

Forging a Powerful Engine: Building Theaters and Elites in Post-Revolutionary Boston and Philadelphia

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In the winter of 1794, the citizens of Boston and Philadelphia eagerly awaited the opening of their new playhouses. Henry Jackson of Boston wrote to a friend in Philadelphia, "Tomorrow week we open our new Theatre. I assure you it's one of the most Elegant and beautiful buildings on the Continent. The Theatre Room is a perfect picture and I believe far surpasses the one in *your* city."¹ Opening night at the Boston and Philadelphia theaters promised more than a new evening's diversion; it represented a milestone in the struggle for dominance in post-Revolutionary society. The battle waged to bring theater to the City of Brotherly Love and to the crooked and narrow streets of Boston exemplified the transition of social and political authority in the early Republic from "Old Revolutionaries" resistant to the rise of factions and corporations, and focused on fulfilling the "historic mission" of their states, to a new post-war elite, brought to power by the war, and intent on launching a system of banks, corporations, and cultural institutions that would place them on the "world stage."² In the history of the early Boston and Philadelphia theaters, we can discern the competition among conflicting social elements to establish and legitimize their own cultural spheres. Benedict Anderson has suggested that the arts can be viewed as a "cultural product of nationalism."³ But whose nationalism? The first years of the Republic witnessed a struggle to determine whose national and cultural vision of America would prevail, and by what means.

The efforts of Boston and Philadelphia's new post-Revolutionary elite to establish theatrical entertainments reflected not only their social and intellectual position in the new nation, but their wish to cement their cultural authority.⁴ To Boston and Philadelphia's "well-born,"⁵ the playhouse—that School of Republican Virtue—offered a forum to circulate the "correct" cultural doctrine of the new nation. The "young men of the Revolution" saw themselves as "pushing back the boundaries of darkness," and implementing Lockean principles of Enlightenment thought in their re-education of the American people.⁶

To the theater's opponents, which encompassed both religious groups such as the Quakers, political figures such as Samuel Adams of Boston, and State Constitutionalist William Finlay of Pennsylvania, the playhouse loomed as a "school of vice" that would encourage people to "forget their political duties."⁷ In general, the theater's supporters backed a Federalist agenda, while its detractors promulgated Anti-Federalist (or Republican) sentiments.⁸

Briefly reviewing the pre-war history of the theater in Boston and Philadelphia may suggest how and why the theater became such a hotly contested issue in the post-war society. Although British theatrical entertainments had flourished in cities like Charleston and Williamsburg prior to the Revolution, both Boston and Philadelphia maintained anti-theatrical policies which dated to the founding of the colonies and were grounded in Quaker and Puritan religious traditions. Massachusetts created its first anti-theatrical law in 1750, and the law remained in effect through the Revolution and into the first two decades of the early Republic. Pennsylvania instituted its first anti-theater laws in its 1682 Frame of Government. Unfortunately for the Quakers, the royal government repealed this law, as well as all subsequent efforts to establish one, and a permanent playhouse was built in Philadelphia in 1766. The Quakers remained undaunted and actively campaigned against it during the entire eighteenth century (they were eventually joined in their efforts by the Presbyterians).⁹

The Revolutionary War fundamentally changed the nature of anti-theatricalism, transforming it from religious doctrine to patriotic duty. In October 1774, the Continental Congress decreed, "We will discountenance every species of extravagance and dissipation, especially all horse-racing, and all kinds of gaming, cock-fighting, exhibition of shews, plays, and other expensive diversions and entertainments."¹⁰ The anti-theatrical ban thus appears as a sharp break with *Britain's* imagined community of the playhouse, identifying playgoing as a "violation of colonial political goals."¹¹ By banning the playhouse, with its class-regulated seating and fare of British plays, Americans implemented a cultural boycott to match their embargo on British tea and sugar. The theatrical activities of the British during the Revolution, in both occupied Boston and Philadelphia, only deepened an already ingrained resentment against playgoing. Though Jared Brown has suggested that "far from destroying the infant American theatre, the Revolution stimulated it . . . and a new and dedicated audience was formed by these (British) productions,"¹² the British wartime theatricals and spectacles, such as Philadelphia's lavish "Meschianza," provoked only scorn among the patriots, who identified these entertainments with British vanity and indolence. As American General Anthony Wayne wrote one month after the "Meschianza" debacle: "Tell those Philadelphia ladies, who attended Howe's assemblies and levees, that the heavenly, sweet, pretty red coats . . . have been humbled on the plains of Monmouth."¹³ Loyalists who attended the theater occupied an ambivalent position, since they simultaneously appreciated the cultural advantages of the British theatrical tradition, yet found the excesses of the British army insulting in a time of privation and need.¹⁴ Those Americans who supported the theater in defiance of the Continental Congress's ban were labeled Tories—a stigma that haunted the theater and its audiences throughout the first decade of the early Republic.

Given the vehemence of the wartime anti-theatrical sentiment, it may be surprising that attempts were made to establish permanent theatrical entertainments in Philadelphia and Boston before the ink on the peace treaty had dried. Lewis Hallam Jr., son of one of America's first actor/managers, and inheritor of the pre-Revolutionary Hallam-Douglass Company, had spent the war in the West Indies. After the war, he hoped to re-establish his profitable touring circuit in the states (and possibly to expand it). In 1782, Hallam petitioned to re-open the Philadelphia theater, ostensibly to recoup the financial losses that his troupe (tactfully renamed the Old American Company) had sustained during the wartime ban. Between 1782 and 1789, he repeatedly petitioned the General Assembly for the right to re-open the Southwark Theatre, citing everything from financial necessity to the importance of playgoing as a "necessary concomitant of our Independence."¹⁵ Seven years elapsed between Hallam's first petition to Pennsylvania's post-Revolutionary government, and the repeal of Pennsylvania's 1779 anti-theatrical legislation.¹⁶ The successful repeal of the law in 1789 coincided with the political victory of Philadelphia's anti-Constitutionalists/Federalists, over the radical Constitutionalist party, which had swept to power in 1776. The Federalist victory paved the way for a decade of social and cultural reform.

While Philadelphia seemed on its way towards establishing a legal theater by 1789, no significant attempts were made to establish a playhouse in Boston prior to 1790, and in *both* states, resistance to the theater remained strong. Why was it so difficult to convince the citizens of Boston and Philadelphia that the theater was a desirable and necessary recreation? The negative example of British wartime entertainments inspired a strong anti-theater opposition among devout republicans, who viewed playgoing as incompatible with civic virtue. But more importantly, in the early 1780s, the theater's advocates had not yet achieved a financial or political status that would allow them to support the establishment of a theatrical culture. As the decade progressed, they consolidated their power and their fortunes through the establishment of private banks and stock companies. They also accrued the necessary social and political clout to effect change in their communities. With the end of the war, the onus of building an American national identity paradoxically fell to members of new local elites willing to pit their power against that of an old order who feared the introduction of potentially corrupting institutions into their virtuous republic. The contest between the old order and the rising post-Revolutionary elite forms the basis for understanding the process by which Boston and Philadelphia established a theatrical culture, and the symbolic significance that the theater assumed.

A complex web of financial, social, and political associations linked the theater's supporters in Boston and Philadelphia. The theater's opponents also maintained a system of alliances based on common interests, but had one

crucial advantage in the early post-war years—possession of what Ronald Formisano has termed the “Revolutionary Center.”¹⁷ Centrality and legitimacy in the early republic were bound up in complex rituals of “ceremony, celebration, and sermon.”¹⁸ After the war, political power in Boston and Philadelphia rested with the men who had guided their local revolutionary regimes. These men (among the most vocal, Maier’s “Old Revolutionary” Samuel Adams, and John Hancock of Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania State Constitutionalist, William Finlay) were determined to suppress activities that smacked of British tastes, or that would permit one group of men to acquire substantial economic and social privilege over another.

During the first years of the early Republic, Philadelphia experienced, “a series of distinct but overlapping and interrelated struggles for power . . . over whose vision of America would become a reality, whose values would produce the institutions and laws that would govern the new country.”¹⁹ The Philadelphia elite (primarily Federalists) transformed the Revolution and post-war years into a time of economic opportunity, building the very institutions that would let them guide the new nation. Amassing substantial fortunes through trade, but more importantly through the creation of bank and stock companies, Philadelphia’s elite gained political and economic control of the state by 1788. But the pre-war cultural institutions that they supported—and tried to resurrect after the war—such as the City Dancing Assembly, theatrical entertainments, and the College of Philadelphia, seemed at odds with the “republican virtue” that the State Constitutionlists had hoped to foster.²⁰ The State Constitutionlists believed that entertainments and speculative ventures corrupted the government and the people. They emphasized equality and direct representation, fearing anything that savored of “private interest” or luxury. However, in their zeal for reform, the Constitutionlists had enacted laws which alienated a significant portion of the Pennsylvania population, including the Quakers, and other sectarian communities, as well as the Anglican/Federalist elite.²¹

Pennsylvania politics entered a tug-of-war during the first years of the early Republic. Between 1784-1788, the struggle between Federalists and State Constitutionlists centered around two main issues: the charter of the Bank of North America and the ratification of the Federal Constitution. These issues were inextricably linked to the theater in Philadelphia in the 1780s. Prior to the Federalist victory of 1788, no member of the Philadelphia elite initiated any organized action to secure a legal theater for the state (though many may have attended the illegal theatrical activities offered during this time). The intense arguments over the Bank and Federal Constitution created a new set of opposing parties who then squared off over the issue of a legal theater. The Quakers and Presbyterians remained staunchly opposed to the theater, but they had lost political power by the 1780s. Without some kind of anti-theater

party *within* the government, the pro-theater petitioners would have easily overcome any “popular” resentment against playgoing (much as the royal government had prior to the Revolution). But the acrimonious character of the Bank and Constitutional struggles spilled over into the theatrical debates. The State Constitutionals resisted the theater partly as an expression of partisan solidarity, since they believed that the prospect of a theater undermined the cultural simplicity was at the heart of Pennsylvania’s democratic experiment. They formed a phalanx of opposition against a group that they felt was trying to subvert the Commonwealth. One 1784 observer noted, “As long as stage plays are prohibited, the present Constitution will stand its vigor, but no longer.”²²

The Bank of North America, founded in 1781 to support the Revolutionary Army in a time of crisis, soon appeared to its opponents as a cabal of “conspicuous Federalists,”²³ who controlled forty-percent of its stock.²⁴ State Constitutionals (who did not support the Bank or receive any direct benefits from it) called the Bank a danger to public safety, claiming that it placed too much power with “a certain body of monied men.”²⁵ The pro-Bank party consisted of Philadelphia men like Robert Morris, Thomas Willing, and Thomas Fitzsimmons—men with financial ties to one another and to a common political agenda. The anti-Bank party was led by Constitutionals such as John Smilie (Fayette County), Robert Whitehill (Cumberland County), and William Finlay (Westmoreland); men who sprang from western Pennsylvania, Scotch-Irish backgrounds, and “had welcomed the Revolution as a means of seizing control of state politics from the East.”²⁶

The anti-Bank party succeeded in revoking the Bank’s charter in 1785, a move which united and mobilized the Federalist faction. During the next three years, the bank debate played out in the government and in popular pamphlet literature. By 1786, it had become a campaign issue which exposed the personal and ideological animosities in Pennsylvania’s post-war society. Looking back over the events of those three years, William Finlay observed, “Repealing the charter, instead of reducing the size of the Bank, had ‘changed the majority’.”²⁷ Finlay’s words proved prophetic: the 1787 Bank victory positioned the Pennsylvania Federalists to push for the ratification of the Federal Constitution. By 1788, the Philadelphia Federalist elite had assumed control of the state government.²⁸

Once the Federalists came to power, they immediately took steps to reverse the restrictive policies of the State Constitution—including those dealing with the theater. In November 1788, a group of the Philadelphia elite²⁹ formed a Dramatic Association “for the purpose of obtaining the establishment of a theatre in Philadelphia under a liberal and properly regulated plan.”³⁰ Self-described as “men of science, friends to virtue, and approved guardians of their country,”³¹ the Dramatic Association bombarded the press with pro-

theater material. Much of their writing asserted the value of theatrical entertainments, but other portions attacked the theater's enemies and questioned their motives. In a "Letter in Favor of the Drama, part 3," which appeared in the *Pennsylvania Packet* in February 1789, the author asserted:

If I thought the legislature passed the law prohibiting stage plays from a persuasion that they were prejudicial to the morals of the people, I would have more charity for them, notwithstanding its being contrary to the [Federal] Constitution. But it is evident that this was not the case—many of the members of that body have invariably opposed everything that was proposed for the benefit of Philadelphia.³²

Lest his readers doubt what he defined as "for the benefit of Philadelphia," the author cited explicitly the Constitutionalists' efforts to revoke the charters of the College of Philadelphia and the Bank of North America as negative examples. The Dramatic Association invoked the Federal Constitution to defend the theater by criticizing those who would "deprive a freeman of a natural right [to attend innocent entertainment]."³³ They also criticized the State Constitutionalists' appeal to Quaker and Presbyterian prejudices to oppose the theater. Ironically, the Constitutionalists used much the same tactic to recruit opposition to the theater that the Federalists had to generate support for the Constitution, and the same two groups—Quakers and Presbyterians—were involved. The Federalists who supported the theater noted with annoyance the Quakers' shift in allegiance. Their pro-theater petition of 1789 carried a veiled threat to the Quakers, concerning the repeal of the Test Acts: "Men who have suffered under the lash of persecution, should [not] now wage a virulent war against freedom of thought and action—particularly at the same moment when they are soliciting the legislature to release them from one fetter, should prevail upon this honorable body to rivet a fetter upon others."³⁴

Despite the efforts of its opponents, the bill in favor of repealing Pennsylvania's anti-theatrical legislation became law on March 2, 1789, by a vote of 35 to 29.³⁵ A comparison of roll call votes on the issues of the Bank, Federal Constitution, and the theater suggests that resistance to all three initiatives was concentrated in western Pennsylvania, among counties such as Westmoreland, Cumberland, Dauphin, and Mifflin, while support was focused in Philadelphia. Certain counties such as Lancaster demonstrated pro-Federalists leanings, but still opposed the theater (hardly surprising, considering the sizable Quaker population of this area).³⁶ When the repeal was announced, the theater ran triumphant new advertisements for performances with the heading "BY AUTHORITY."³⁷ Now all that remained to the Philadelphia elite was to create a theater that would fulfill their expectations.

Philadelphia's battle to establish legitimate theatrical entertainments in many ways provided the model for Boston's, which took place a few years later. In July 1789, General Henry Knox of Philadelphia wrote to his friend Samuel Breck, then living in Boston:

This letter will be handed to you by Mr. John Henry [Lewis Hallam's partner], one of the managers of the American Theatre, and is generally designed for such other open friends as you may think it proper to communicate it to. As the state of Pennsylvania has repealed laws against dramatic performances, Mr. Henry has flattered himself with the idea that the same might be effected in Massachusetts, and he accordingly visits Boston to examine whether his hopes are well-founded in this appeal. . . . My enlightened Townsmen know the full value of such a refined entertainment.³⁸

Though Knox's letter suggests that interest in establishing theatrical entertainments may have been bubbling in Boston as early as 1789, and though John Henry petitioned for a repeal of Boston's anti-theatrical legislation in 1790, no group took immediate action to support these efforts. The "open friends" to which Knox referred in his letter, lacked the necessary financial and political clout to bring theatrical diversions to a state still reeling from the impact of Shays' Rebellion, and still firmly under the thumb of members of the old order, such as Samuel Adams and Governor John Hancock. Though Hancock and Adams might have disagreed over some points concerning Massachusetts's revolutionary government, they were united in their distaste for any ventures that threatened their social and political dominance. Hancock had been part of the committee in 1767 that renewed Massachusetts's strict anti-theatrical legislation as a protest against the Townshend Duties, and Adams had expressed his scorn for British wartime military theatricals and for those Loyalists who attended them.³⁹

During the mid-1780s, sporadic efforts had been made to establish a "polite" society in Boston similar to that of Philadelphia and the cultured cities of Europe. Among the diversions proposed were tea parties, card playing, dancing assemblies, and playgoing. Those early initiatives were ridiculed—both in print and in private. As Richard Bushman has noted, "Gentility seemed to carry within itself the cultural seeds of its own destruction."⁴⁰ The 1785 farce, *Sans Souci, alias Free and Easy:—Or an Evening's Peep in a Polite Circle* lambasts Boston's social aspirants who believed that card playing and theater-going offered more cultural cachet than republican virtue. As the character Little Pert remarks:

D—m the old musty rules of decency and decorum—national character—Spartan virtues—republican principles . . . Fashion and etiquette are more agreeable to my ideas of life—this is the independence I aim at—the free

and easy air which distinguishes the man of fashion . . . from the republican.⁴¹

While Little Pert scorns the “musty” principles of republicanism, Madam Importance mourns the leveling effect of democracy, and hopes that the institutions of card playing, assemblies, and theater-going will “be the most effectual means to establish a precedency—we have for a long while been too much at a level.” She describes frequent public entertainments as a means of winnowing out those who could not afford to keep pace.⁴² Handwritten notes in copies of *Sans Souci* in the archives at the Boston Athenaeum and the American Antiquarian Society make tentative identifications of the Boston figures represented in the play, who were members of the real-life Sans Souci Club. Among those listed are Perez Morton and Harrison Gray Otis (future theater supporters).⁴³ In a letter from 1785, Samuel Adams noted that a theater under proper regulation might not be harmful, but that a theater directed by supporters of the Tea Assembly/Sans Souci Club definitely would be (since presumably it would perpetuate the same shallow system of values as its sponsors). In a letter to her son, Mercy Otis Warren described the club as “a subscription party consisting principally of the younger gay class of people in the town. . . . their amusements optional, dancing or cards. . . . a ridiculous institution for a country such as this.”⁴⁴ Warren, the anonymous author of *Sans Souci*, and Adams targeted the theater and the trappings of elite society as a danger to republican virtue—and a symptom of sympathy with Tory interests.⁴⁵

By the early 1790s however, Boston’s anxiety over Tory influence had diminished, and a sense of cultural and civic competitiveness with its sister city and to the south had emerged. In a 1791 letter to his wife, representative Thomas Sedgewick compared the nation’s capitol to Boston, noting that:

They [Philadelphians] seem in their improvements to have got the start of any other place in the continent.... They believe themselves to be the first people in America, as well in manners as in arts . . . and are at no pains to disguise their opinion... In point of polished manners, they are certainly in a grade vastly below the inhabitants of Boston. The species of pride in which the Philadelphians excel perhaps every other people is in decorating their town.⁴⁶

Could Boston bear to fall behind, in either cultural awareness or civic improvements? Apparently not. But transforming Boston into a city that could compete with, or outstrip, Philadelphia required initiative on the part of men prepared to defy Hancock’s political, social, and economic agenda.⁴⁷ These men, some representatives in state government, some wealthy merchants and

lawyers, and some former army officers, eventually drew together to form the Boston Tontine Association, using private insurance companies and bank ventures to accumulate the necessary capital to finance their plans for Boston's development.

Formed in 1791, the Boston Tontine Association's original subscribers included politicians and professional men such as William Tudor, Benjamin Austin, Thomas Dawes, John Codman, Jr., and Jonathan Amory, as well as wealthy merchants, Stephen Higginson, Nathaniel Fellowes, Joseph Russell, Jr., Oliver Wendell, Caleb Davis, Frederick W. Geyer, Ebenezer Storer, and William Phillips.⁴⁸ The tontine was a life insurance company, the type of corporation which Pauline Maier called "the instrument of those economic changes that transformed Massachusetts between 1780 and 1860," allowing greater private development of financial and public ventures, ostensibly for the good of the Commonwealth.⁴⁹ Narrowly, a tontine is an annuity, shared among a group, but the term can also refer to those who share in the annuity. The members of the Boston Tontine Association proposed "raising a fund by a subscription on lives to pertain to uses private and public."⁵⁰ Though the venture sounds like a simple life insurance group, the Boston Tontine functioned along the lines of a private bank—issuing loans and accepting collateral at the discretion of its directors. The Tontiners had amassed roughly two million dollars by the winter of 1792, when they petitioned the state for the right to incorporate. Their request raised anxieties about the direction and regulation of Boston's post-Revolutionary economy, since there appeared no way to monitor the Tontiners use of their funds. Paul Goodman suggests that post-Revolutionary social and political divisions frequently "occurred between entrenched groups and others seeking access to opportunity."⁵¹ Because of the anxiety that it generated, the bill was rejected each time it came before the House.⁵² Part of the opposition to the Tontine stemmed from the concern among leaders like Hancock and Adams that the rising elite were overtaking the established social structures of Boston society. As John W. Tyler notes, by the 1790s the market in Massachusetts belonged to a "new generation" that left Samuel Adams and John Hancock behind.⁵³

At the same time that the Tontiners were forming their association, they were preparing and presenting the first of many petitions for the repeal of Massachusetts's 1750 anti-theatrical legislation. The language of the 1791 petition offered to Boston's selectmen outlines the type of theater that the rising elite envisioned:

A theater, where the actions of great and virtuous men are represented, under every possible embellishment which genius and eloquence can give, will not only afford a rational and innocent amusement, but essentially advance the interests of private and political virtue; will have the tendency to polish

the manners and habits of society, to disseminate the social affections, and to improve and refine the literary taste of our rising republic.⁵⁴

The petition further claimed that it was "repugnant to the Principles of a Free Government to deprive any of its citizens of a rational entertainment."⁵⁵ There is a striking similarity between the text of the Massachusetts and Pennsylvania pro-theater petitions; hardly surprising, given that the Pennsylvania petition had been widely published.

Neither the Tontine proposal nor the theater petition met with success. Newspapers and pamphlets raised the cry against the evils of Tontine and the theater. Editor Abraham Bishop of the Boston *Argus* penned a vehement series of articles in which he "exposed" the Tontine as a grossly inflated stock scheme and likened the theater to the plague. He pointed out the links between the men who supported the theater and the Tontine, deriding their "ambitions" for Boston: "Is New England to be infested with Theatres because some of our Tontine Gentry have been Southward and have heard some very pretty plays?" He added, "Do some of our rich men threaten to leave Boston if we will not have a Theater? Let them go by all means." To Bishop, the Tontine and theater combined to symbolize all that was negative and dangerous in the seemingly unregulated economy of the new republic, "The rich are now playing a game against the poor. Unable to gain enough by Tontine and other plans, they wish to [corrupt] your ideas about property... Why does not the whole truth come out?"⁵⁶

Supporters claimed the Tontine and the theater were patriotic enterprises that would advance the interests of the Commonwealth. One Tontine enthusiast noted, "of all the various monied schemes which have been brought forward, none strike the mind of the philanthropist and republican more than that of the TONTINE lately established in this State."⁵⁷ Defending the theater in a 1792 speech before the House, representative John Gardiner asserted, "the old things are rapidly doing away; already (within the last twenty years) the face of the political and moral world has changed." Speaking more pointedly to the opponents of the theater within the House, Gardiner noted, "There are some among us, in this House, who presume to take too much upon themselves, and attempt to control and direct, where they have no other right than to advise and attempt to persuade."⁵⁸

Like the supporters of the Philadelphia theater, Boston's pro-theater party believed that they were victims of a conspiracy among members of the Assembly determined to block initiatives that would modernize and improve their society. In an anonymous 1792 publication, *The Rights of the Drama*, the author observed that "in an age of refinement and in a nation of free men," it was extraordinary "that there should exist a single enemy to the manly, rational amusements of the Theater." The author praised the "patriots" William

Tudor and Charles Jarvis (both Tontiners), who were laboring to establish a theater in Boston.⁵⁹ In his pro-theater pamphlet, "The Effects of the Stage on the Manners of the People; and the Propriety of Encouraging and Establishing a Virtuous Theatre," Bostonian William Haliburton encouraged the government to support the theater, noting that men who sponsored the theater would be remembered as "promoters of a design so grand and beneficial...(that) the history of the stage will ever after have a conspicuous place in the History of America."⁶⁰ Despite these efforts, state officials (most notably John Hancock, who had been a key player in the Commonwealth's 1767 ban against theater) continued from 1790 to 1793, to resist *both* the establishment of a theater and the advancement of the interests of the Tontine.

Sidetracked by the opposition to the theater and the Tontine, both in the Assembly and in the press, the Tontiners tried another tactic. In 1792, the Tontiners petitioned to incorporate as the Union Bank⁶¹ whose roster of investors and capitalization were virtually identical to the Tontine. Though the Tontiners' purposes in forming the Bank seemed transparent—letters to newspapers derided the Bank as nothing more than a "stock-jobbing shop, just to answer the purposes of speculators"⁶²—the Bank did receive the Assembly's permission to incorporate in early 1792, just as the second Tontine-backed petition in support of the theater was being rejected. According to roll-call votes county by county, most of those who opposed the theater also opposed the Tontine and the Union Bank. Opponents generally came from districts outside of Boston, and represented rural or farming interests. The theater's supporters generally came from Suffolk and Essex County and were affiliated with the Tontine and Bank.⁶³ The Union Bank provided a comfortable and legitimate front for the Tontiners, who continued to operate informally as an association. It also offered them the necessary economic clout to put their plans for a theater into action in spite of the government's continued opposition.

What the Philadelphia and Boston elite expected from their theaters and what they got were two very different things. After the repeal of Pennsylvania's anti-theatrical legislation in 1789, Philadelphians turned their attention to the Old American Company, expecting that the removal of the last legal roadblock would allow manager Lewis Hallam to proceed with renovations to the Southwark Theatre and improvements to the company that would make Philadelphia's theater the best in the country. Similarly, once the Tontiners decided to act in defiance of Massachusetts law and establish their own small 500-seat theater in Board Alley, they expected a theatrical product that would "improve and refine the literary taste of our rising republic." Both groups were destined for disappointment.

Philadelphia's Southwark Theatre, built in 1766, in addition to being inconveniently located by increasingly rundown dockside neighborhoods, was

"an ugly, ill-contrived affair."⁶⁴ Spectators froze in the winter and roasted in the summer. Charles Durang claims that the theater became so hot during the summer season that the city fire engines were brought in so that water could be hosed onto the roof to cool the building.⁶⁵ Hallam and Henry, beset by financial difficulties after the war, had lacked the funds to renovate the house. Thus it fell far below the standards of theater patrons like Ann Willing Bingham⁶⁶, who were familiar with the great European playhouses. The company seemed sloppy as well. Hallam and Henry had promised the Philadelphia Dramatic Association in 1789 that they would replenish the company with new talent. Yet by 1791, they had neither fixed up the house nor improved the quality of the performers.⁶⁷ In a published letter to Hallam and Henry, the members of the Dramatic Association expressed their frustration:

The friends of the Drama, more particularly the members of the late dramatic association, whose labour and influence procured for you the license for opening a Theatre in this city, have become so much dissatisfied with your want of attention to the promises you made them relative to the strengthening of your company by good actors from Europe, that they are determined to evince publicly their resentment of your conduct.⁶⁸

These "Friends of the Drama" threatened the actors of the Old American Company with cries of "hiss! hiss! off!"⁶⁹

Though Hallam tried to appease them with promises that he would secure new players, they seemed disinclined to believe him after his previous stalling. Feeling that Hallam's theater reflected little credit on the city of Philadelphia, they began to circulate suggestions for "an association of citizens for the purpose of erecting an independent theater, and encouraging performers who will make greater exertions to please."⁷⁰ Hallam had clearly alienated his former supporters. Whether he felt that they wanted too much control over the running of his company in exchange for their continued support is unclear. However, the phrase "performers who will make greater exertions to please," suggests that the Dramatic Association expected that their opinions should guide the theater's policies to some degree.

They got their wish in 1791, when Hallam and a popular Old American Company actor named Thomas Wignell had a falling-out about Wignell's role in the management of the troupe. The *New York Daily Advertiser* called Wignell—one of the best actors of his time—the "Atlas of the American Theater." He "carried" the rest of the Hallam Company⁷¹ the paper claimed. Wignell was, therefore, in a strong position to demand concessions from Hallam. When Hallam refused, Wignell left the company to form one of his own, recruiting musician and composer Alexander Reinagle to accompany him. Together they created a proposal for a new theater, appealing to the former members of the

Dramatic Association for support. Among their new sponsors were such Philadelphia worthies as Robert Morris, the “financier of the Revolution,” William Bingham, one of the wealthiest men in the United States, Henry Hill, John Swanwick (Morris’s partner/agent), Thomas Fitzsimmons, General Walter Stewart, Thomas Willing, director of the Bank of North America, and Charles Pettit.⁷²

Wignell and Reinagle struck at a propitious moment. The Philadelphia elite were developing new neighborhoods and establishing activities and entertainments that mimicked the European courts. By 1790, “a substantial portion of the wealthy had broken away from the city’s commercial center,” that was concentrated around the public marketplace on Market and Second Streets, “and formed a new, upper-class residential area.”⁷³ This area, known as the New Society Hill was located between South and Market Streets, above Second and below Seventh Street. Among the residents of this section were Thomas Willing, William Bingham, and Robert Morris.⁷⁴ Part of Wignell and Reinagle’s plan for the new theater included choosing a new location that would make it more accessible to its patrons, who had grown tired of wading through the mud to the unfashionable Southwark location. Wignell and Reinagle justified “erecting a new Theatre in some Central part of the City,” on the grounds that the city’s “encreasing Wealth and Importance,” demanded

Courtesy of the Harvard Theatre Collection



Philadelphia's Chestnut Street Theatre near the northwest corner of Chestnut and Sixth Street (right), near Independence Hall. Congress Hall (the Philadelphia County Court House) is at left.

that its "places of Amusement should be put to a larger and more suitable scale."⁷⁵ The lot chosen for the theater, on the north side of Chestnut Street, and on the west side of Sixth, was not only convenient to the residences of the elite, it was situated near Independence Hall, the national capitol and the State House. What better way to impress upon the minds of foreign visitors the dual strengths of the city—its government and its cultural life? And what better way to legitimate the much-opposed theater, than to plant it directly in the sightlines of the government officials who had tried to squash it?

A rumor circulated in the fall of 1791, while plans for the theater were still in progress, demonstrates the significance of location for the new playhouse: "The place said to be chosen . . . is perhaps more improper than any other in the city. . . . The lot in question is . . . near to the center of the city, it lies in and near the public walks . . . the university, the college, the Quaker's academy, the public library, and the courts of justice." The writer, obviously no fan of the theater, admonished the "Parents, Masters, and mistresses, Legislators, citizens, Matrons, and Virgins," to protest and "avert this impending evil."⁷⁶ Part of the battle over the theater concerned possession of the "Revolutionary Center." By situating the theater in a central location, and essentially reconfiguring Philadelphia society around their own homes and places of amusement, the post-Revolutionary elite laid claim to the sites in which the ceremonies of nationalism would take place.

Events in Boston followed similar patterns, with one important distinction. Like the Philadelphia elite, the Tontiners had been busily accumulating and developing property within the city, creating new neighborhoods modeled on wealthy European urban centers. Like the Philadelphians, they planned their theater to ornament the city. But unlike the Philadelphians, the Tontiners undertook construction of their new theater while it was still illegal. After their repeated petitions to the Assembly failed, the Tontiners took matters into their own hands. Throughout the late 1780s and early 1790s, the Tontine Associates and a group of "satellite" professionals and merchants involved with them had acquired a sizable portion of the available land in Boston's Ward 10.⁷⁷ By the mid-1790s, they owned multiple lots on several streets, including Board Alley and Federal Street, the sites of Boston's first two theaters.

In 1792, the Tontiners built Boston's first theater on land belonging to merchant Joseph Russell. Described by one patron as a "rough-boarded hovel," it was nevertheless enough of a start to encourage the Tontiners.⁷⁸ The Board Alley Theatre season opened in August of 1792 and ran throughout the fall with a series of acrobat acts featuring Joseph Harper (formerly of the Old American Company), and the Placide Family. During the fall of 1792, patrons enjoyed such entertainments as:

A Favorite PANTOMIME Entertainment—called
Harlequin Skeleton
With Machinery
Where will be introduced, LA DANCE DE LA
FRICASSE
DANCING on the
SLACK WIRE
Mons. Placide will balance a Peacock's Feather
in different ways⁷⁹

Some letters to the newspapers objected that “the tightrope applied to the *legs* is not so effectual to refine the *morals* of the people as the old fashioned way of applying it to the *neck*.”⁸⁰ And those who had read Gardiner’s impassioned defense of the theater might have wondered how gazing at someone balancing a peacock feather would “polish the Manners and Habits of Society.” But for all its faults, the Board Alley Theatre was in many ways an experiment to gauge the public’s appetite for entertainment, and to test the government’s willingness to uphold the law. The appearance of advertisements for “opera glasses” in November 1792 suggests that Boston audiences had begun to enjoy theatrical entertainments on a fairly regular basis,⁸¹ as does the notation found at the bottom of playbills and ads for evening performances “Tickets to be had at the usual places.”⁸² Despite the legal ban on theater, performances proceeded smoothly throughout the fall of 1792.

However, Governor Hancock was growing increasingly frustrated with the Tontiners’ open defiance. In a letter to the newspapers he complained:

Whether the apprehension of the evils which might flow from Theatrical Exhibitions . . . are well founded or not . . . the Act is now a law of the Commonwealth . . . and surely it ought to claim the respect and obedience of all who happen to live within the Commonwealth.

No measures have been taken to punish a most open breach of the Law, and a most contemptuous insult upon the powers of the Government.⁸³

Hancock’s letter provoked one effort to squelch the theater—an utter failure. On December 5, 1792 the Boston sheriff attended the evening performance and tried to close the theater and arrest the manager, Joseph Harper. The outraged audience rioted, and in their fury, tore down Governor Hancock’s portrait and coat of arms and trampled them.⁸⁴ The founders of the theater could hardly have asked for more direct proof that the old order had lost its hold on public opinion. The “trial” of Joseph Harper was largely a farce, with Tontine member “Judge” William Tudor, who was embroiled in supporting the offending entertainments as anyone, defending Harper and securing

his release. Based on advertisements which ran in local papers, performances resumed just a few days after the incident, and proceeded for the rest of the season without opposition.

The Tontiners made one last official effort to secure a repeal of the anti-theater law in early 1793. Their petition made it through the assembly by a vote of fifty-seven to fifty-four, but was never signed into law.⁸⁵ On the surface, this denial seems to subvert the Tontiners' triumph. In fact, it reveals the extent to which their interests had polarized tensions in the Commonwealth, tensions between old and new, urban and rural, and central and peripheral factions. Like the Philadelphia elite, whose triumphs in the debates over the Bank, the Constitution, and the theater positioned them to assume control of the revolutionary center, the Tontiners' tacit victory in the December theater riot shifted them to a new position of power. The rioting audience members demonstrated to the Tontiners and the Boston community their desire to maintain a Boston theater. When the rioters trampled Hancock's coat of arms—the quintessential emblem of the old order—they elevated the theater space into a realm of action. After Hancock's death in 1793, no other official attempts were made to close the theater.

To demonstrate their new status as cultural arbiters, both the Tontiners and the Philadelphia elite planned theater buildings to serve as showpieces of their respective cities. Philadelphians opened subscriptions in 1791, for their new theater, and Bostonians in April, 1793 for a theater to replace the one in Board Alley.⁸⁶ In citing their reasons for building a permanent playhouse,

Courtesy of the Harvard Theatre Collection



Boston's Federal Street Theatre (right) and the Tontine Crescent.

Philadelphia's Robert Morris and Boston's John Gardiner mentioned the positive impression that a beautiful theatre would make on foreign visitors.⁸⁷ Plans for both theaters were grandiose, and modeled after their European counterparts.⁸⁸ Subscribers wanted to make sure that they had the most elegant appointments possible, and they sent to Europe for items such as "crimson tabray, fringe and tassells, chandeliers, girandoles," as well as scenery and furniture for the card and assembly rooms that the theaters also housed.⁸⁹ In addition to their luxurious trappings, the theaters were constructed to maintain distinctions between different social classes among the audience. The Chestnut Street Theatre proudly advertised: "The entrances are so well-contrived and the lobbies so spacious, that there can be no possibility of confusion among the audience going into different parts of the house."⁹⁰

Courtesy of Harvard Theatre Collection



Interior of Chestnut Street Theatre

In their impatience to enjoy their new playhouses, the subscribers harried the builders, who appear to have put up both theaters a record amount of time. As Abby Hamilton observed to her friend Sarah Bache, "The New Theatre is a superb building and only wants Wignell's return to open. The old ones groan as they pass, and say had it been for a church, it would have been years finishing."⁹¹ But the price of this grandeur quickly mounted. Projected costs for the Federal Street Theatre had been between \$15,000 and \$20,000, but by January 1794 the subscribers had already spent \$35,000, and anticipated spending an additional \$5,000 before the theater's completion.⁹² Initial estimates for the Chestnut Street Theatre had ranged around \$20,000, but

Brooks McNamara estimates the final cost at approximately \$135,000.⁹³ Subscribers for both theaters were constantly asked to contribute additional funds so that the buildings could be finished. Small wonder that their impatience occasionally got the better of them. For example, when Thomas Wignell and the new Philadelphia company were delayed in London, Reinagle was forced to open the theater for concerts to pacify investors who wanted to see the interior of the building. When the Federal Street Theatre opened on February 4, 1794, tickets were scalped for up to twelve times their original cost.⁹⁴ For its first performance, the Federal Street playhouse offered one of George Washington's favorite plays, Henry Brooke's *Gustavus Vasa, or The Deliverer of his Country*. Though Brooke's play dealt with the liberation of Sweden from a tyrant usurper, it seemed to American audiences an excellent analogy to their own recent struggle with Britain. Moreover, the hero, Gustavus, displayed the same manly virtues of republicanism as their own presidential leader. Even Bache's *General Advertiser* (later the *Aurora*) applauded Boston's choice, and encouraged the Philadelphia theater to emulate their patriotic display:

It is much to be wished that Messieurs Wignell and Reinagle may shortly favor the public with a representation of that admirable piece (*Gustavus Vasa*), and convince the friends of Freedom and Virtue that their are dramatic works which not only abound with pure and genuine sentiments in favor of liberty, but also powerfully advocate the cause of virtue and morality.⁹⁵

Bache complained that the general choice of plays by the Chestnut Street managers did not reflect "American" sensibilities. The theater had opened on February 17, 1794 with O'Keeffe's popular comic opera *The Castle of Andalusia*, and had continued with British staples such as *Venice Preserved*, *The Lying Valet*, *The School for Scandal*, and *The School for Wives*. Of *The School for Wives*, Bache observed, "the play is not a mirror for an American audience. This to be sure is a fault common to most transatlantic productions." Bache did note that the play was useful in one respect: "by magnifying the deformities of vice abroad [it] may induce us to shun it at home."⁹⁶

Bache's vision of the theater as a "school of Republican Freedom and Virtuous morality," differed from that of the theaters' founders.⁹⁷ From the beginning, the theaters' supporters had wildly optimistic hopes for the ways in which the theater could shape public sentiment in accordance with their views. Advocates such as John Gardiner and Robert Morris, who touted the theater as a means of improving the manners and habits of society, expected the audience to receive material passively. They assumed that they would be able to disseminate *their* Federalist version of nationalism, that government should be administered by a rational and detached elite, which acted for the public good. Direct involvement by "the people" was to be avoided at all costs, since

the people were too often ruled by their passions, rather than reason. Yet articles and letters run in Bache's paper suggest that the theater came under sharp scrutiny from a public which believed that it had every right to shape the form of its entertainments. Parties in the audience disputed the merits of plays and the inclusion of political songs in the program. Audience members at the Chestnut Street playhouse rejected the "complicated" music provided by Reingale, in favor of "simple tunes."⁹⁸ Federalists feared any form of factionalism and dissent (even within the playhouse) as evidence of local "interest" that drew people's loyalty from the nation.⁹⁹ When the members of the Dramatic Association asserted that they were the "approved guardians of their country," they summarized the quintessential Federalist viewpoint, that as the "guardians" of virtue and rationality, they should steer America's cultural development. As Tamara Thornton has noted, Federalists "never subscribed to the idea of equality of condition among men. Of course human beings occupied different levels in the social and economic scale; to deny the reality of that situation was foolish, utopian, and—the ultimate condemnation—democratic."¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately for the Federalists and for their theaters, this outlook clashed with the system of direct participation which the Revolution had encouraged.

Sacvan Bercovitch suggests that we fulfilled our need for a "communal myth" after the Revolution by attempts to establish a "rhetoric of consensus"—and indeed that may have been the goal of the theaters' founders.¹⁰¹ But instead of the docile and respectful crowds that they anticipated, the founders encountered audiences accustomed to active celebration of their liberty through the press and public fetes—and to creating nationalism on their own terms. Perhaps the best early example in the theater is the extraordinary popularity of the song, the "Federal Overture." In a recent unpublished work, Liam Riordan discusses the origins of Benjamin Carr's song—a medley of French Revolutionary and Federalist tunes that was popular between 1794 and 1798. Lewis Hallam commissioned the work in response to a March 1794 disturbance at the John Street playhouse in New York, in which Jacobin audience members rioted upon hearing the orchestra play English songs. Pro- and anti-French sentiments had invaded the theater by 1794, as pro-French factions called for songs like "Ça Ira" and attacked the orchestra if they refused to comply. Bostonian Sarah Flucker recounted one such struggle between the audience and the Federal Street orchestra. In a letter to her friend Lucy Knox, she wrote of what was apparently a *planned* protest at the theater against England's Prince Edward (who was visiting Boston at the time and who had been scheduled to appear at the theater that evening). She noted that Prince Edward decided not to attend at the last moment, "doubtless prevented by the assurance that a large Party was formed in the Galleries to Govern the Music."¹⁰² In another letter concerning "Ça Ira" theater controversy, Increase Sumner noted, "the

theater would be well enough if confined within the bounds of morality and decency, & not made an engine of party nonsense."¹⁰³ Ultimately, the conflict between the Boston audience and theater proprietors assumed a violent character. The proprietors ran the following advertisement: "50 Dollars reward—[for the] evil-minded person from the Gallery of the Theatre [who] threw into the Orchestra. . . . a piece of Glass, and by that means destroyed one of the Kettle Drums."¹⁰⁴ Philadelphia theater managers fared scarcely better, and were repeatedly forced to comply with gallery demands for "Ça Ira."¹⁰⁵ Managers in Boston and Philadelphia were caught between a rock and a hard place: they could not afford to offend their wealthy Federalist patrons, nor could they afford to turn the tide of popular political sentiment against the theater. Thus, the "Federal Overture," which encompassed both French and English traditions emerged as a viable compromise, since it was "calculated to attract *universal* admiration," and to pacify all the factions in the house.¹⁰⁶

Another way in which the theaters' proprietors tried to create a sense of community among the audience was through the use of celebratory prologues and epilogues. The Federal Street proprietors created a contest, inviting submissions for prologues and epilogues, and asked some of Boston's most respected citizens, including the Reverend Jeremy Belknap (founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society which was housed in the Tontine Crescent) to serve as judges (Belknap declined). The prize for 1794 was awarded to Thomas Paine (later Robert Treat Paine), and the prologue was described as "highly creditable to the poet's genius."¹⁰⁷ The theatrical prologues and epilogues of the early national period can, in many ways, be seen as analogous to toasts—they saluted the audience, addressed pressing concerns of the day, and affirmed the audience's participation in a specific set of beliefs and values. They also provided the opportunity for commentary that could contextualize the play for the audience. For example, in her prologue to *Slaves in Algiers*, Susanna Rowson juxtaposed the tyranny that the American captives suffered with the freedom offered under America's democratic system, and within the walls of the playhouse:

Shall the noble Eagle see her brood
Beneath the pirate kite's fell claw subdued?
View her dear sons of liberty enslaved
Nor let them share the blessings which they saved?

...

Tonight our author boldly dare to choose,
This glorious subject for her humble muse;
Though tyrants check the genius which they fear,
She dreads no check, no persecution *here*;
Where safe asylums every virtue guard,
And every talent meets its just reward.¹⁰⁸

Rowson's prologue admitted only two points of view: that of the tyrant and that of the American patriot/audience member. The prologue united the American audience in an imagined community against the tyranny of foreign powers who would impinge upon its liberty. Her words affirmed the audience's participation in that community, while still reminding the audience that participation is an earned privilege.

The challenge of creating successful forums for the display of national sentiment is explored in two recent works: David Waldstreicher's *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes* and Simon Newman's *Parades and the Politics of the Street*. Waldstreicher and Newman discuss the formation of American nationalism(s) through print and celebratory events, and the attempts by various factions to channel or control that nationalism. Waldstreicher notes that "Civic festivals were attempts to take over public space and create unanimity."¹⁰⁹ But, as Newman notes, by the early 1790s, rites of public celebration had fractured along lines of class and nascent party loyalty. He observes that celebrants "began separating according to partisan sympathies and identities," and that the lower classes developed "alternative rites" to those offered by the Federalist elite.¹¹⁰

The theaters' founders also encountered audiences who were beginning to clamor for the right to shape America's cultural identity. When the Boston and Philadelphia theaters had opened in the winter of 1794, they opened to communities already dividing along lines of social, economic, and political tension. The theater, which brought divergent groups face-to-face under the same roof, only amplified existing differences. By 1795, Philadelphian barber-cum-playwright John Murdock *demand*ed that the Chestnut Street managers stage his works, claiming that he had as much right as any British author or member of the gentry to express his views in the theater. Also in 1795, Boston mechanics took their first tentative steps towards the formation of a mechanics association, a society intended to sponsor the same type of lavish social entertainments that had been the province of the Boston elite.

Class and economic divisions carried over into the playhouse most obviously in the dispute over theater boxes. Though Philadelphia's Chestnut Street Theatre offered no privately maintained patrons' boxes, it was generally understood that box seats were reserved for members of the elite. The regulations of the theater noted that places in the side boxes could not be offered to fewer than groups of eight (or smaller groups who could afford the fee). On February 24, 1794, a concerned "middle class" patron wrote to the *General Advertiser*, complaining that the costs of the boxes and the eight-person rule precluded his bringing his family to the theater. "I have not the least ambition to hurt the feelings of the well-born by placing my family too near, but I think it hard that we should be excluded because [of] my retired situation." The writer suggested that if the managers feared "giving offense to their opulent friends

by subjecting them to sit in the same boxes with the less wealthy," that they create separate but equally well-placed boxes for the middling sort, who also wanted to enjoy the theater.¹¹¹

The playhouse, which had been planned to provide "rational and innocent amusement," suddenly faced the challenge of papering over the class, social, and financial differences among the audience. This was a task for which it was ill-suited, though the managers did their best. Perhaps the best clue to how they planned to cope with the multiple complications of the post-war playhouse can be found in the texts that they chose for production. Some studies have examined the text of plays such as Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* (perhaps the best-known early American script) as a means of extrapolating information about both post-war society and the post-war playhouse.¹¹² While Tyler's work *does* offer insights into the theater of the 1780s—most notably the famous scene in which Jonathan the Yankee attends a play without realizing it—it is important to note that Tyler's play received only four recorded performances in Philadelphia between 1787 and 1796.¹¹³ Assuming that the performance sites (the City Tavern, the Southwark Theatre, and the Chestnut Street Theatre) were filled to capacity on all three occasions, no more than 3,000 people in Philadelphia would have seen the play in production over a period of seven years. Few other early American dramatists (such as William Charles White or John Murdock) fared better. Their plays were hailed for their novelty, but they did not secure a permanent place in the repertoire. This may seem a strange choice on the part of the managers, not to actively cultivate the work of new American authors, yet they were, to a large extent, following the dictates of public taste. To a sizable part of the theater-going public (and certainly to the Federalists) part of maintaining a theater that rivaled its British counterparts, meant producing the *same* plays that were available in European playhouses. An angry audience member complained to the Chestnut Street managers in 1794, "We have heard of new plays and farces which were performed many months ago in England, and which we had hoped before this time to have seen here. . . . unless you speedily alter your mode of conduct, your company will play to empty benches."¹¹⁴

Faced with such threats to their financial well-being, managers struggled to combine the most popular plays of the old British repertoire, with current British works. Managers relied on a repertoire of pre-war favorites from Britain, including such works as *The School for Scandal*, Sheridan's comedy of scandalmongers, adulterers, and cheats among the British aristocracy; *The Busybody*, Susannah Centilivre's lewd satire on wooing and matrimony (which spawned her most popular character, Marplot); *Jane Shore*, Rowe's popular and tragic account of the life of Edward IV's mistress; and *The Gamester*, Moore's tragedy of a young, middle-class husband who ruins his family by his gambling addiction. The theater also offered a selection of new British works and

new translations of French and German drama. Often the playbill would incorporate a familiar play as the main piece of the evening, enlivened with new dances, songs, or afterpieces. With these limited tools, the theater managers tried to accommodate their diverse audience.

Frequently they tried to re-style old favorites into forms more suitable to the contemporary taste of the audience. They also cut or re-wrote passages in newer scripts to make the works conform to American tastes, while still allowing the audiences to feel that they were getting the best of "British" theater. In her dissertation, "Organization, Production, and Management at the Chestnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia, 1791-1820," Ruth Harsha McKenzie analyzes the cuts and changes made to scripts for productions at the Chestnut Street Playhouse. These changes were recorded in the theater's promptbooks—the master copy of the script, kept by the stage manager/prompter. Since promptbooks were not generally intended for publication, the amended versions of the plays would only have been witnessed by the audience attending the performance.¹¹⁵ For example, the popular English opera *Rosina* premiered at Covent Garden in 1782, and played in America twenty-one times between 1787 and 1799.¹¹⁶ It had already been playing in America for seven years by 1794, but by that point, America's political and social system had changed sufficiently that Thomas Wignell thought it prudent to cut 194 lines from the text. The opera tells the story of the virtuous and beautiful Rosina (who is, unbeknownst to her, a member of the gentry). She lives among simple harvesters (having lost her parents and her fortune), and is courted by two brothers—one a dishonorable captain who tries to kidnap her, and the other the virtuous Belville, who hopes to marry her. Wignell's major cuts to this script include references to the British class system, and derogatory remarks about farmers and the poor.¹¹⁷ Wignell also cut the following passage from Cumberland's *The Carmelite* for obvious reasons:

De Courci: On England's throne/No tyrant sits, deaf to the widow's cause/
But Heaven's viceregent, merciful and just.

Matilda: Thanks to thy royal sender! On my knee/
I offer prayers to Heaven for length of days/
And blessings shower'd on his anointed head!

From Richard Cumberland's *The Box Lobby Challenge*, Wignell eliminated the following undemocratic sentiments:

Sir Toby: In old times, everybody sat silent in company with their superiors, nobody spoke until they were spoken to; no tongue was heard at the table but the master's of it; now they are all talkers and no hearers, such as gabble and din; every priggish puppy gives puppy opinion

These texts and others like them play a crucial but complicated role in examining the marketing and production strategies of theater managers in the early Republic. The judicious cuts that they made to the texts allowed them to simultaneously appeal to American patriotic sentiment, since the plays were being purged of their English "taint," while at the same time permitting them to take a cosmopolitan pride in the fact that their theaters were producing the latest European plays. As David Brigham has noted in his work on Peale's Museum, the key to running a successful public entertainment was to attract a "democratic" range of spectators, while maintaining an implicit class structure. The secret was to promote a rhetoric of inclusiveness, but to make that inclusion dependent upon participation in the community (whether of the museum or the playhouse), under a certain set of established conditions or behaviors.¹¹⁸

The founders of the Boston and Philadelphia theaters hoped to bring their audiences into a "magic circle of agreement,"¹¹⁹ and to establish themselves at the center of that circle. But they failed to realize that what constituted central and peripheral positions of power were in flux during this period. Therefore, to try to establish a theater of "the people" was, in many ways, a self-defeating proposition, since the theater could not appeal to every audience member, any more than the government could realistically represent every citizen.

Although they were soon displaced by the onset of party rivalries, financial reverses, and the growth of new social groups, the theaters' founders in Boston and Philadelphia had achieved three important goals by 1794. They had constructed physical monuments to America's cultural advancement that would stand as models for future generations. They had established theatrical entertainments as a legitimate expression of American nationalism. And they had laid the groundwork for the development of American drama. Playwright, artist, and manager William Dunlap described the American theater as a "powerful engine" for change. In reviewing the struggle for legitimacy in the early national theater, we see that this powerful agent did indeed transform the cultural, political, and urban landscapes in which it flourished.

Notes

1. General Henry Jackson to General Henry Knox, January 26, 1794, Henry Knox Papers.
2. Pauline Maier, *The Old Revolutionaries: Political Lives in the Age of Samuel Adams* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1980), p. 272. Maier suggests that for Samuel Adams, the Revolution represented a "working out of New England's historical mission." I suggest that the Quakers and State Constitutionlists of Pennsylvania may have adopted a similar view—one which erased the effects of British decadence. For more on the concept of the World Stage and its connection to the American Revolution, see Jeffrey H. Richards, *Theatre Enough: American Culture and the Metaphor of the World Stage, 1607-1789* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991). Also see Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, "The Founding Fathers: Young Men of the Revolution," *Political Science Quarterly* vol. LXXVI, June 1961, pp. 181-216. Elkins and McKittrick note that many of the key Federalists who campaigned for the establishment of the Constitution and who promoted a vision of national over local interests, were under the age of forty-five, and had "made their careers" in the war, thus they truly *did* comprise a "new" generation, even though they occasionally allied with members of the pre-war elite (or their descendants).
3. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Editions, 1983), p. 129.
4. I use the phrase "elite" to describe a section of the wealthy members of Boston and Philadelphia society, linked to their respective groups by social, financial, and familial ties. I adopt this construction of the term from Stephen Brobeck's dissertation, "Changes in the Composition and Structure of Philadelphia Elite Groups, 1756-1790." Peter Dobkin Hall also outlines similar patterns for the rise of a post-Revolutionary elite in *The Organization of American Culture, 1700-1900: Private Institutions, Elites, and the Origins of American Nationality* (New York: New York University Press, 1982).
5. This phrase recurs with some frequency in Philadelphia *Freeman's Journal*, and targets the wealthy cabal that the *Journal* feared would swallow up Philadelphia society. For an example, see the attack on the Federal Constitution, described as the "foundation upon which the well-born mean to build up their schemes of profit and aggrandizement." *Freeman's Journal*, October 29, 1788.
6. Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), p. 191. Also see Elkins and McKittrick, "The Founding Fathers: Young Men of the Revolution."
7. William Dunlap, *History of the American Theatre*, (New York: Burt Franklin, 1963), p. 107.
8. I qualify this statement with the phrase "in general," because there were individuals on both sides of the theater question whose agendas do not fit neatly within a party framework. As the 1790s progressed and party divisions grew more stringent, some of the theater's supporters shifted allegiance. Also, support or opposition of the theater did not necessarily preclude alliances between factions, if there was the prospect of financial or political gain. For example, the formation of Pennsylvania's many land development companies drew together individuals who had faced off over the theater. In another example, the Federalists' efforts to secure ratification of the Constitution encouraged them to form alliances with groups vehemently opposed to theatrical entertainments.
9. The Quaker and Puritan bias against theater has been documented in a variety of studies. Among the best/most comprehensive are Jean-Christophe Agnew's *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (New York, 1986); William Dye, "Pennsylvania *versus* the Theatre," in *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. LV, 1931, pp. 333-373; Harold C. Shiffler, "Religious Opposition to the Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia Stage," in *Educational Theatre Journal*, vol. 14, October 1962, pp. 215-223; and Peter A. Davis, "Puritan Mercantilism and the Politics of Anti-Theatrical Legislation in Colonial America," in Ron Engle and Tice Miller, eds., *The American Stage* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
10. Jared Brown, *The Theatre in America During the Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). p. 6. It should be noted that the Continental Congress had to re-issue their original ban in 1778, because American officers, including Washington, were staging performances within their camps. The 1778 ban stated that any officer who permit-

ted, condoned, or participated in theatrical entertainments would lose his position.

11. Ann Fairfax Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union: Virtue and the Formation of American Republics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 46. Also see Chapter 2, "Plays and Politics," for more on this issue. It is important to note that even though theatrical performances were banned, dialogues and pamphlets in play form continued to circulate throughout the Revolutionary period. These playlets formed part of a new imagined community, in which the rebelling colonists could hypothesize the drama of their own rebellion.

12. Brown, p. 131. Though Brown's documentation of events is thorough, he makes some problematic connections between the British wartime theater and the rise of a post-Revolutionary American theatrical tradition. What seems more probable, given the post-war controversy over the theater, is that the British wartime displays inspired Americans to move towards creating their own cultural traditions.

13. Brown, pp. 54-55; also see "Commonplace Book," c. 1780, given to Dr. I. T. Sharpless in 1828, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The Commonplace Book contains a detailed description of the Meschianza, as well as a collection of anti-American songs.

14. Meredith H. Lair, "Red Coat Theater: Negotiating Identity in Occupied Philadelphia, 1777-1778," unpublished paper, Department of History, Pennsylvania State University. I am grateful to Ms. Lair for sharing her research with me.

15. Petition submitted by Lewis Hallam, November 9, 1788; Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Also see *Pennsylvania Archives*, first series, X, pp. 141-143.

16. It is important to note that Hallam continued to stage performances at the Southwark Theatre, despite the continued ban. He "disguised" these performances as lectures, pantomimes, and concerts. For more information, see Thomas Pollock, *The Philadelphia Theatre in the Eighteenth Century. Together with the Day Book of the Same Period* (New York: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1968).

17. Ronald Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 10-13. Also see Edward Shils's *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

18. Formisano, pp. 85-88. Also see Ann Fairfax Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fêtes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); and Simon P. Newman, *Parades, and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

19. Steven Rosswurm, "Class Relations, Political Economy, and Society in Philadelphia," in Catherine E. Hutchins, ed. *Shaping a National Culture: The Philadelphia Experience, 1750-1800* (Winterthur, Delaware: Winterthur Museum, 1994), p. 45.

20. For a discussion of the State Constitutionals' motivations, see Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1969), pp. 226-233. Also see Douglas M. Arnold, *A Republican Revolution: Ideology and Politics in Pennsylvania, 1776-1790* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1989), pp. 188-193.

21. Examples of State Constitutionals' initiatives during this period are the Test Acts of 1776/1779, the anti-theatrical legislation of 1779, the attack on the charter of the College of Philadelphia, and the revocation of the charter of the First Presbyterian Church in 1786. These acts chipped away at the basis of the State Constitutionals' authority, and allowed the Federalists to challenge them for possession of the Revolutionary Center, on the grounds that the State Constitutionals had violated the same Revolutionary principles that they were sworn to uphold.

22. "Legions," in *Independent Gazetteer*, February 21, 1784.

23. Janet Wilson, "The Bank of North America and Pennsylvania Politics, 1781-1787," in *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. LXVI, no. 1, January, 1942, pp. 3-4.

24. Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 51. The Bank initially issued 1,000 shares, 600 of which were held by the United States and 400 of which were in the hands of private stockholders. Twelve of the private shareholders, including Thomas Willing, James Wilson, William Bingham, and Thomas Fitzsimmons, remained on the bank's board for almost a decade.

25. *Independent Gazetteer*, March 13, 1784.
26. Wilson, pp. 16-17.
27. Cited in Hammond, already listed above, p. 63.
28. For a discussion of this period, also see Chapter I, "Revolutions and Constitutions, 1776-1790," in Harry Marlin Tinkcom, *The Republicans and Federalists in Pennsylvania, 1790-1801* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1950). Tinkcom offers a concise summary of the crises in Pennsylvania state government from the ratification of the first state constitution, to the adoption of the Federal Constitution in 1788, and the creation of a new Pennsylvania state constitution in 1790.
29. Though no complete list of members for the Dramatic Association survives, the following men are known to have been members because they signed petitions from the Dramatic Association submitted to the General Assembly: General Walter Stewart, Major Thomas L. Moore, William Temple Franklin, Dr. Robert Bass, John Barclay, Jacob Barge, Dr. Joseph Redman, and John West.
30. *Pennsylvania Packet*, January 7, 1789.
31. Petition of the Dramatic Association to the General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly*, February 16, 1789; also see *Pennsylvania Packet*, February 17, 1789.
32. *Pennsylvania Packet*, February 16, 1789.
33. Petition of the Dramatic Association to the General Assembly, *Minutes of the General Assembly*, February 16, 1789; also see *Pennsylvania Packet*, February 17, 1789.
34. *Pennsylvania Museum*, V, 1789, 187-190.
35. *Independent Gazetteer*, March 7, 1789.
36. This information is drawn from roll-call votes printed in Carey's work on the Bank of North America, 1786; Owen Ireland's tabulations of Federalist/anti-Federalist counties in *Religion, Ethnicity, and Politics*, pp. 191-194; and reports on the theater votes in the General Assembly in the *Independent Gazetteer*, March 7, 1789. Though the representatives changed during this five-year period, patterns of voting remained roughly similar.
37. *Independent Gazetteer*, March 7, 1789.
38. Henry Knox of Philadelphia to Samuel Breck of Boston, July 16, 1789, Henry Knox Papers.
39. Stephen Patterson, *Political Parties in Revolutionary Massachusetts* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973). For Hancock's involvement in the 1767 law, see *Journal of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts, 1767-1768* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1975). For Adams's comments on wartime theatricals see Samuel Adams to S. P. Savage, October 17, 1778, S. P. Savage Collection, Bound Letters, vol. 2, Massachusetts Historical Society.
40. Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Random House, 1991), p. 191.
41. Anonymous, *Sans Souci, alias Free and Easy, or an Evening's Peep into a Polite Circle* (Boston: Warden and Russell, 1785), p. 4. Mercy Otis Warren is often credited with this play. It should be noted however that Warren's authorship is disputed, and that she herself disclaimed it, saying, "I hope I shall never write anything I should be so much ashamed to avow as that little indigested farago," cited in Charles Warren, "Samuel Adams and the Sans Social Club in 1785," *Massachusetts Historical Society, Proceedings*, LX (1927), p. 343.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
43. Charles Warren, "Samuel Adams and the Sans Souci Club in 1785," already cited p. 335. I have cited the names which correspond in the two editions. There are some identifications which differ among the two. When the publication of the play was announced, Samuel Jarvis, apparently another member of the society, approached the printers to try to block its distribution.
44. Warren, "Samuel Adams and the Sans Souci Club in 1785," already cited p. 342.
45. Waldstreicher, p. 81. Also see Charles Warren, "Samuel Adams and the Sans Souci Club in 1785," *Massachusetts Historical Society, Proceedings*, LX (1927), p. 318-344.
46. Thomas Sedgewick, January 9, 1791, Sedgewick Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society.
47. Walter Muir Whitehill discusses the movement of Boston's merchants into increasingly new and grand neighborhoods, largely planned by architect Charles Bulfinch. Bulfinch translated his European, neoclassical inspired designs into private mansions and public buildings, transforming the look of Boston architecture. See Walter Muir Whitehill, *Boston: A Topographical History*, second edition, enlarged (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), Chapter 3, "The Boston of Bulfinch." Also see Harold and James Kirker, *Bulfinch's Boston, 1787-1817* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

48. *Constitution of the Boston Tontine Association* (Boston: Benjamin Russell, 1791).

49. Pauline Maier, "The Debate Over Incorporations: Massachusetts in the Early Republic," in Conrad Edick Wright, ed., *Massachusetts and the New Nation* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society and Northeastern University Press, 1992), p. 74.

50. *Constitution of the Boston Tontine Association*.

51. Paul Goodman, *The Democratic Republicans of Massachusetts: Politics in a Young Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 42.

52. To trace the progress of the Tontiners' petitions, see the Journals of the House of Representatives and Journals of the Senate, 1791-93, as well as newspapers of the time, such as *The Independent Chronicle and Daily Advertiser*, and *The American Apollo*.

53. John W. Tyler, "Persistence and Change within the Boston Business Community," Conrad Edick Wright and Kathryn P. Viens, eds., *Entrepreneurs: The Boston Business Community, 1700-1850* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), pp. 97-119.

54. William Warland Clapp, Jr., *A Record of the Boston Stage* (Boston: James Monroe and Company, 1853), p. 5.

55. "Petition for a Clause for a Theatre," October 8, 1791, Miscellaneous Documents Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society.

56. *Argus*, November 8, 1791. I am grateful to Seth Cotlar, who first drew my attention to Abraham Bishop, while we were in residence at the McNeil Center for Early American Studies.

57. *Independent Chronicle and Daily Advertiser*, February 2, 1792.

58. John Gardiner, *The Speech of John Gardiner* (Boston: Apollo Press, 1792) p. 3. Gardiner's speech addresses more than an ancient prejudice against the theater—it speaks to the transformation of the post-Revolutionary society as a whole.

59. Philo Dramaticus, *Rights of the Drama* (Boston, 1792).

60. William Haliburton, "Effects of the Stage on the Manners of the People; and the Propriety of Encouraging and Establishing a Virtuous Theater: By a Bostonian" (Boston: Young & Etheridge, Market Square, 1792).

61. By 1792, the Tontine included such men as Dr. Charles Jarvis, Joseph Barrell, General Henry Jackson, Perez Morton, and John

Gardiner.

62. Cited in Goodman, p. 41.

63. This information is drawn from votes recorded in the Journals of the House and Senate 1791-1793. Of the three related initiatives, the Union Bank is the only vote that is more evenly distributed—which is not surprising, considering it is the only one of the three acts that passed. Resistance was concentrated in Worcester County, the northern part of Middlesex County, and the southern section of Norfolk County. Support for these initiatives was strongest in Suffolk and Essex County. As Pauline Maier notes in her essay "The Debate Over Incorporations," to the general public, acts of incorporation seemed potentially dangerous tools which could transform a democratic body into one governed by an elite. See the Journal of the House of Representatives, May 1791-March 1792 session, Massachusetts State House, Special Collections.

64. John Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia*, vol. 1, p. 140.

65. Charles Durang, *History of the Philadelphia Stage, Between the Years 1749 and 1855*, vol. XV.

66. Ann Willing Bingham was the wife of William Bingham, one of the wealthiest men in America. She was recognized as one of the leaders of the "Republican Court," Philadelphia's elite social circle. Ann Bingham had spent the early part of the 1780s in Europe, where she absorbed the social traditions and elegance of court circles that she tried to recreate back in the United States. Durang claims that she was one of the prime movers behind the formation of the Dramatic Association. I have not yet found any information that either supports or disproves this claim.

67. John Harold Herr, "Thomas Wignell and the Chesnut Street Theatre," unpublished dissertation, Department of Theater, Michigan State University, 1969, p. 30. Note that Herr's spelling of "Chesnut" is an accepted version of the theater's name—not a typo.

68. *Federal Gazette and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser*, February 11, 1791. The "Friends of the Drama" also expressed their outrage that Hallam had neglected to recruit a group of "seven or eight good [British] actors... who came to America for the avowed purpose of joining your company."

69. It is interesting to note that the "Friends of the Drama" do not seem to have objected

to the *content* of the plays being presented by Hallam's Company, which included such old favorites as *School for Scandal*, *Richard III*, *Rosina, or the Reapers*, *The West Indian*, and *The Beaux' Stratagem*. These plays, despite their identification with British culture, remained staples of the American theater throughout the 1790s. See Pollock, pp. 161-162 for a list of performances during the time of Hallam's dispute with the "Friends of the Drama."

70. *Federal Gazette and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser*, February 15, 1791.

71. Cited in Herr, p. 51.

72. Herr suggests that Reinagle's partnership with Wignell was instrumental in attracting members of the Philadelphia elite to the new project. He suggests that the elite were already familiar with Reinagle through his concerts at the City Tavern, and that Reinagle gave the project a more "refined" tone. See Herr, pp. 42-46. Subscribers to the new theater included many members of Philadelphia elite, men who had defended the theater to the general assembly, and men who had formed part of the Dramatic Association. The list of the original fifty-eight subscribers can be found in the Society Collection at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Funds for the theater were kept at the Bank of North America. For more information on the accounts of the Theater, see the Account Book in the Chestnut Street Theatre Collection at the Historical Society of Philadelphia and the Henry Hill Collection at the Library Company of Philadelphia.

73. Mary M. Schweitzer, "The Spatial Organization of Federalist Philadelphia, 1790," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXIV, 1 (Summer, 1993), p. 37.

74. Thompson Westcott, *The Historic Mansions and Buildings of Philadelphia, with Some Notice of their Owners and Occupants* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1877).

75. Proposals by Messieurs Wignell and Reinagle for Erecting a New Theatre in Philadelphia," June 22, 1792, Society Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

76. *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, September 12, 1791. There is some suggestion of a subterfuge being used in buying lots for the theater. Due to the public outcry from the theater's opponents, Wignell, Reinagle, and the theater subscribers arranged the transaction for the theater land through a third party, a lawyer named John Dickinson, who purchased the land in his own name and then leased it to the

theater managers. This version of events is recounted in Brooks McNamara, *The American Playhouse in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 105). John Dickinson was indeed the owner of the land upon which the theater was built—in fact, he tried to foreclose on the managers in 1799.

77. For more information on property transactions in Boston during this period see Annie Haven Thwing, *The Crooked and Narrow Streets of Boston* (Boston: Marshal Jones Company, 1920); also see the Thwing Card Catalog at the Massachusetts Historical Society for a record of land deeds and occupations of land holders; also see Annie Haven Thwing, *Suffolk Deeds 1630-1800, Compiled by Streets* (Boston, 1916). For information on property development as perceived by a resident of Boston during the 1790s, see the Thomas Wallcut Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. In a handwritten essay entitled "Hints as to Widening Streets," Walcutt praises the Tontiners for their "disinterested Public Spirit" in contributing to the renovation of the Ward 10 area.

78. Nathaniel Cutting, September 18, 1792, cited in "Extracts from the Diary of Nathaniel Cutting," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 12, (1873), p. 63.

79. *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, September 3, 1792.

80. Cited in Clapp, p. 9.

81. *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, November 26, 1792.

82. See advertisements in the *Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser* and the *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, Fall, 1792.

83. *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, November 12, 1792.

84. See Clapp, p. 12. Also see the *American Apollo*, December 7, 1792. The *Apollo* was supported by members of the Tontine, and gives an account of the incident weighted in their favor.

85. See Journal of the House and Senate, May 1792-March 1793. The vote was taken on March 26, 1793. Also see *Independent Chronicle and Daily Advertiser*, April 12, 1793, for a list of which initiatives were approved and which were not approved.

86. The Federal Street Theatre was built directly opposite a new row of townhouses known as the Tontine Crescent, and modeled after the urban architecture of Bath, England. The Tontiners could see their monument to

Boston's cultural advancement from their doorsteps! For an engraving which depicts both the Tontine Crescent and the Federal Street Theatre, see Douglas Shand-Tucci, *Built in Boston: City and Suburb, 1800-1950* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), p. 6.

87. Gardiner tried to rally support for the Boston theater by appealing to Boston's competitive spirit, noting that, "strangers complain much for a want of resort (in Boston)... and they leave us for New York or Philadelphia." See Gardiner, p. 150. Gardiner and Robert Morris also emphasized the fact that every polished civilization from the Greeks to the Elizabethans had maintained a permanent theater.

88. The Federal Street Theatre was designed and built by Charles Bulfinch, with the aid of the Tontine Construction Company. The architect of the Chestnut Street Theatre remains in dispute, partly because final construction on the building was not completed until 1805, and various alterations in the design took place during that time. For a detailed account of the evolution of the Chestnut Street Theatre's design, see McNamara, pp. 104-112.

89. Federal Street Theatre Collection, Boston Public Library.

90. *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, February 4, 1793.

91. Abby Hamilton to Sarah Bache, November 25, 1792, Hamilton Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

92. Henry Jackson to Henry Knox, January 26, 1794, Knox Papers.

93. McNamara, p. 108. Note that McNamara's figure is from 1820, by which time the theater had undergone substantial renovations. From correspondence among Wignell, Reinagle, and the theater trustees, it seems that the land on which the theater was built cost approximately \$20,000, and that the theater building itself cost substantially more. When the theater finally opened in February, 1794, after a delay due to the Yellow Fever epidemic, Wignell and Reinagle were in debt for an additional \$20,000 to \$35,000. This estimate is based on accounts for the theater, which do not specify which debts are on-going and which are new. See account records for the theater dated October 24 and 28, 1794 in the Henry Hill Collection, Library Company of Philadelphia.

94. The opening of the Chestnut Street The-

atre was delayed by a severe epidemic of yellow fever which gripped Philadelphia in the summer and fall of 1793. For more information on the impact of the fever on the theater and Philadelphia society, see Martin S. Pernick, "Politics, Parties, and Pestilence: Epidemic Yellow Fever in Philadelphia and the Rise of the First Party System," in J. Worth Estes and Billy G. Smith, eds., *A Melancholy Scene of Devastation: The Public Response to the 1793 Philadelphia Yellow Fever Epidemic* (Philadelphia: Science History Publications, 1997), pp. 119-146.

95. *General Advertiser*, February 24, 1794.

96. *General Advertiser*, March 24, 1794.

97. *General Advertiser*, February 24, 1794.

98. *General Advertiser*, February 24, 1794.

99. Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, pp. 471-519.

100. Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life Among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 18.

101. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America* (New York, 1993), p. 41.

102. See Sarah L. Flucker to Lucy Knox, February 15, 1794, Henry Knox Papers.

103. Increase Sumner to William Cushing, February 14, 1794, Cushing Family Papers, 1650-1840, Massachusetts Historical Society. Note that Clapp's *Record of the Boston Stage*, 1853, *denies* that any Boston theater riots took place in 1794—he does however, allude to one in Philadelphia, but does not provide additional details. Clapp, p. 23.

104. *Federal Orrery*, January 14, 1796.

105. See the *General Advertiser*, February 19, 1794, February 25, 1794, February 26, 1794, February 28, 1794, and May 7, 1794 for mention of the audience demands for "Ça Ira." It is interesting to note that after March 3, 1794, the theater managers stopped running the statement which proclaimed that audience song requests would *not* be accommodated.

106. Liam Riordan, " 'O dear, what can the matter be': Political Culture and Popular Song in Benjamin Carr's *Federal Overture*," unpublished paper, December 1995. I am grateful to Professor Riordan for sharing his findings with me.

107. Clapp, p. 22.

108. Susanna Rowson, *Slaves in Algiers* (Philadelphia: Wrigley and Berriman, 1794), prologue.

109. Waldstreicher, p. 129.

1109. Newman, p. 87.

111. *Philadelphia General Advertiser*, February 24, 1794.

112. For material related to *The Contrast* and early American drama, see Jeffrey Richards's excellent bibliography and prefatory comments in Jeffrey H. Richards, ed., *Early American Drama*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1997); Lucy Elizabeth Rinehart, "A Nation's 'Noble Spectacle': Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* as Metatheatrical Commentary," *American Drama*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1994), pp. 29-52; John Evelev, "The Contrast: The Problem of Theatricality and Political and Social Crisis in Postrevolutionary America," *Early American Literature*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1996), pp. 74-97; Jurgen C. Wolter, ed., *The Dawning of American Drama: American Dramatic Criticism, 1746-1915* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993).

113. It is important to note that a limited run does not necessarily indicate that a play was unpopular. Because the audience "pool" of the time was relatively limited, managers did their best to offer a constantly rotating menu of plays. Therefore, a play could be extremely successful, and still only have one or two show-

ings over a several year period. Tyler's *The Contrast* debuted in a December 1, 1787 reading by Thomas Wignell at the City Tavern. For more information about early performances, see Pollock, p. 407.

114. *General Advertiser*, April 1, 1794.

115. It should be noted that theaters did occasionally publish versions of scripts with the prompter's changes. One example is Henry Brooke's *Gustavus Vasa; or The Deliverer of his Country*, published "with alterations and amendments as performed at the New Theatre in Boston," printed by John West, 1794.

116. Pollock. See index for list of dates and years of performance.

117. See the outstanding promptbook collection at the Library Company of Philadelphia for more information. The Library Company's copy of *Rosina* contains one humorous note handwritten by the prompter on the front inside page of the script: "I foresee what will happen to this orchestra with a Dutch leader knowing no English."

118. David R. Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic: Peale's Museum and Its Audience* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), pp. 1-16.

119. Waldstreicher, p. 92.