who diversified its fields to include religion, textbooks, and history books. The volumes became slightly more expensive. In 1929, the firm became the J.H. Sears Publishing Company. Sears, in his unpublished memoir, speaks about Kingsport, but strangely does not mention his own firm. In the notices about it, no one else is mentioned, either. A combination of serendipity and helpful librarians led us to the names of two men who, in those years, were part of it and even bore the title of vice-president.

⁶² Long, *Kingsport*, 122–23.

⁶³ Wolfe, *The House of Appleton*, 75.

⁶⁴ Sears, “And This Too,” 91. In this memoir, Sears recounts a disquieting anecdote. The president of Woolworth was informed that four hundred thousand copies of *Alice in Wonderland* had been put together wrongly, bound with half of Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Kidnapped*. He said: “Let’s wait for the complaints.” Not one came in twenty years. *Ibid.*, 92–93.

⁶⁵ Claire Parfait, *The Publishing History of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 166.

One of these men was Karl Edwin Harriman, born in 1875, a journalist and writer from the Midwest with an impressive career. When he died in 1935, his obituary in the *Scranton Republic* summed up his life: “Karl E. Harriman, former magazine editor and newspaper man, died today at his home in suburban Wyncote. He was sixty. He served as managing editor of the *Ladies Home Journal* from 1912 to 1919 and was editor of *The Red Book*, *The Blue Book*, and *The Green Book*, from 1919 to 1927. He became vice-president of the J.H. Sears Publishing Co, New York, in 1927. Two years ago, he retired.” Under Harriman, the Hearst monthly magazines had prospered with the introduction of short fiction by a range of major recent or contemporary writers, from Sinclair Lewis and Edith Wharton, to Edgar Rice Burroughs, the creator of Tarzan, and Zane Grey. The other vice-president, Phil(l)ip Austen Murkland (1880–1944), obtained a BA from Johns Hopkins University, and graduated from the law school at the University of Maryland in 1901. Later on, he worked at some point for Sears Roebuck & Company, but our information is incomplete.

Both men appear, along with Sears, in the papers of the Dietz collection kept in the special collections at the Syracuse University Bird Library.⁶⁶ David Dietz (1897–1984), a science journalist, wrote *The Story of Science*, which he hoped would be published by Sears. In numerous letters dated between 1930 and 1931, Harriman, Murkland, and Sears in turns discuss the manuscript, decide to wait for more chapters, read them, then meet with the author. Murkland also discusses illustrations and promotion. The book was published in 1932 and there were plans for publishing further works on science. Other non-fiction titles (listed in Appendix 2) also aimed at spreading general knowledge, like the shortened version of Webster’s dictionary (1928), *The Story of Literature* (1927) by Sidney Gunn, a Boston professor,⁶⁷ or *How Red is America?* by Will Irwin, in 1927, which analyzed various radical groups. Still others recorded the experiences of individuals in medicine, exploration, war, or politics, like Samuel H. Adams’s *The Godlike Daniel* (1930), a book on Daniel Webster. A female immigrant story, *I Am a Woman – and a Jew*, signed by Leah

⁶⁶ Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries, <http://src.syr.edu>.

⁶⁷ The *Lewiston Evening Journal*, 4 November 1927, hailed Gunn’s book as “an aid to general culture, in school or home.”

Morton (alias Elizabeth Stern) was also very successful.⁶⁸ The works of fiction published by Sears tended toward romances, adventure stories, and thrillers like *The Counterfeit Wife: A Sophisticated Maiden's Confessions Censored Indiscreetly* (1930), by James G. Dunton; nevertheless, there were a few memorable modern novels and stories, like Margery Latimer's *We Are Incredible* (1928), and *Nellie Bloom and Other Stories* (1929).

In spite of its emblem, the Winged Victory, the Sears Publishing Company did not survive beyond 1934, when Dodd, Mead & Company bought it and J.H. Sears retired. By this time the company was heavily in debt, which explains the price of \$10,000 (equivalent to about \$172,000 in 2013) paid in cash, that the Sears Publishing Company had to accept for all its assets. The Kingsport Press itself was still in action, but the economic crisis meant a decrease in the department store orders, and besides, the debtors' list named nearly three hundred shops, schools, or libraries that owed money for books. An extra \$5,000 was paid to Dodd, Mead & Company to cover whatever would come in from these clients. In addition, the documents of the sale show that some of the more successful recent authors under copyright were gone, and while many popular ones with several titles remained, including James G. Dunton, Lee Thayer, and Arthur Somers Roche, their sales had decreased significantly.⁶⁹

Joseph Hamblen Sears could not foresee, and never witnessed the fatal crisis of the Kingsport Press. What its admirers had said of its peaceful labour relations was probably true, but, as Margaret R. Wolfe says, the press "became an example of unrestrained capitalism allowed to run its course ... the leaders became tyrannical."⁷⁰ As a result, the Allied Press Unions began to strike in March 1963 for better working conditions. Arbitration failing, the strike lasted until 1967, when the unions were disbanded and the press became a subsidiary of Arcata National Corporation, to be purchased by Quebecor World, to

⁶⁸ Sears would have been astonished to read, in *Secret Family*, published by Stern's eldest son T. Noel Stern in 1988, that his mother's self-portrait as a Polish-born Jew was pure fiction. Nobody came to disprove him. See also Laura Browder, *Slippery Characters: Ethnic Impersonators and American Identities* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) 165–70.

⁶⁹ Dodd, Mead Manuscripts, Lilly Library Manuscript Collections, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

⁷⁰ Margaret Wolfe, *Kingsport, Tennessee*, 5.

which it belonged until 2008, when the latter sold the press grounds to the city.⁷¹

One of Sears's remarkable traits as an editor and publisher was his concern for spreading culture among new readers or readers who had not had much access to it. It was naturally hoped that those books on historical, scientific, literary, or even philosophical topics (see in particular the 1926 series of essays entitled *These Splendid Painters*, etc., and *The Inspiration of Old Age* in 1927) would sell, and this was a characteristic attitude of which we have given examples. At the same time, Sears knew that readers also had an appetite for entertainment through different types of texts, and he published popular fiction as well. A question he pondered and was asked was that of readers' tastes – how to perceive them and how much to indulge them; this was crucial information for authors who submitted manuscripts. On 1 October 1911, the *New York Herald* published a long interview entitled "Pitfalls of the Unpublished Author," signed by Garnet Warren, who also drew several pencil sketches. In this article, Sears claimed that "matching the book with the known tastes of the readers" was necessary to make money for his firm, and that "to try to give them what they don't want suggests something between a prig and a fool." Why reject manuscripts by new authors? How can genius be detected? "When a very unusual book is in your hand, you don't know if it's diamonds or dynamite," as genius is always "breaking through, like dynamite." Years later, writing on the sudden success of *David Harum*, published by Appleton in 1899 after fourteen publishers had refused it, Sears compared the book's success to "the inception of a war – finally a spark."⁷² Harper & Brothers had had a similar experience in 1880 with Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur*. Sears admitted that, with some new authors, it was difficult to decide whether an author's "lack of respect for the laws of fiction" was just poor craftsmanship or was unusual in a way that deserved a gamble. Sears's grandson, Sherman Phelps Platt, Jr., the president of Dodd, Mead & Company, noted in his recorded interview unexpected successes with non-fiction books as well.

On 4 October 1913, the *New York Sun* ran a long (unsigned) article on J.H. Sears, the president of Appleton, with a photograph, in its series, Gossip of Publishers and Authors in Bookland. The article reveals the more original and independent side of Sears's convictions

⁷¹ The Kingsport press strike is well documented in Georgia State University Library's special collections in Atlanta, and in the City of Kingsport archives.

⁷² Sears, "And This Too," 28.

through a discussion of the notions of morality and immorality in published writings. To Sears, as we have already pointed out, nothing was objective or permanent, since such conceptions “change as do dress fashions.” Sears points to slight changes in tolerance that make all the difference for certain writings and gives the interesting example of three novels, which, had they been published in the 1870s, would not have been read or appreciated: *The House of Bondage, or Charlotte Brooks and Other Slaves*, by Octavia V. Rogers Albert,⁷³ a series of interviews of former slaves conducted by a woman born just before her parents were emancipated (now a classic among slave narratives); *Damaged Goods* (1913), by Upton Sinclair, a novelization of a French play, *Les Avariés* by Eugène Brieux, on the subject of venereal diseases and syphilis; and *The Hungry Heart* by David Graham Phillips. The last two were published by Appleton under Sears’s presidency. *The Hungry Heart* heralds modernist fiction written a little later, especially by women like Margery Latimer, in its perception of, and sympathy with the woman’s feelings inside a couple who married for love. In the novel, the husband concentrates on his chemical research to such a degree that his wife feels utterly neglected and, after attempting in vain to work with him, she decides to leave him. After she has gone, he comes to understand her feelings.

In the transition period between Appleton and Sears Publishing Company, Sears wrote an eight-page essay on reading entitled “Novels that Last,” published in 1921 by *The Forum*. The essay undermined all his efforts as a businessman, since its provocative thesis is that, for a happy reading life, two works were sufficient, as the reader would never tire of going back to them for enjoyment or reflection. The first was the French novel *The Three Musketeers* (1844) by Alexandre Dumas, including its sequels, and the other was the historical and philosophical work of Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (completed in Britain in 1788), “every page filled with episodes and histories and stories that no inventive mind of the novelist can ever excel in variety or strangeness, in beauty or horror or magnificence.” Provided that these books, a wood fire, and a flower garden become our life companions, “the least that can be said is that they will keep us sane.”

Sears’s other works are a medley. Some, like *In the Shadow of War* (Dodd, Mead & Company, 1901), reprinted as *None but the Brave* (1902), and *The Career of Leonard Wood* (Appleton, 1919), were in

⁷³ Published in New York by Hunt & Eaton, 1890.

the American epic vein. Both went through many reprints. His 1904 novel, *A Box of Matches* (Dodd, Mead & Company), written mostly in dialogue, is the satirical portrait of a woman who loves matchmaking; it was probably a recreation for him. It went through four editions.

In Sears's obituaries came the announcement of a last novel. Few people knew about it, no reviews are known to exist, and even his descendants had not heard of it, although it was published in 1939, several years before he died. *The Ormsteads: A Novel of Three Generations*, was not signed Joseph Sears but Nickerson Bangs, and was published in New York by Harold C. Kinsey & Company, Inc., and printed by J.J. Little & Ives Company, making it a product of the Kingsport Press. Nickerson was Sears's mother's maiden name. The novel was not an autobiography, but Sears used certain elements relevant to his family and their "clan." It centres on old William Ormstead, who had amassed a fortune in shipping (like Sears's own father), married Eleanor, and had six children. The "clan" comes and goes between New York City and their inherited summer home. The narrative deals with the range of the patriarch's negative emotions as to the choices of his children, then his grandchildren, regarding work and spouses. In Ormstead's eyes, his offspring transgress all the tacit rules of their society. The old man is like the majority of men described by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (quoted by G. Moore in his apology); to them, "experience is like the stern lights of a ship, which illuminate only the track it has passed." By the end, however, Ormstead finds inner peace when he comes to think: "They did not do the things and think the thoughts he had done and thought; and yet if the world did not change and develop, it would be a sorry place."⁷⁴

The book was a fitting reflection of J.H. Sears's life. He was discreet, but held firm convictions, and attempted to convince others of the necessity of change. This tendency was not limited to family lives, of course. In his actions as a publisher, Sears was neither a revolutionary, nor someone concerned only with high culture, contemptuous or fearful of the masses. While reading his own works or about him, one is not made particularly aware of non-white American authors (with the exception of *The House of Bondage*) or of the avant-garde publishers who marked the first half of the twentieth century, such as B.W. Huebsch, Alfred and Blanche Knopf, Albert Boni, or Horace Liveright – Jews who entered the publishing industry

⁷⁴ Nickerson Bangs, *The Ormsteads: A Novel of Three Generations* (New York: Harold C. Kinsey, 1939) 296.

more attuned to new American and European writing and ready to fight the censors.⁷⁵ However, Sears did not share the conservative views of the editors at Scribner's Sons, reflected by their historian, R. Burlingame in *Of Making Many Books*, and often by *Publishers Weekly*. Change affected not only publishing, which had become an industry, but American culture in general. A series of experiments with cheap books frightened the establishment, and not just for commercial reasons. An early example had been, in 1874, John B. Alden's "literary revolution."⁷⁶ Much later, in the 1930s, several publishers paid Edward L. Bernays to fight "the dollar book."⁷⁷ The urban historian Lewis Mumford said, in the spirit of many who held "popular fiction," which they associated with female readers, in contempt: "Once the attempt is made to reach this audience, the sort of books produced en série will be the equivalent of dream stories and True Romances, and on the whole, violet-ray treatments and vacuum cleaners, and cheap motor cars take care of the surplus income of this group quite as satisfactorily as books possibly could, with a smaller amount of cultural degradation."⁷⁸ Later on, the gradual concentration of the book business brought with it many high risks, but did not quite deserve the apocalyptic 1954 view of Alan Dutscher, whose article concluded with a prediction of the coming "death of free expression in America."⁷⁹

Joseph Hamblen Sears benefited from his status as an "inheritor,"⁸⁰ in particular through the social network he built in his youth, which facilitated his later career. Perhaps his inherited status also freed him from the need to boast, and enabled him to view life and society with the wry humour exemplified several times in the preceding

⁷⁵ See Walker Gilmer, *Horace Liveright, Publisher of the Twenties* (New York: David Lewis, 1970).

⁷⁶ R.H. Shove, *Cheap Book Production in the U.S., 1870 to 1891*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Library, 1937), 87–94.

⁷⁷ Ann Haugland, "Book Propaganda: Edward L. Bernays's 1930 Campaign Against Dollar Books," *Book History* 3 (2000) 231–52.

⁷⁸ Lewis Mumford, "Publishing: Old and New," *The New Republic* 64 (1930): 176–78, quoted in Haugland, "Book Propaganda," 235.

⁷⁹ Alan Dutscher, "The Book Business in America," in *Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg & David Manning White (New York: The Free Press, 1957), 126–40.

⁸⁰ Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *The Inheritors: French Students and Their Culture*, trans. Richard Nice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). Originally published as *Les Héritiers: Les étudiants et la culture* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1964).

pages. Sears can be seen as a transition figure in American publishing, concerned with what we would call middle-class readers, and working at the juncture between two worlds in publishing.

Appendix 1. List of Works by Joseph Hamblen Sears (Alternatively Signed “Hamblen Sears” or “Hamblin Sears”) as Author or Editor

Books

- Governments of the World To-Day* (Meadville, PA: Chautauqua Century Press, 1895), introduction and notes.
- Fur and Feather Tales* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1899).
- None but the Brave* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1901, 1902). This book was published as *In the Shadow of War* in 1901.
- A Box of Matches* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1904).
- The Career of Leonard Wood* (New York: D. Appleton, 1919).
- The Splendid Books Series, edited by J.H. Sears:
- These Splendid Rulers: the Golden Ages of the World* (New York: J.H. Sears & Co., 1926), introduction and notes.
- These Splendid Women* (New York: J.H. Sears & Co., 1923), introduction and notes.
- These Splendid Explorers* (New York: J.H. Sears & Co., 1926), introduction and notes.
- Edward Gibbon, *These Splendid Fighters* (New York: J.H. Sears & Co., 1925), introduction and notes.
- Giorgio Vasari, *These Splendid Painters* (New York: J.H. Sears & Co., 1926), introduction and notes.
- James J. Walsh, *These Splendid Priests* (New York: J.H. Sears & Co., 1926), introduction and notes.
- The Inspiration of Old Age* (New York: J.H. Sears & Co., 1927), introduction and notes.
- Tennessee Printers 1791–1945: A Review of Printing History from Roulston’s First Press to Printers of the Present, by Joseph Hamblen Sears (1865–1946)* (Kingsport, TN: privately printed by the Kingsport Press, 1945). Reprinted in 2000, with an index added by Sharon R. McCormack.
- Kingsport: The Planned Industrial City*, 2nd revised ed. (Kingsport, TN: Rotary Club, 1946). Written by John A Piquet, first published as *Kingsport: City of Industries, Schools, Churches and Homes*, 1937.
- Nickerson Bangs [pseudonym for J.H. Sears], *The Ormsteads: A Novel of Three Generations* (New York: H.C. Kinsey, 1939).

Essay

“Novels that Last,” *Forum*, August 1921, 108.

Unpublished Typescript

“And This Too, Shall Pass,” 125 pages, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Interviews

“Is Your Book Unpublished? – Here Are the Reasons Why,”
Washington Post, 8 October 1911.

“The Men Who Publish Books ... Joseph H. Sears,” Gossip of
Publishers and Authors in Bookland, *The Sun*, 4 October 1913.

**Appendix 2. A Sampling of Works Published or Reprinted by
J.H. Sears, “Manufactured Complete by the Kingsport Press,”
in 1926, 1927, and 1928**

The only primary record to have come to light of works published under Sears’s name is the alphabetical list of authors under copyright whose titles were transferred to Dodd & Mead in 1934. That list includes 118 authors and 191 titles, but the dates given for the first editions can be unreliable or absent. Most of these works can still be found in second hand bookstores in various editions, and nearly all have been digitized and can be read for free or as e-books. A large number are kept in the Widener Library of Harvard University.

1926

The Three Musketeers, Alexandre Dumas (2 vol.).

Inez: A Tale of the Alamo, A. J. Evans (1850).

Alice in Wonderland and *Through the Looking Glass*, Lewis Carroll
(1865, 1871).

The Pilgrim’s Progress, John Bunyan (1678).

These Splendid Explorers, J.H. Sears, editor.

These Splendid Rulers: The Golden Ages of the World, J.H. Sears, editor.

These Splendid Painters, Giorgio Vasari, with introduction and notes
by J.H. Sears.

These Splendid Women, J.H. Sears, editor.

I Am a Woman – and a Jew, Leah Morton (alias Elizabeth Stern).

Wine, Women and War: A Diary of Disillusionment, Anonymous.

The Man Hunters, Melville Davisson Post.
The Comeback: The Story of the Heart of a Dog, Joe Mills.
The Philippines: A Treasure and a Problem, Nicholas Roosevelt.
Publicity: A Study of the Development of Industrial News, Roger
Williams Riis and Charles William Bonner.
Jazz, Paul Whiteman and Mary Margaret McBride.
Pinocchio, Carlo Collodi.

1927

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SOMMAIRE

Cet article attire l'attention sur plusieurs aspects de l'édition américaine *mainstream*, de la dernière décennie du 19^e siècle aux années trente, à travers un homme au destin paradoxal : personnage public de l'édition sur une longue période, oublié ensuite des historiens du livre. Pour différentes raisons, retrouver sa trace précise dans des archives s'avère très difficile, et l'article en témoigne. On suit d'abord le parcours de Joseph Hamblen Sears (1865–1946) de sa jeunesse dorée bostonienne, avec ses études de haut niveau (Harvard et des séjours universitaires à Paris et à Berlin), à son choix d'écrire et de travailler dans l'édition. On le voit apprendre le métier dans diverses revues à diffusion nationale, (*Cosmopolitan*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Harper's Monthly*), nouer des contacts et faire preuve de compétences à la fois littéraires et de gestion. Peu après 1900, il est fait appel à lui pour présenter un projet de redressement de la grande maison Appleton, en crise financière, si bien qu'il en est nommé président. Il le restera jusqu'en 1919. Une autre étape succède à cette "retraite," il est associé à l'expérience de Kingsport, Tennessee. Dans cette nouvelle ville industrielle, des hommes d'affaires ont réuni toutes

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les entreprises nécessaires à la fabrication de livres très bon marché et de qualité, grâce aux progrès technologiques. Devant la nécessité d'assurer la vente de millions d'exemplaires, Sears est chargé d'ouvrir une maison à son nom, à New York, de 1922 à 1934, et de contacter notamment de grandes chaînes comme Woolworth. La Kingsport Press diffuse d'abord des classiques à dix cents, puis des volumes un peu plus chers, avec des textes très divers, plus récents, de fiction ou non. L'exemple de J.H. Sears montre comment travaillaient les éditeurs, avant la présence des agents littéraires et dans les conditions économiques et sociales de ces années, notamment en étroite contact avec les auteurs. Les éléments de correspondance sont précieux à ce sujet et sur les auteurs eux-mêmes. Les écrits, romanesques ou non, de Sears au long de sa vie ont un fil commun qui rejoint son attitude d'éditeur, la conviction du changement inéluctable des mœurs, en général vers davantage de tolérance. Il a souvent défendu des écrivains, George Moore par exemple, contre la censure. Sa supériorité de classe, au lieu de l'inciter au conformisme, lui donnait une liberté de pensée, un recul souvent ironique par rapport aux prescriptions et aux tabous de la société dominante, sans pour autant en faire un révolutionnaire.

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