

“Highly Valuable & Extensively Useful”: Community and Readership Among the Eighteenth Century Philadelphia Middling Sort

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William Birch, Library and Surgeon's Hall, Fifth-street. Engraving, from The City of Philadelphia. Philadelphia, 1800.

Late in 1789, Benjamin Franklin carried out one of his last public acts in composing a few words to describe the founding of the Library Company of Philadelphia. The directors of the Library Company planned to carve Franklin's words on a stone tablet on the front of their luxurious new library hall, across Fifth Street from the Pennsylvania State House yard. When completed, the library building would face the home of another of Franklin's creations, the American Philosophical Society. Both structures were luxurious by any standards in the new state and nation. Both drew in the interests and actions of some of the preeminent gentlemen (and ladies) of the early Republic. The words Franklin chose to adorn this new building were therefore important, and pregnant with meaning:

Be it remembered,
In honor of the Philadelphia Youth,
Then chiefly Artificers
That in MDCCXXXI
They cheerfully
Instituted the Philadelphia Library;
which, tho' small at first,
Is become highly valuable & extensively useful¹

Franklin's carefully-chosen words signified his entire career and ideology as an educational activist and reformer, and likewise they reflected the cultural milieu in which he had carried out those activities. Certainly, the Library Company of 1789 was an institution dominated by the rich "upper sort" of early national Philadelphia. Like the American Philosophical Society and other educational civic organizations Franklin had helped found, the library had become a place of gentility and refinement, a far cry from its first meetings in a room adjacent a tavern. The strict codes of decorum that were reflected in its building, furnishings, and expectations of patrons were all departures from the simple origins of the Library Company. But Franklin reminded the Philadelphia gentry who strolled the statehouse lawn and browsed the library shelves that it was artificers, not the wealthy, who had formed this institution. It was the actions of these artificers, the ingenuity that they displayed, that had "become highly valuable & extensively useful." Franklin sought to remind Philadelphians of the 1780s of the importance of the middling sort in creating influential social institutions in the early history of the city. Similarly, this essay seeks to expand our understanding of the centrality of the eighteenth-century middle class in the forming of American educational practices and ideals.

The Library Company acted as a bridge for the Philadelphia middling sort, connecting the social aspects of learning and discussion which flourished in the Junto with a broader plan of education that was rooted in a transatlantic world of ideas and aimed at improving the individual and the society at large. It was within the Library Company that Philadelphians outside of the highest ranks of society first experienced this expanded mental world, where they discovered new ideas and a new place for themselves in society. That Franklin reflected as an elder statesman on the early days of the library and emphasized the role of the middling social rank of its founders was profoundly important. He could reflect on his own successes as an intellectual and civic leader and see the roots of that accomplishment in what he had learned in the library. But beyond just being the chronicle of an institution that succeeded in its mission, the history of the Library Company offers an important perspective on the history of the mental world of eighteenth-century Philadelphia artisans. In addition to examining the library as an example of group coherence among these men, this essay will explore the history of reading and literacy as reflected

in the Library Company, will show how books fit into an expanding trade of items and ideas in the eighteenth century, and finally, will show how the library's activities led Philadelphians to broaden their explorations of what they should learn in order to be both knowledgeable and useful citizens.

By 1789, when Franklin composed his words for the library cornerstone, he had already come to embody the Enlightenment to people around the world, and his emphasis on reading and the book signified the importance of print in both that era and his advancement within it. Yet at the same time that the Enlightenment brought challenges to assumptions about politics, society, and the natural world, the uses of the print media were also being transformed.² Recent historiography has challenged the way scholars examine the experience of reading. As Michael Warner has pointed out, "we have to assume that the purposes, uses, and meaning of print do change."³ Franklin's emphasis on the Library Company reflected his belief that reading and literacy changed social expectations and redefined positions within a developing culture.

The structural roots of the Library Company of Philadelphia lay in the literacy tradition of European artisans and the public house. From its start, the Junto, the club of artisans which Franklin and his friends organized, discussed reading at their regular Friday meetings in a tavern. The first question that Junto members read aloud each week asked the twelve members to share "any thing in the last author you read, remarkable, or suitable to be communicated" to the rest of the group.⁴ While the Junto's following questions revealed an expanding perception of what artisan education could include, this first query showed an idea of communication deeply rooted in artisan public culture. When Junto members decided to meet weekly for discussion while sharing glasses of wine, they were recognizing the public house as a center of communication in the Anglo-American world. When Junto members decided to share their reading with the others, they were continuing a social tradition that was a part of their own educational experience and, undoubtedly, the way they had learned. The tavern was a place in which a significant portion of literacy and communication took place. Books, magazines, and newspapers were available in taverns, where they were read aloud by those whose reading skills enabled them to do so.⁵ Literacy was a shared activity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While the majority of artisan-class Philadelphians likely had at least a limited ability to make sense of the printed page, they also very likely expected much of their written communication to take place in a public setting or as a group activity in the household or workplace. Those who sat listening to a Boston newspaper or an English book being read in a Philadelphia public house were having an experience not profoundly different from the person who was doing the reading itself. The cost of printed materials, the inability of the middling sort to spend their daylight hours reading instead of working, and the high cost of candles all increased the likelihood that reading was done in a shared place with shared expenses. This newly-defined experience

of what reading meant and how it was done gives a much richer understanding of readership in the lives of the early American middling sort.⁶

The Junto artisans were building on these traditions when they carried out the humble beginnings of the Library Company. The Junto was one of many social clubs gathering in Philadelphia taverns in the late 1720s, but by 1730, the group's discussions had outgrown that setting. Sometime around September 1, 1730, when Franklin began his commonlaw marriage with Deborah Read Rogers, the Junto moved into a room in the house of Robert Grace at 131 High Street. Franklin recalled that he proposed

that since our Books were often referr'd to in our Disquisitions upon the Queries, it might be convenient to us to have them all together where we met, that upon Occasion they might be consulted; and by thus clubbing our Books to a common Library, we should, while we lik'd to keep them together, have each of us the Advantage of using the Books of all the other Members, which would be nearly as beneficial as if each owned the whole. It was lik'd and agreed to, and we fill'd one End of the Room with such Books as we could best spare.⁷

The few bits of information that survive concerning this library reveal the ideals on readership that the Junto artisans held. The first Junto question contains the closest thing to a catalog of the library, and one surmises that members commingled works "particularly in history, morality, poetry, phisic, travels, mechanic arts, or other parts of knowledge."⁸ Striking perhaps at this point is that Junto members, young men starting their careers, possessed enough books that "fill'd one End of the Room." The communally-held library was a strident statement of artisan mutual education and group identity.

It was, however, a brief statement. The Junto members took their books home after about a year of holding them in common, when "want of due Care of them" made members question the feasibility of keeping expensive possessions out of their personal care. Very likely, tempers flared when members, consuming glasses of wine during Junto meetings and permitted to take one another's books home, damaged the volumes.⁹ Despite the failure of the experiment, the Junto's common library was the beginning of Philadelphia artisans expanding their literacy.

The founding of the Library Company late in 1731 marked the expansion of the middling sort into the public sphere and literacy's primacy in that expansion. Franklin's 1789 statement recognized the importance of reading to his personal transformation within the public eye. It was a statement that echoed his remarks about his fellow artisans and their intellectual abilities, as when he wrote that the Library Company of Philadelphia and others it inspired "have improved the general Conversation of the Americans, made the common Tradesmen and Farmers as intelligent as most Gentlemen from other Countries, and perhaps have contributed in some degree to the Stand so generally made

throughout the Colonies in Defense of their Privileges.”¹⁰ Reading had changed the perception and abilities of himself and an entire rank of people, he wrote.

That Franklin recognized the founding of the library as a watershed in his life was made evident by a simple fact: it was the only story that he told twice in his *Autobiography*. The author explained away the dual telling by a series of circumstances. He had used some leisure time while in England in 1771 as a colonial agent to write the story of his early life to William, his only surviving son. He progressed only as far as 1731 when his vacation and reflection time ran out, and did not return to the project for thirteen years, because “The Affairs of the Revolution occasion’d the Interruption.”¹¹ When he returned to the project after the end of the war, he did not have the first section to consult and told the library organization story a second time. But a careful analysis of the text and a consideration of the story he was telling portray more complexities in the break in the *Autobiography*. Rather than simply running out of time, I would argue, Franklin reached a clear stopping point. In 1730, he had become a married man — in the eyes of himself and his spouse and their community, if not in the law — and also that year he became an independent tradesman, buying out his partner Hugh Meredith and taking control of his own workshop.¹² Franklin told these stories in the first section of his memoir, and obviously recalled the changes that took place in his life when he continued:

And now I set foot my first Project of a public Nature, that for a Subscription Library. I drew up the Proposals, got them put into Form by our great Scrivner Brockden, and by the help of my Friends in the Junto, procur’d Fifty Subscriptions of 40s. each to begin with and 10s. a Year for 50 Years, the Term our Company was to continue.¹³

Here Franklin stressed the public nature of the organization, and the turn that his own life took at that point. Another decade of reflection made the transformation to a public persona complete. In the beginning of Part II, Franklin portrays himself more as a leader of a group of interested readers, rather than the sole organizing force of the Library Company. He shows that group leading the pursuit of education, specifically stating the difficulty that an artisan would have in paying the forty shillings that membership required:

So few were the Readers at that time in Philadelphia, and the Majority of us so poor, that I was not able with great Industry to find more than Fifty Persons, mostly young Tradesmen, willing to pay down for this purpose Forty shillings each, and Ten Shillings per Annum. In this little Fund we began.¹⁴

The “I” that was indicative of the first section of the *Autobiography* gives way to the “we” that represents the second. The library founding is a representative experience, Franklin is saying, because it marked the emergence

of a public persona.

From Franklin's two descriptions, one can draw several conclusions about the Library Company's founding. First, the original organization had a very definite setting: members were drawn from the ranks of "young Tradesmen," a term that is somewhat nebulous. The tradesmen that Franklin is mentioning in this passage presumably had a certain amount of economic independence that enabled them to afford the initial 40 shilling outlay and the commitment of 10 shillings per year. Therefore, poorer workers, or the "lower sort," were financially excluded.¹⁵ In addition, the wealthy were not a part of the library's establishment. The richest Philadelphians in 1731 could afford to buy books from English merchants or shops in Philadelphia and other cities, and were neither interested in nor desirous of joining a subscription library. The Library Company of Philadelphia, therefore, was founded as a middling institution. Members had achieved a certain level of income, and held expectations of being able to continue that income or make economic progress. The education that they intended to receive from their library would aid in that progress.

The social implications of the Library Company of Philadelphia become evident through careful analysis of who participated in the organization and the lives of library subscribers during the founding period. In his 1942 history of the company's membership, Francis R. Packard noted the gentry aspects of the Library Company. "We will find that the most cultivated and intellectual citizens of Philadelphia were its chief supporters," Packard wrote. But this argument is flawed because Packard examined the signers of the 1742 proprietary charter, not those who bought memberships in 1731. In its first decade of existence, the Library Company had grown and matured, and by 1742 already showed marked differences from its founding. An examination of the first members offers a more accurate portrayal of why the library was created and what its founders hoped to accomplish.¹⁶

A general picture of the shareholder reveals some particular facts about who participated in the founding of the Library Company in 1731.¹⁷ First, the shareholders were men, generally drawn from the ranks of storekeepers or skilled artisans. They were neighbors. With few exceptions, the purchasers of the first fifty shares were residents of the roughly twelve square blocks centered around the High Street Market that constituted the town in 1731. They were involved in a variety of civic and governmental activities. Library founders held offices in ethnic and religious organizations, took active parts in later philanthropic works, and were elected to numerous offices that reflected a middling status in society. The majority of the original founders were not drawn from the city's economic, governmental, or cultural elite, and the majority do not appear to have included college or university-educated men. None of the first members had the professional titles of "the reverend" or "doctor" nor the acknowledgement of elevated social rank that came with "esquire." Rather, they were members of congregations, not ministers; surveyors

of property and sheriffs, not council members; members of the Junto or the Masons, not of the elite dancing assemblies or soirees. They were, in essence, men of Philadelphia's middling sort. Their participation in the Library Company reflected their perception of that social rank and what reading would mean to it.

The library extended the intellectual ideals first cultivated in the Junto into a broader, public sphere for middling sort Philadelphia artisans. The organizing methods of the organization, particularly the use of the public press to announce sales of shares and public meetings, were the best examples of how the middling sort moved into the public sphere. Similarly, the realm of the Junto's private meeting room and its twelve members now gave way to the more public forum of the library room. The specific instructions that the directors gave Louis Timothée, the first librarian, reveal that the Library Company of Philadelphia was to be a formal public space, not an informal meeting place for friends.¹⁸ The intricate ways in which memberships were decided, announcements of share sales and meetings released in the press, and the careful notation by secretary Joseph Breintnall of all group actions and decisions, revealed that the Library Company founders were attempting to enter a more formal, public sphere.¹⁹

Franklin recognized that his personal style of public presentation changed with the founding of the Library Company.

The Objections, & Reluctances I met with in Soliciting the Subscriptions, made me soon feel the Impropriety of presenting one's self as the Proposer of any useful Project that might be suppos'd to raise one's Reputation in the smallest degree above that of one's Neighbours, when one has need of their Assistance to accomplish that Project. I therefore put my self as much as I could out of sight, and stated it as a Scheme of *a Number of Friends*, who had requested me to go about and propose it to such as they thought Lovers of Reading. In this way my Affair went on more smoothly, and I ever after practis'd it on such Occasions; and from my frequent Successes, can heartily recommend it. The present little Sacrifice of your Vanity will afterwards be amply repaid.²⁰

In this passage, Franklin succinctly summed up what later social theorists characterized as "the principle of negativity" in structurally transforming the public sphere. Michael Warner's research has shown that the early American public sphere underwent a change from an intensely personal, deferential method of political and social interaction to one in which the individual actor's self was negated in favor of a particular persona adopted to present a plan. Franklin's negation of his own self in favor of the persona of *a Number of Friends* emphasized the middling sort's expanding public sphere.²¹

The formation of the Library Company was foremost an attempt to extend the social roles of members while it expanded their intellectual worlds. The

middling sort's ideas of elevated prospects tied to education are obvious in many instances in the organization's first years, as when the directors ordered the librarian to "permit any civil Gentleman to peruse the Books of the Library in the Library Room." "Gentleman" was not used loosely to indicate any man, but rather was a term of particular refinement. It was also a word that most library members would not have used to identify themselves. But the founding of the Library Company, a place for expanded intellectual considerations, raised middling Philadelphians to an elevated position and elevated expectations.²²

The organization was also remarkable for its extension of the private works of founders into the public realm of philanthropy. The majority of benevolent works up to this time were by either wealthy citizens or religious denominations creating charitable organizations with goals particularly attuned to their ideals. Examples of such actions for education, most notably in the founding of Harvard College or other schools throughout British North America, perpetuate the idea of philanthropy as the realm of civic leaders affecting their society. But the Library Company was different. Its members' social status and their civic goals reflected a new direction for philanthropic works in early America. Donations were at times small, but so too were the incomes of the donors. When the directors "asked [Franklin] what Charge was for printing a Catalogue of the Books of the Library for each Subscriber, and his Answer was that he designed them for Presents, and should make no charge for them," the minutes were revealing a deeply symbolic social interchange. Franklin's commitment to the organization and his investment in its success were both tied up in this act of "gifting." Similar actions among other members of the group also showed the expanding middling culture that was a part of the creation of the library. The library's 1741 catalog carefully noted when a book had been a gift and who had given it. Courtesy titles like "P. Collinson, Esq; of London. F.R.S." and "the Hon. James Logan, Esq;" bear witness to the importance of gifting for those in the upper ranks of society. But similar notations for artisans who gave one or more volumes, all noted with the title "Mr.," showed that the act of giving was also an action which raised that person in the esteem of his fellow citizens. In addition, the donation of books allowed that member to make a very public statement about his intellectual interests. The role of these philanthropic actions were part of the expanded public realm of the artisans who founded the library. Their status would be raised by the education they were seeking; the beginning of its elevation was revealed in their donations to the group.²³

Book Selection and Middling Sort Reading

The titles selected for the first order of books further illustrates specific ideas of class identity and intellectual development in the founding of the Library Company. The first directors of the library presumably had limited experience

as readers, if Franklin's statement that no good book shop existed in the colonies south of Boston in 1731 is to be believed.²⁴ While Edwin Wolf's research has shown that large numbers of titles were available at auction and through local Philadelphia merchants, the Library Company directors did not purchase their first books from those sources. Instead, they sought the advice of James Logan, the preeminent intellectual and civic leader of the colony, and then purchased their books from dealers outside of North America. The methods of book selection and procurement show that Philadelphia's artisan-readers were attempting to join an intellectual world centered in Europe and aimed at social advancement for their rank.

As the directors made their choices of works to be purchased, they deliberately broke from earlier patterns of readership within their social rank. While the research of Victor Neuburg has shown that members of the "lower sort" in eighteenth-century America had reading tastes centered in short works of fiction, fanciful stories, and similar tales found within chapbooks, the founders of the Library Company of Philadelphia distanced themselves from that tradition by creating a collection of "useful" works.²⁵ The rough draft manuscript list of books for the library included subheadings of history, architecture, mathematics, morality, geography, physics, anatomy, natural philosophy, botany, politics, animals, chronology, logic, and philology. This sophisticated curriculum displays both a break from reading traditions of their social class, and a previous knowledge of available literature that would have gone beyond the means of most of their economic backgrounds.²⁶

The method the LCP directors used to select their books discloses the nature of the Anglo-American intellectual trade and is exemplary of the social structure in the period. The directors' minutes of March 29, 1732 show that social and intellectual deference were followed in selecting books: "Thomas Godfrey at the Meeting informed us that Mr. [James] Logan had let him know he had heard of this Design and approved of it and would willingly give his Advice in the Choice of the Books....And the Committee esteemed Mr. Logan to be a Gentleman of universal Learning and the best Judge of Books in these Parts, ordered that Thos. Godfrey should wait on him and request him to favour them with a catalogue of suitable Books."²⁷ Logan was undeniably the best judge of books in the area, having created one of the outstanding libraries in early America in the half century he had lived in Pennsylvania. The group respected him for his abilities, as well as deferred to him within their society. The Library Company of Philadelphia would be founded, funded, and run by tradesmen, but as their status within society dictated, matters of importance would require the input of the colony's leader of intellectual and governmental matters.²⁸

Neither Franklin's personal papers nor the Library Company's minutes specifically state what Logan recommended for the library's shelves. It is feasible

that a surviving manuscript list of books for the Library Company in Franklin's handwriting was the notes he took when he and Godfrey "sate with Mr. Logan" to discuss the purchases. The list certainly reflects Logan's interests and library. Similarly, the list reflects the wide-ranging interests and questions of the Junto members.²⁹

A Trade in Ideas

When the artisans who formed the Library Company of Philadelphia made their first purchase of books for the collection's shelves, they also made decisions which symbolized a profound economic transformation for their group. When they ordered these titles, they assumed roles as active participants in a trans-Atlantic dialogue relating to the market, the nature of ideas, and their class' place within these realms.

As T. H. Breen's research has shown, mid-eighteenth-century Anglo-Americans were steeped in the market world. Breen's analysis looks at market items such as consumer goods and foods, but his argument that those items traded within the empire held places of central importance to men and women of all classes is equally significant in examining the books bought by the Library Company. Just as tea was becoming popular as an enjoyable representation of prosperity and imported ribbons and laces were added to homespun to increase social status, the book trade allowed Philadelphia artisans to enter the empire of goods. On a very basic level, the books purchased were consumer goods, items of luxury or at least added comfort, useful in making life in a provincial American town more pleasant and containing information that could be both useful and interesting. As such, the decision to delve into the trans-Atlantic book trade was a watershed experience in the consumer lives of eighteenth-century middling Philadelphians.³⁰

The way that these middling sort readers entered the market was also significant. Stephen Botein found little of note in the creation of the trans-Atlantic book trade in the early eighteenth century, and instead contended that "Students of the 'Enlightenment in America' might want to revise their definitions of that phenomenon after inspecting a miscellany of invoices sent to colonial importers." Instead, his analysis of shipping records and the advertisements of books shows that Americans were receiving "the detritus of eighteenth-century English culture." Before the 1750s, he argues, there was little market for books in the colonies, and there did not exist the same "reading public" that existed in the mother country. Botein's limited analysis may offer the answer for why his research reveals so little about the mentalité of America's eighteenth-century urban dwellers, and also provides an excellent reason to study an organization like the Library Company. It is the community-oriented aspects of the Library Company, the shared experience of reading and learning and the shared expense, that are fundamentally important. Botein found significance in books accounting for only ten percent of advertisements in the

American press, while they accounted for thirty-five percent of advertisements in English newspapers of the same period.³¹ Rather than viewing this as an example of the lack of interest in reading in the colonies, a point disputed by the Library Company's very existence, we can draw hypotheses about the nature of the economy and culture of the colony. Books were much cheaper in England than in America during this time period, due to the higher costs of labor in the colonies and the increased cost of labor-intensive products, particularly paper. Shipping costs added to the prohibitive expense of purchasing a private library for all but the richest colonists. The majority of the first members of the library were middling sort, and as such came from a predominantly oral-cultural background. Information was dispensed as much through speech and conversation as through reading and, to an even lesser extent, writing. The existence of a collection of shared books, within a context of a community organization, discloses that books were highly valued and sought after. Botein's findings that books were much less available in the colonies is significant, therefore, but not as an indicator of the colonists' lack of interest in the materials conveyed in them. Rather, the establishment of an institution like the Library Company shows that the middling sort sought the information in and social implications connected with books, and they were taking a significant position of social and cultural leadership by establishing their library.

The decision to imitate the book culture of the Pennsylvania gentry — represented by James Logan — reveals that the Philadelphia middling sort combined new ideas in their intellectual and commercial worlds to elevate their rank in their society. The decision to combine their funds to purchase books showed that they viewed education as both a means to increase progress and an end in itself: a consumer good that could be purchased, displayed to enhance reputation and status, and enjoyed in the face of hardships of living far from the metropolis.

The first purchase of books by the Library Company represents just how much the market world was a part of the intellectual development of Philadelphians. While Franklin noted much later that there were good book shops in Boston in his youth, and Philadelphia newspapers carried advertisements for a variety of titles in their pages, when the library founders sought works that would be both useful and fashionable, they "sent home" for those books. As the shipment of any items from the mother country was perilous, it is obvious that the directors did not make this decision lightly, but rather that the presumed benefits of buying books from England outweighed the possible losses and efforts involved. Like James Logan, the library members wanted to join the intellectual world of Great Britain. While Logan had no choice but to purchase books from London during the early years of building his library, the Library Company's decision to buy books from the mother country reflected a desire to be tied to the economic and cultural center of the

empire despite other options for procuring books.

The first purchase of books in London marks the point in which the Library Company became involved in the trade of ideas. Thomas Hopkinson, a London-born lawyer who settled in Philadelphia and entered the mercantile trade, was scheduled to depart for London and was chosen as the library's agent. Hopkinson's career mirrored Franklin's in both his involvement in public affairs — ranging from political office and philanthropic activities that included the Library Company and later the Academy — and his rise from somewhat modest background to extreme wealth.³² Yet while Hopkinson's background included more formal education than Franklin's, and he had been trained in a profession rather than a craft, his economic status in 1731 was evidently middling. The library's use of a £45 sterling bill of exchange from Robert Grace to a London merchant implies that Grace, "a young Gentleman of some Fortune," had a higher economic status and more readily available funds from trade than Hopkinson, a relatively recent immigrant and new entrant into trade.³³ Like his fellow Junto and Library Company members, Hopkinson was entering a new economic world.

Once in London, Hopkinson was to purchase the titles decided on with the advice of Peter Collinson, "Mercer in Gracious Street London."³⁴ With that action, the Library Company began a long-term business arrangement that would influence the readership of Philadelphians and reflect the Quaker City's ties to the European Enlightenment.

Peter Collinson, a prosperous London cloth merchant and member of the Society of Friends, served his Philadelphia fellows as both purchase agent for books and informant of the diverse ideas and publications then available in Europe. An enthusiastic natural philosopher, Collinson helped diffuse the ideas of the Enlightenment to his fellow enthusiasts across the Atlantic, as well as acting as the bridge which connected them to the book market in England. In Collinson's correspondence with Library Company secretary Joseph Breintnall one can observe the development of a transatlantic friendship as a pair of kindred spirits observed the natural world from an Enlightened perspective and shared their observations. Collinson's first correspondence with the Library Company came after he helped Hopkinson find the first books purchased, and he supplemented that collection with two practical yet sophisticated volumes:

I am a stranger to most of you, but not to your laudable Design to erect a public Library. I beg your acceptance of my Mite—Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy and Philip Miller's Gardening Dictionary. It will be an Instance of your Candour to accept the Intention and good will of the Giver and not regard the Meanness of the Gift.³⁵

Neither Collinson's gift of the books nor his long-term donation of his services

as London book agent for the library should be underestimated. The gift of the two works was symbolic of the relationship that would span the succeeding decades. Collinson's gift was useful, including information on agriculture and scientific writings that were at the cutting edge of the period. But they also expanded the intellectual boundaries of the library members to include extremely sophisticated natural philosophical information. The Library Company directors realized that their actions were part of the expansion of their social and intellectual worlds, and that Collinson's assistance could help them. As Library Company secretary Joseph Breintnall wrote to Collinson:

An Undertaking like ours was as necessary here, as we hope it will be useful; there being no manner of Provision made by the Government for public Education, either in this or in neighbouring Provinces, nor so much as a good Book-Seller's Shop nearer than Boston. Every Encouragement to an Infant Design, by Men of Merit and Consideration, gives new Spirit to the Undertakers, strengthens the Hands of all concerned and greatly tends to secure and establish their Work[.]³⁶

Breintnall is succinctly stating the middling sort's cause for founding a library: the education of the public gained therein will be useful, it will make its members productive citizens of the colony. These library founders were taking up a civic responsibility that, from Breintnall's words, had been neglected by the founders, churches, and government leaders of Pennsylvania. Breintnall's notice that no good book shops existed any closer than Boston (using words that Franklin would unknowingly echo four decades later) again stresses the civic importance of founding a library accessible to Philadelphians. By this letter, Breintnall began a long correspondence with Collinson that drew the latter into the pursuit of useful knowledge for Philadelphians of the middling ranks. Collinson acted as a prompt for the library members, encouraging them to study the natural world and, in true Enlightenment fashion, share their observations with other interested people.

Books and Readership

When the Library Company directors chose the first books to be placed on their shelves, they made decisions which reflected what ideas and information they considered important to readers in their social rank. The library directors' first book order reveals what topics they considered "useful" to their pursuit of knowledge as well as the role of reading and its place within middling sort culture. Members could only imagine what a successful library project would be like, but the list they created had to include works that would interest their tastes as well as texts popular enough to draw continued support for the organization. By March, 1732, the directors were ready to commit their entire collected funds to purchase books from England. The books they ordered would be those which would have immediate use and interest for readers, and

not volumes to supplement an existing collection. Also, as the library matured and gained popularity and membership, the upper class were much more represented in the director's rolls. But the first book order provides a vivid picture of the group mentality of middling Philadelphians in the winter of 1732/3.³⁷

In all, fifty specific titles made up the first order. Specific classification of some titles is difficult to determine, because of considerable overlap in topics. The subject that most interested the Library Company in its first months was history. As Franklin later wrote, the study of history in the eighteenth century was a lesson in morality, a portrayal of the correctness of the government or its need for improvement, the importance of a life that was beneficial to the society as a whole as well as the individual. The research of Edwin Wolf and Meyer Reinhold pointed out the centrality of ancient historical topics to the thought of eighteenth-century colonists, and they saw a clear lesson for their own times in these writings.³⁸ But the Library Company of Philadelphia also wanted historical studies of their contemporary world. Nine of the first titles ordered fit into this category, including Samuel Pufendorf's eight-volume history of Europe, William Howell's history of the world, and Plutarch's *Lives*. That history was a morality play was poignantly shown in Abbé René Aubert de Vertot's *History of Revolutions*, in which the precarious nature of democratic governments in Rome, Sweden, and Portugal were displayed.

The library directors chose to forego works of theology in favor of "Morality," and the seven books that they selected comprised the second largest theme in the first library order. Included in the books on moral topics were Joseph Addison's *Works* as well as *Tatlers*, *Spectators* and *Guardians*, *The Turkish Spy*, Pufendorf's *Law of Nature*, and Plato's writings about Socrates. These works display an interest in moral improvement, but one with an expanded view of human ability in the creation of morality. The Library Company's founders lived in one of the most religiously-diverse societies in history up to that time; their decision to exclude religious topics from their first order speaks to that diversity. Religion was important within the city, and certainly religious works soon flooded into the library as books were purchased as well as donated by local and foreign clergy. But at this stage, the founders worked to create a library that was distinct in colonial America, which dealt with topics outside the theological diversity of the city and instead concentrated on ancient and modern lessons of public virtue.

The importance of communication within the social order is evident in the six works in philology in the first book order. As the title implies, philological works were intended to teach grammar and writing, but for the express purpose of being able to better convey one's ideas. Brighthand's English grammar, Bailey's English Dictionary, Gordon's Grammar, and Greenwood's English Grammar were all purchased to help men whose backgrounds would have included little training in active literacy to improve their skills in written as

well as spoken English. Works of Virgil and Homer, likewise included under this heading, provided concrete examples of those communication skills to the readers.

The Enlightenment's stress on scientific knowledge is also evident in the Company's interest. Books about mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, botany, physics, animal physiology and anatomy, geography and other topics related to natural philosophy accounted for seventeen of the works in the first book order. Closely aligned with these were the two works in architecture, displaying — as in Andrea Palladio's work — the foremost building styles as well as the useful knowledge of modern construction techniques.

In selecting four works of political discourse, the Library Company chose titles which advocated the rights of the people as well as considering the potential abuses that could come from an unjust government. *Cato's Letters* was among the first books ordered, as was Algernon Sidney's *Discourses concerning Government*. Both obviously helped shape Franklin's opinion of government, both in his later life as a revolutionary but also relatively early in his career, as when he noted that the only true crime which had led to Sidney's execution "was the writing of an excellent Book".³⁹

In summary, the books ordered by the library directors in the spring of 1732 displayed how middling Philadelphians made use of the ideas of the Enlightenment. They broke with traditions already established in other Anglo-American libraries and left theological discussions to the many churches and ministers who filled the colony. Instead, they concentrated on works which would allow them to understand the way in which their political and physical universes operated. They divulged a keen interest in the topics of natural philosophy, seeking to learn of the discussion of the physical world which dominated the greatest thinkers of their day. They sought to make sense of human actions, in the past, for which history provided a series of models both good and bad, and the present, wherein commentaries on recent political actions were available for contemplation. The Library Company's first book order also showed a connection to the social world of eighteenth-century Anglo-America: one was to present oneself in the best possible light, to perform as if on stage. The library's book choices reveal that its members saw Enlightenment thought as valuable to their self-presentation.

As the first book order offers insight into the ideal of "useful knowledge" that the Library Company directors held, the library's oldest surviving catalog, published almost a decade later, reveals how that ideal matured.⁴⁰ The 1741 document, with fifty-five pages of listings of books divided by size, shows that book acquisition trends continued as well as changed in the first decade of the library's existence. Perhaps most remarkable is the acquisition of religious texts; thirty-three titles relating to theology were on the library's shelves by 1741, including sermons, three Bibles, and lives of religious figures.⁴¹ Undoubtedly, some of these theological works represented the desires of the

Philadelphia religious to include works within the library's shelves. For example, on November 24, 1739, Peter Evans gave "a latin Bible in Folio, with Notes by Tremellins & Junius" and the catalog noted that Robert Grace, a merchant who was a member of both the Junto and library, gave "*Fox's Acts and Monuments of the Church*" in three expensive folio volumes.⁴²

In addition to religious works, several other subjects gained popularity, as revealed in the library's acquisitions. Several volumes of poetry are listed in the 1741 catalog, some with quite evident ties to other areas, as "*Creation, a Philosophical Poem: Demonstrating the Existence of GOD, In 7 books. By Sir Richard Blackmore.*" Literature was gaining shelf space in the Library Company. Other arts were also being added to the library, yet one is struck by the practicality of the volumes. Five volumes of architecture books with illustrations were available from the company, and one may surmise that volumes richly-illustrated with plates were perused both for pleasure and to gain insight into building designs. While *The Practice of Perspective* was advertised in the catalog as "An easy Method of representing natural Objects according to the Rules of Art," the practicality of its 150 copper plates was also noted as "A Work highly necessary for Painters, Engravers, Architects, Embroiderers, &c." The library catalog that William Coleman, Hugh Roberts, Francis Hopkinson, and Franklin compiled was very careful to note when its volumes included interesting illustrations. Library patrons obviously were showing an increasing demand for these attractions.

Some topics continued to hold their position as purchases of the Library Company, and one may assume were popular with readers. The 1741 catalog included 132 titles in history, covering a wide-ranging array of topics. Also, the library's readers continued their pursuit of Enlightenment science, with sixty-three natural philosophical titles including works in botany, chemistry, human anatomy and medicine, mathematics and physics, and many general works listed in the catalog. Striking among these works is the preponderance of books that offered both sophisticated scientific writing and a practical application: medical treatises with obvious advantages, studies of plant cultivation designed both to improve the reader's mind and his crop output. Practical life application was also evident in the forty-eight volumes which the library readers would have classified as "morality," items which considered proper personal conduct, pedagogical studies designed to improve the colony's youth.

Far more evident in the 1741 catalog are the writings of John Locke. A complex question is raised in considering why Locke's *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* was listed in Franklin's rough draft book list in the titles in logic, but later crossed off and not added to the first book order. Locke's work was already available as early as 1700 from Philadelphia booksellers, and the directors may have thought it did not require shipment from England. However, Locke's work on human understanding was among

those books ordered by the LCP in 1733, when the library also purchased his *Two Treatises of Government* and *Essay on Education*. The initial shipment of books, therefore, seems to have contained only those works which were not readily available in British North America. By 1741, the Library Company listed five separate collections of Locke's writings: a three-volume folio edition of his philosophical, economic, and political writings; a two-volume octavo edition of *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* which Franklin's published catalog said was "Esteemed the best Book of Logick in the World"; a duodecimo edition of *An Essay upon Education*; a one-volume 1720 collection of Locke's political, educational, and civic writings; and a 1698 edition of *Two Treatises of Government*, the latter two volumes listed in the catalog as being "Given by B.F."⁴³ The philosopher's influence on Franklin and the library were obviously revealed in these editions.⁴⁴

The Library Company's records reveal what books were available to middling sort Philadelphians, but the actual experience of reading, what sense members made of texts, is far more difficult to determine. The autobiographical accounts of members or their personal papers which discuss reading go a long way to explain what importance reading played to some Philadelphians in the eighteenth century.⁴⁵ In this respect, Franklin's writings are particularly valuable. His lifelong interest in reading, his emphasis on it in his letters, memoirs, and public pronouncements that spanned decades, all show that his experience was greatly influenced by the experience of reading works in the Enlightenment. But Franklin was not alone in his interests. The papers left by men such as Breintnall show that reading remained a common experience and one that shaped social understandings for their entire lives. When library leaders chose books, they had to take the interests and needs of numerous people into consideration. Philadelphians adapted texts to fit their lives and work.

The experience of Elizabeth Coates Paschall illustrates the social experience of readership in eighteenth-century Philadelphia. While membership in the Library Company might be interpreted to have had a specific gendered meaning — no women held shares until decades later — the actual experience of reading was one that crossed gender lines.⁴⁶ The wife and later widow of a merchant, Elizabeth Paschall was herself a healer, an experienced woman who studied numerous human ailments and ways to treat them. The practice of healing that Paschall carried out was deeply rooted within a social context where information was passed orally between acquaintances, friends, and family. One can judge just how small a community Philadelphia was — and how well residents knew the details of their neighbors personal lives — in her cure for "the Bloody Flux:"

Take fresh Mutton Sewet of the kidney and Boyl it in Milk & Give them to Drink, this Cured our Proprietor Thos. Penn when his Life was Dispair'd of & the Doctors Could not help him⁴⁷

Paschall's intimate knowledge of the proprietor's bowels is striking from a twentieth century perspective, but was part of the social experience of eighteenth-century Philadelphians. Elizabeth Coates Paschall's notebook is filled with stories of cures, as the useful knowledge of them was passed on anecdotally from one person to another. Medicines relating to stomach ailments, problems with pregnancies, wounds, bruises, and other medical problems all found their way into the conversations of Paschall and other Pennsylvanians, and she recorded them for later reference. When her friend Martha Petitt informed her that she had taken the advice of "Ladowich Christian Sprogell & wife" to use a poultice folk cure for the white swelling on her neck, rather than the more expensive and painful treatment of cutting the swelling advised by the woman's doctor, and that the treatment of human dung and hog's lard worked, Paschall recorded the story in her medical notes. She added a further testimony to the treatment in recording "My friend John Bartram told me he had a horse whose Hoofe Came off his foot swar[m]'d with Maggots and a Man aplyed the above pultice to it which intensely cured it." The social network of sharing medical information was shared in by both men and women, novices and, in Bartram's case, one of the foremost scientific minds in the colonies. Yet reading also provided a locus for gathering medical information. When she wrote "The Common Thyme is an Excellent nervous Medicine[,] it makes a Agreeable kind of Tea in a Common Way of Tea Making" and was a good cure for "the Night Mares," Paschall noted that she learned of the cure by reading Dr. John Mills' *A History of the Materia Medica*: "I had it out of the Library." Paschall's experience shows that reading and library participation were not confined only to those whose names were included in the shareholders' roster. Rather, presumably like others who did not own shares, she gained admittance to the library's shelves through the membership of a relative. The records of the Library Company are dotted with references to fathers or uncles taking responsibility for their younger male relatives to borrow books. Elizabeth Coates Paschall was not noted in such a context, but because she legally was a *femme covert*, such a statement was likely deemed unnecessary. The first rules established by the Library Company acknowledged that members would be sharing books with people in their households, and the family reading circle remained a central point of entertainment and information dissemination. Elizabeth Coates Paschall fitted into these contexts. Yet her career as a healer of men and women is reflected in her repeated statements that she had a book out of the library. She made the choice in her reading material. Other publications, including *Poor Richard's Almanac*, the *London Magazine*, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, Robert Boyle's *Philosophical Works*, *Quincy's English Dyspensary*, and on numerous occasions "James' grate dictionary," all found their way into Paschall's reading and offered cures to be copied into her notebook.⁴⁸

Elizabeth Coats Paschall's experiences reveal that traditional communication methods combined with readership to disseminate information in eighteenth-century Philadelphia. Reading was not always a private experience, but in many instances was part of the realm of conversation, social interaction, and recreation. The earlier activities of the Junto, reading aloud, sharing interesting passages, debating, indicated the experiences of common people relating to books. Elizabeth Paschall read medical information from some of the most sophisticated writers of the Enlightenment, and she read it within a social context of passing on that information to other interested or needy people.

The Library and Expanding Educational Goals

As Elizabeth Coates Paschall's copybook reveals how readers used the library books and incorporated them into their work and social interaction, so the actions of other library patrons disclose that the Library Company was leading its members into an expanded mental world that included and went beyond book learning, drawing some of them into the very heart of Enlightenment thought and the pursuit of information. An excellent example of this point is Joseph Breintnall. The surviving letters between Breintnall and Peter Collinson show the expanding intellectual interests of leaders in Philadelphia's artisan class. Breintnall's formal education was likely limited to preparing him to be a successful copier of deeds in a scrivener's shop. As his career dictated, Breintnall gained an extensive level of both passive and active literacy, where he was required both to read business documents and write more ornate copies of them. He also used a limited scientific understanding as he created distinct types of ink which would later make both Franklin and himself prosperous. But Breintnall went far beyond his initial works, becoming successful in two fields of intellectual endeavor.

Although no clues survive relating to Breintnall's literary training, he evidently developed a talent for prose and poetry, and his writings appeared in several Pennsylvania publications, the most famous of which were "The Busy-Body," his *American Weekly Mercury* essays co-authored with Franklin. Even before the two men co-founded the Junto, they worked together in public endeavors. Franklin printed Breintnall's poem "The Death of King George Lamented in Pennsylvania," a piece that celebrated both the late monarch and the religious freedom that had existed under him. Breintnall's words concerning religious liberty reflect an Enlightenment ideology. The poem celebrates the religious diversity that existed in Pennsylvania, and was the law under the Hanoverians. The Quaker Breintnall is especially careful to note George I's toleration of Friends, in which

Their choicest Boon so humbly sought he gave,
Nor would their Persons nor their Minds enslave
Easy to grant, he took their solemn YEA,

And cast the Fetters of the Oath away;
Free their Religion and Estates they hold,
The last are dear, the first surpasses Gold.⁴⁹

It is impossible to say whether Breintnall would have begun extensive scientific works had he not been so intimately connected with the Library Company of Philadelphia. Certainly, his business background and particularly his ability to produce legible and clear business letters made him the logical choice as the artisan to carry out correspondence and keep minutes for the company. In that capacity, he developed a pursuit of natural philosophy that went far beyond the basic chemical mixtures he had made as a scrivener. The Breintnall-Collinson correspondence shows that Joseph Breintnall developed an interest in an increasingly large array of scientific areas. Breintnall carried out early experiments on the effect of color in conducting heat, an inquiry also followed by Franklin.⁵⁰ He pursued botany, a field already of interest to Collinson, and in 1733 increased European knowledge of American plant life by sending Collinson a set of prints of 127 leaves. Between 1731 and 1742 he produced a two-volume work of prints of leaves of American plants, a manuscript not intended for publication and sale, but rather one that showed his own interests and displayed his knowledge to his fellows.⁵¹ Two sets of experiments also furthered Breintnall's standing as a natural philosopher. Late in 1735, he collected a set of observations detailing the anatomy and habits of rattlesnakes that he sent to Collinson. While Breintnall's letters to Collinson reveal that, like many colonists, he followed folk beliefs about poisonous snakes, he also had keen observation skills and an ability to communicate scientific information. The natural philosophers of colonial Philadelphia were also acting as a community in these works. Breintnall relates that he gained his knowledge of snake anatomy from a local doctor, who dissected one. The Junto was an evident part of that community, as Breintnall told Collinson of the experiences of Nicholas Scull, a fellow member and surveyor, who related the mesmerizing effects of encountering a rattlesnake.⁵² While writing from memory, Breintnall's account is extremely detailed, including descriptions of experiments in which dogs were bitten by rattlesnakes. Under Collinson's auspices, Breintnall's observations were published in the proceedings of the Royal Academy of Science.

The two natural philosophers also observed society in their work. In one letter, Collinson included stories of the poor starving to death in Northern Ireland. Breintnall's Quaker benevolence is evident in his response that Collinson's report "has thrown a Damp over my Spirits." But, ever the scholar, Breintnall followed his revelation of his personal feelings with his own observation, in this case the local story of an Indian family, trapped 150 miles from their community in a winter storm, killing and cannibalizing all five children and the mother of the family in order to survive.⁵³ Joseph Breintnall

began with very simple observations in natural philosophy, but by the time of his death in 1746, was conducting and reporting scientific work that showed he had fully embraced the pre-eminent ideas of the scientific Enlightenment. Breintnall's scientific pursuits were not his business, but in the true sense of the eighteenth-century natural philosopher, they were a very large part of his social interaction, and added to his standing in his community.

While the Library Company's ostensible objective was to be a public institution providing reading materials, as the organization matured it broadened its educational activities and promoted useful knowledge using a variety of techniques and in a variety of ways. First, the Library Company became a forum wherein its members and others could discuss intellectual topics and gain further information on their own areas of interest. The organization's relationship with Peter Collinson was a part of this, and through that connection and others, it became a scholarly organization with access to people of varying financial and social backgrounds.

On April 28, 1743, the directors noted that Collinson "begs a Favour of the Gentlemen of the Library Company that they will admit his Friend John Bartram...an honorary Member, without any Expense, and to have a free Access to the Library." The library directors agreed to Collinson's request, noting his frequent benefactions, but they also noted Bartram's scholarly skill "as Mr. Bartram was also in their Esteem a deserving Man, he should have free Access to the Library and be permitted to read and borrow the Books, at such Times and in such Manner as Members of the Library Company are privileged to do." Bartram, like Breintnall, had developed a trans-Atlantic correspondence with Collinson based in their mutual interest in natural philosophy, starting in 1733. He would become a pre-eminent scientist during his long career, and Linneus would refer to him as the greatest "natural botanist" in the world.⁵⁴

The inclusion of Bartram in the library's participants shows the importance of natural science in the intellectual lives of the people founding these educational institutions in the eighteenth century. In many respects, the new science, the ability to capture and study the natural world, was a metaphor for the expanding intellectual lives of these middling philosophers in colonial Philadelphia. The library's growing cabinet of curiosities — to which Bartram made an early contribution — included shells and fossils, Indian artifacts and samples of minerals and ores, a telescope and an air pump, the latter donated by the Penn family. As the Junto had prompted a small group of middling men of Philadelphia to come together and discuss intellectual endeavors, the Library Company developed from its foundation to become a promoter of useful knowledge to a much wider spectrum of Philadelphia's population. As it took the lead in promoting education to Philadelphians of a variety of backgrounds and classes, the Library and its members further expanded their intellectual pursuits.⁵⁵

Just one month after Bartram was included in the readers of the Library

Company, Franklin published his essay "A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge among the British Plantations in America," the founding document of the American Philosophical Society. Franklin did not have the first idea of founding an organization to study natural philosophy, as he has often been credited. Bartram had first promoted the idea in 1739, writing for advice to Collinson at the same time he was keeping up intellectual dialogues with natural philosophers in Europe and North America. But his idea came to nothing. Franklin's plan, although initially only marginally more successful, showed the influence of his interaction with a large group of fellow enthusiasts and the impact of the Library Company in promoting group work. Franklin was still actively engaged in his printing business, and was far from advanced in his scientific work, when he prefaced his plan by writing

The first Drudgery of Settling new Colonies, which confines the Attention of People to mere Necessaries, is now pretty well over; and there are many in every Province in Circumstances that set them at Ease, and afford Leisure to cultivate the finer Arts, and improve the common Stock of Knowledge. To such of these who are men of Speculation, many Hints must from time to time arise, many observations occur, which if well-examined, pursued and improved, might produce Discoveries to the Advantage of some or all of the British Plantations, or to the Benefit of Mankind in General.⁵⁶

This passage typified Franklin's growing interest in public education. Interested people from a variety of backgrounds must be encouraged to carry out activities which will provide useful information. And those activities must be carried out in a communal setting, wherein ideas and action may be discussed, debated, and amended. The goal of knowledge, Franklin was stating in 1743, is to help the community and the society.

This was a message that he echoed forty-six years later when he wrote his dedicatory words for the Library Company's first permanent home. That education, readership, and community were closely intertwined in Franklin's world-view at the end of his life was the continuation of an ideal that had dominated his mind for more than half a century. It was within the confines of the Library Company of Philadelphia that Franklin's educational ideology was created and nurtured. Certainly, the books that the library offered Franklin were key to his intellectual development. But perhaps most importantly, the community-oriented aspects of the library created Franklin's concepts of education. Building on artisan-community traditions that antedated the colony's founding, the library acted as an academy for those who could not afford an academy education. It brought ideas to common people that had previously been deemed the realm of the upper ranks. Franklin's statement that it "improved the general Conversation of the Americans, made the common Tradesmen and Farmers as intelligent as most Gentlemen from other Countries" stressed the role that education could play in affecting the lives of

Courtesy of Library Company of Philadelphia



Francesco Lazzarini, Benjamin Franklin. Marble sculpture, ca. 1792, commissioned by William Bingham for the Library Company's first building.

those born outside the upper ranks. The practical education that Franklin and other Philadelphians provided themselves in the Library Company laid the foundation for an educational plan that was a radical departure from eighteenth-century social and cultural expectations.⁵⁷

Notes

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1. Minutes of the Library Company of Philadelphia, 8 September 1789, LCP Archives. The directors added the words "at the Instance of Benjamin Franklin, / one of their Number," to the statement before having it inscribed on their cornerstone.

2. Peter Gay's *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (New York: Norton, 1968), two volumes, remains the standard work on the period. See also Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford, 1976).

3. Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) 4. Warner is heavily influenced by the work of Jürgen Habermas and argues persuasively that Habermas's emphasis on the eighteenth century's expanded role of the people and their ability to read and communicate in writing was evident in colonial American society.

4. Franklin's manuscript copy of the Junto questions is in his commonplace book in the Ferdinand Dreer Collection in the archives of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. See also Leonard H. Labaree, et al., eds. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale, 1959-) I: 256 (hereafter *Franklin Papers*). I explore the Junto and its mutual education in depth in chapter two of my forthcoming dissertation: "The Middling Sorts' 'Best School': The Junto as Enlightenment Educational Institution."

5. Peter Thompson, "A Social History of Philadelphia's Taverns, 1683-1800," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1989.

6. The history of readership and literacy has undergone significant re-evaluation in recent years. In previous decades, much emphasis was given to the ability to write and, particularly, sign names, in determining how literate a society was. But more recent research has shown that people of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had a profoundly different experience of reading than in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries: people learned the "three R's"

sequentially, with widespread *passive* literacy (reading) but much more limited *active* literacy (writing). I have discovered similar findings in my examinations of the advertisements of schoolmasters in Philadelphia and other sources on reading. Advocates of this method stress that rates of passive literacy were actually much higher than was earlier believed. I acknowledge the drawbacks of this method: it does not tell us how many people were taught to read, or how that differed by social rank. But this methodology does provide a great deal more understanding about what reading meant to people in that era and how they read.

I have been greatly influenced by recent European historiography on the nature of reading and literacy in the eighteenth century. See Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York: Norton, 1990); Daniel Roche, *The People of Paris: An Essay in Popular Culture in the 18th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), particularly chapter 7, "Reading Habits"; Margaret Spufford's "First Steps in Literacy: The Reading and Writing Experience of the Humblest Seventeenth-Century Autobiographers," *Social History* 4 (1979): 407-35 is an excellent source on the history of literacy in early modern Britain, particularly in exploring the role of class in the amount of formal education that was expected. David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf, 1989) is becoming a standard text on the new history of reading and the book in early America.

7. Leonard W. Labaree, et al., eds., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale, 1964) 130.

8. *Franklin Papers*, I: 256.

9. Benjamin Franklin commonplace book, Dreer Collection, HSP. Entry dated 30 June 1732.

10. Labaree, et al., eds. *Autobiography*, 130-31. This statement appears in Part I of the memoir, written in 1771.

11. Labaree, et al., eds., *Autobiography* 133.

12. Chronology of Franklin's life in J. A. Leo Lemay, editor, *Benjamin Franklin: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1987) 1474.

13. Franklin, *Autobiography* (part I), 130.

14. Franklin, *Autobiography* (part II), 142.

15. Gary B. Nash estimates that Philadelphia laborers earned 2.50 shillings per day in 1731, an income that certainly would have precluded

investing 40 shillings in any leisure activity, even one with potential benefits. Nash, *The Urban Crucible*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) 392. See also Billy G. Smith, *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), particularly chapter four.

16. Francis R. Packard, M.D. "Charter Members of the Library Company," address delivered 25 March 1942, printed by the Library Company of Philadelphia.

17. I have worked from numerous sources in attempting to create a picture of the average member of the Library Company during its earliest years. Starting with the manuscript membership record book in the LCP archives, I have traced the job, location of residence in the 1730s, religious affiliation, and other biographical aspects using the Hannah Roach genealogy cards in the American Philosophical Society, the CD-Rom *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and manuscript collections in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

18. "Agreement between Louis Timothée and Directors of Library Company," November 14, 1732, *Franklin Papers* I: 250-52. Timothée's career offers interesting insights into the history of education in two areas. He advertised in October 14, 1731 in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* that he was "master of the FRENCH TONGUE, hath settled himself with his Family in this city, in order to keep a publick French School; he will also, if required, teach the said language to any young Gentlemen or Ladies, at their lodgings," showing the ways different social ranks learned and the use of languages. Timothée moved to Charleston in 1733, established as a printer by Franklin. Following his death in 1738, his widow Elizabeth Timothy took over the business, making it more efficient and profitable. In the most feminist of Franklin's educational writings, he remarked on the importance of teaching women mathematics and keeping accounts. *Autobiography*, 166.

19. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991). Also useful are Craig Calhoun, editor, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), and Lynn Hunt, editor, *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

20. Franklin, *Autobiography*, Part II, in Lemay, ed., *Benjamin Franklin: Writings*, 1380-81.

21. Warner, *Letters of the Republic*, 42.

22. LCP Minutes, 14 November 1732.

23. LCP Minutes, 11 December 1732. Other artisans who made donations to the group included scrivener Charles Brockden, copier Joseph Breintnall, and silversmith Philip Syng; these men, along with Franklin, were given "two years freedom of the Library" on 24 April 1732 for their work. Franklin's second donation of the cost and labor of producing the catalog was obviously more extensive than his first noted donation, that of "advertisements, certificates, etc." See also the LCP 1741 printed catalog, 4, 6.

Much research on the act of gift giving and its symbolism has been carried out by cultural anthropologists and cultural historians. See, for example, Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). For studies of philanthropy in early America, see John C. Van Horne, "Collective Benevolence and the Common Good in Franklin's Philanthropy," and Michael Zuckerman, "Doing Good While Doing Well: Benevolence and Self-Interest in Franklin's *Autobiography*" both in J.A. Leo Lemay, editor, *Reappraising Benjamin Franklin: A Bicentennial Perspective* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993); Sydney V. James, *A People Among Peoples: Quaker Benevolence in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

24. The same phrasing is used in Joseph Breintnall's letter of 7 November 1732 to Peter Collinson, LCP Minutes, 12 November 1732.

25. Victor Neuburg, "Chapbooks in America: Reconstructing the Popular Reading of Early America" in Cathy N. Davidson, editor, *Reading in America: Literature and Social History* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 81-113.

26. First order of Library Company of Philadelphia books, 1732, LCP Archives. Original, in Benjamin Franklin's hand, is in the New York Public Library.

27. LCP Minutes, 29 March 1732.

28. For an examination of rank and society, see Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992) 40-58.

29. The best analysis of James Logan's book purchases and his interest in the transatlantic book market is found in Edwin Wolf 2nd, *The*

Library of James Logan of Philadelphia (Philadelphia: The Library Company of Philadelphia, 1974), especially pages xviii-xxi, xxiv-xxv. Logan's influence is made obvious by the number of books which are on the first book order that were also in Logan's library.

30. T. H. Breen, "An Empire of Goods" in Stanley N. Katz and John M. Murrin, editors, *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development*. (New York: Knopf, 1993, fourth edition.) 367-397; Breen, "'Baubles of Britain: The American and Consumer Revolution of the Eighteenth Century," in Cary Carson, et al., editors, *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994) 444-82.

31. Stephen Botein, "The Anglo-American Book Trade before 1776: Personnel and Strategies," in William L. Joyce et al. *Printing and Society in Early America* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1983), 49-50.

32. Biographical sketches of Thomas Hopkinson can be found in Ronald Esplin, "Benjamin Franklin's Junto Club," M.A. Thesis, University of Virginia, 1970, 49-50; Labaree et al., *Franklin Papers*, I: 209n.

33. Franklin, *Autobiography*, 117-118.

34. LCP Minutes, 31 March 1732.

35. Peter Collinson to the LCP Directors, London, 22 July 1732. LCP Minutes, 14 November 1732.

36. Joseph Breintnall to Peter Collinson, 7 November 1732, LCP minutes, 14 November 1732.

37. The Directors' Minutes of 30 and 31 March 1732 reveal the debates about buying books and when to commit the library's money to the purchase. In analyzing the books purchased by the Library Company, I began with the letter of the directors to Thomas Hutchinson, dated Philadelphia, 31 March 1732, including the list of books to be purchased. In addition I utilized the Directors' Minutes, which record all books received by the library. In categorizing these books, I have used the topics assigned in Franklin's handwritten list of books to be ordered, in the New York Public Library, and other topics when logic dictated. Helpful in this study is Edwin Wolf 2nd's *The Book Culture of a Colonial American City*, which often offers full titles when the manuscripts offer only a single word or phrase, and the modern catalog of the LCP.

38. Franklin's views of history are found in his "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania," written in October, 1749, *Franklin Papers*, III: 413-15. Wolf, *Book Culture*, 78-9; Wolf also quotes Reinhold, *The Classic Pages: Classical Reading of Eighteenth-Century Americans* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1975) 16. In *Classica Americana: The Greek and Roman Heritage in the United States* (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1984), 29, Reinhold's research reveals that the interests of the LCP in historical titles may have been part of a more wide-ranging intellectual transformation, as libraries began taking more of an interest in historical titles and less in theology.

39. Labaree, et al., eds., *Franklin Papers*, III: 455. The passage was in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, December, 1750. Also quoted in Wolf, *Book Culture*, 116.

40. The first public catalog of the Library Company of Philadelphia was printed by Franklin in 1733, but no copies are known to survive.

41. Again, the categorization is difficult. For this study, I have counted books under the topics of religion which are specifically about theology or doctrine. Religious history, however, is a much more nebulous topic; many historical works had religious components in the eighteenth century, many biographies dealt with the religious lives of their subjects. Therefore, I have counted these subjects as historical works, rather than under the theology topic. Again, I am aware that I am utilizing a twentieth-century perspective to draw a firm line that an eighteenth-century library patron would not have seen.

42. LCP Directors' Minutes, 24 November 1739; *Catalogue of the Library Company of Philadelphia, 1741*, 6.

43. LCP Minutes, 19 February 1733, 1 June 1733; 1741 Catalogue, 11, 28, 30, 33, 50.

44. A complete breakdown of book titles by topic (when identifiable) in the 1741 catalog is as follows: History, 127; Natural Philosophy, 64; Morality and Philosophy, 49; Grammar and Philology, 44; Religion and Theology, 33; Politics and Government, 12; Commerce, 9; Logic, 7; Law, 6; Architecture, 5; Geography, 3.

45. For works on the study of readership, see Roger Chartier, "Figures of the 'Other': Peasant Reading in the Age of the Enlightenment" in Chartier, *Cultural History*, translated by Lydia

G. Cochrane (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) 151-171; Robert Darnton, "First Steps toward a History of Reading," in *The Kiss of Lamourette*, 154-187; Roche, *The People of Paris*, 197-233.

Very few specific circulation notices are available for the colonial period of the Library Company of Philadelphia. The Directors' Minutes only record when a patron has lost a specific volume, or, occasionally, when special permission was given to someone outside of the company's membership to borrow a book.

46. For a consideration of the gendered meaning of writing and reading, see Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*, 15-16, 86-87.

47. Commonplace book of Elizabeth Coates Paschall, manuscript in the library of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, page 15. The notebook was presumably kept in the 1750s, although the only dates noted are a reference to "this present year 1757" on page 21 and a reference to *Poor Richard's Almanack* for 1759 on page 25. I am deeply indebted to Prof. Susan Klepp of Rider University for calling my attention to this source, and for sharing her research on Coates Paschall.

48. The LCP Minutes of 14 November 1732, stated "Each Borrower (besides subscribing a promissary Note) shall promise that he will not lend the Books he borrows to any Person out of his dwelling House." For further discussion of the role of the family in education and reading, see Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *As Various as Their Land: The Everyday Lives of Eighteenth-Century Americans* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); Barry Levy, *Quakers and the American Family: British Settlement in the Delaware Valley* (New York: Oxford, 1988); Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); J. William Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America* (New York: St. Martin's, 1973); Bushman, *The Refinement of America*.

49. James Green, "News from Our First Secretary and Notes on Other Acquisitions," Library Company of Philadelphia Annual Report, 1989, 8-11. The only known copy of Breintnall's broadside was purchased by the LCP in 1989, attributed only by the words "by Joseph Breintnall" written on the sheet. James Green believes that the handwriting may be Franklin's, and that the poem made its way to England when he may have sent the poem

to an associate in England. The printing is definitely set in type owned by Samuel Keimer's print shop. Therefore, the poem may be the first collaborative effort between Franklin and Breintnall, antedating their work in the Junto and Library Company.

50. I. Bernard Cohen, *Benjamin Franklin's Science* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 162-66. Cohen considers the quandary of whether Franklin or Breintnall first conducted the experiments using pieces of cloth on the snow.

51. *Philadelphia: Three Centuries of American Art* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1976), 37-9.

52. Joseph Breintnall to Peter Collinson, Philadelphia, 3 November 1735; Peter Collinson commonplacebook (APS), 162.

53. Joseph Breintnall to Peter Collinson, Philadelphia, 14 April 1741, Peter Collinson commonplacebook (APS), 176.

54. Breintnall, Bartram, and Collinson obviously had developed a friendship based on their mutual interests in science and books by the time Bartram was given his honorary membership in the Library Company. In his frequent parcels to the Library Company, Collinson frequently included books, seeds, and even clothing for Bartram. Collinson, who had only known Breintnall through correspondence, often included personal notes in his letters to Bartram, as when he wrote on 12 August 1737 to Bartram "pray my Love & Respects to our Friend Joseph Breintnall"; Edmund Berkeley and Dorothy Smith Berkeley, editors, *The Correspondence of John Bartram, 1734-1777* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1992) 9, 60, 186-7; LCP Minutes, April 28, 1743; *Franklin Papers*, II: 378n.

55. Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, volume II, *The Science of Freedom* offers an excellent overview of the place of science in the social history of the eighteenth century world. The Library Company Minutes contain numerous examples of its natural history collections during the eighteenth century. See, for example, the directors' meetings of 11 May 1738, 13 December 1742, 11 August 1760, and 14 February 1763.

56. *Franklin Papers*, II: 380.

57. Labaree, et al., eds. *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, 130-31.