



London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811

James Raven

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James Raven's history of the Charleston Library Society's book purchasing activities offers a window into the transatlantic book trade during the 18th and 19th centuries, and a chronicle of this early library's influence on southern culture. Founded in 1748 and still flourishing at the start of the 21st century, the Charleston Library Society occupies a position of historical significance comparable to that of the Library Company of Philadelphia, the New York Library Society, and the Boston Athenaeum. Its members provided the initiative for the founding of the Charleston Museum, the College of Charleston, and numerous civic and literary societies. Raven reveals how the Charleston library grew into an effective force for the pursuit of intellectual and scientific interests and the confirmation of the political power of South Carolina's planter elite. Raven's study features an annotated edition of the "Charles Town Library Society Letterbook, 1758-1811", a rare surviving set of correspondence written to London booksellers. These letters document the processes of colonial book ordering and transit, including the types of literature requested, methods of financing undertaken, and time required to receive shipments. Raven supplements the correspondence by tracking changes in 18th-century publishing and revealing how important but exasperating the overseas market was for all leading London booksellers.

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