

‘Done By a Tradesman’: Franklin’s Educational Proposals and the Culture of Eighteenth-Century Pennsylvania

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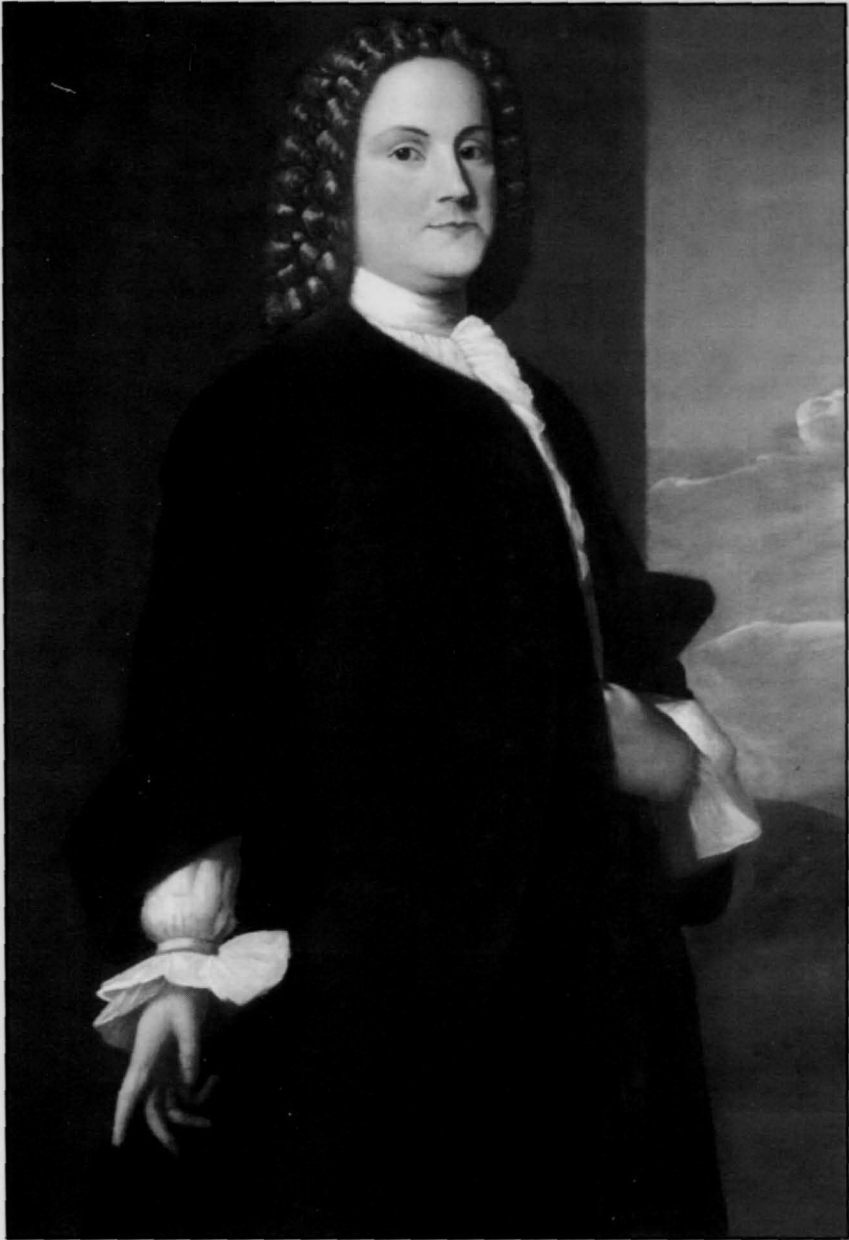
In November 1750, Samuel Johnson, the New York clergyman who would distinguish himself as one of colonial America’s leading educators, responded to Benjamin Franklin’s plans for a public school in Philadelphia. Franklin had sent Johnson a draft of *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*, which proposed the curriculum for an academy in Philadelphia, along with a note of explanation that he was “indeed very unfit, having neither been educated myself (except as a Tradesman) nor ever concern’d in educating others.” But Johnson, impressed by the “Tradesman’s” work, responded with what he considered to be a compliment: “Nobody would imagine that the draught you have made for an English education was done by a Tradesman. But so it sometimes is, a True Genius will not content itself without entering more or less into almost everything, and of mastering many things more in spite of Fate it self.”¹

Johnson’s compliment was, however, somewhat misleading. Indeed, the reader might see that the Academy plan was “done by a Tradesman,” because it broke from so many of the traditional assumptions that accompanied ideas of formal education in early eighteenth-century

1. My thanks to Steve Harp, Allis Eaton Bennett, Sally Griffith, Mike Zuckerman, Judy Van Buskirk, Bill Pencak, and the late Paul R. Lucas for their comments and suggestions on this essay in various stages. A research fellowship at the David Library of the American Revolution provided much-appreciated time to revise and expand my ideas that follow.

Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Johnson, 25 October 1750, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, (New Haven, 1961), IV: 72; Johnson to BF, November 1750, *Franklin Papers* IV: 74- 5. Johnson (1696-1772) held a B.A. from Yale (1714) and had tutored at that College, later serving as a Presbyterian minister in West Haven before converting to Anglicanism in 1722-23. He served as the first president of King’s College (Columbia) from 1754-1763. *Franklin Papers*, III: 477n. By the time of this correspondence, Franklin had obviously developed a warm relationship with Johnson.

Courtesy of the Harvard University Portrait Collection, Bequest of Dr. John Collins Warren, 1856



*Robert Feke's portrait of Benjamin Franklin (c. 1748/9) shows him as he would have been seen around the time of the publication of *Proposals*. Franklin's periwig and clothing disclose he is a prosperous middling man, wearing fine cuffs and ruffles on his shirt, and a coat appropriate to his social rank in style and color. The very fact that he had a portrait painted, and that that he is facing optimistically into a sunrise, shows the social ambitions that were evident in his writings and actions in the period.*

Anglo-America. Franklin's plan showed little knowledge of the way that formal education was supposed to be, ignoring customs of the educated elite in Europe and the colonies. Instead, his plan reflected the foremost ideas of the Enlightenment, ideas that had been pursued and redefined for decades by Philadelphia's middling sort. The *Proposals* was both the fruition of their ideas about education and "useful knowledge" and the result of the city's social and cultural development in the preceding decades. With his plan to create the academy, Franklin took those ideas and actions to a new, public space – the college – specifically designed to implement them.²

The plans that Franklin wrote broke decisively from many traditional educational practices. As Charles and Mary Beard wrote, "Franklin himself had never been ground through the college mill," and his pedagogical outline reflected that fact. But his unique perspective and the education that he and other middling Philadelphians had given themselves profoundly affected his concept of what an educational institution should do.³ In designing his academy, Franklin combined his understanding of Enlightenment thought with his extensive knowledge of Philadelphia's unique social and cultural composition to propose an institution that was both his most innovative civic project and the most original educational idea of his era. The projected school would continue the associational structure that began with the private meetings of the Junto in the 1720s and progressed into the public sphere with ideas and actions of the Library Company of Philadelphia founded in 1731 and the American Philosophical Society proposed a dozen years later. Yet the academy would also be a battlefield. As Philadelphians rethought educational traditions and practices, they also called aspects of the social structure into question and created or expanded social divisions that came with these challenges. This essay examines the founding of the Academy of Philadelphia within its social, cultural, and intellectual contexts, first paying particular attention to how Philadelphia

2. The Enlightenment has, in recent decades, undergone a reassessment. No longer seen as just the realm of a few leading European intellectuals, historians now examine the movement's implications for larger numbers of people from a wider social spectrum. See Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1985); Ned C. Landsman, *From Colonials to Provincials: American Thought and Culture, 1680-1760* (New York, 1997); Margaret C. Jacob, "The Enlightenment Redefined: The Formation of Modern Civil Society," *Social Research* 58 (Summer 1991) 475-95; Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York, 2000); Elizabeth Eisenstein, *Print Culture and Enlightenment Thought* (Chapel Hill: 1986); Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1994); Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1982).

3. Charles Beard and Mary Ritter Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (London, 1944), 169.

provided a context for Franklin's educational ideas to develop and how the city had previously dealt with long-range questions of education. Then, it examines how Franklin's educational proposals compared to other contemporary school plans and how they represented Enlightenment educational thought, examining the ways in which Franklin's pedagogy offered a unique perspective on human needs and abilities.⁴

As with the Library Company, Franklin downplayed his central role in the academy scheme when he announced his plans.⁵ He wrote an anonymous page-one letter in the August 24, 1749 issue of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* that called readers to consider a defect in their city: the lack of educational institutions available to the youths of the town. The first generations of settlers were not to be blamed for neglecting to establish an academy; economic survival and a livelihood were their foremost concerns. "*Agriculture and mechanic arts*, were of the most immediate importance; the *culture of minds* by the *finer arts and sciences*, was necessarily postpon'd to times of more wealth and leisure." But now that Philadelphia was prosperous, now that the city had come through a tremendous period of growth in the preceding decades, and now that many other social institutions had been placed on sturdy foundations, it was time to establish a permanent academy for the education of youth. To support his point, the *Gazette* essayist reprinted a letter from Pliny the Younger to Cornelius Tacitus in which the Roman orator explained his plan for a school in his native town of Comum. Using classical antiquity as a model, the *Gazette* letter equated Philadelphia's situation with Pliny's idea: no plan could be more beneficial to both a community and its youth than founding a school. By learning in their native town, students would strengthen ties to the locale and augment their desire to affect it. In this letter, Franklin combined his studies with commonly-held beliefs about Philadelphia's past and present to initiate

4. The American Philosophical Society existed for only a short time after its 1743 founding, then was revived in 1768 and in 1769 merged with the American Society. Whitfield J. Bell, *Patriot-Improvers: Biographical Sketches of the Members of the American Philosophical Society*, vols. 1 and 2 (Philadelphia, 1997, 1999); George W. Boudreau, "'Highly Valuable and Extensively Useful': Community and Readership among the Eighteenth Century Philadelphia Middling Sort" *Pennsylvania History* (Summer 1996). On the public sphere, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, 1991).

5. As Franklin wrote in the *Autobiography*, "The Objections, & Reluctances I met with in Soliciting the Subscriptions, made me soon feel the Impropriety of presenting one's self as the Proposer of any useful Project that might be suppos'd to raise one's Reputation in the smallest degree above that of one's Neighbours, when one has need of their Assistance to accomplish that Project. I therefore put my self as much as I could out of sight, and stated it as a Scheme of a *Number of Friends*," Leonard Labaree, et al., eds., *Autobiography*, 143.

an academy movement specifically integrated into its social and cultural contexts.⁶

The *Proposals*' Curriculum

Franklin's proposed curriculum for the Philadelphia academy disclosed a sophisticated reading of Enlightenment sources at the same time it displayed a context-driven understanding of those works. Students were to learn important ideas and information, but information that would have direct relevance to their lives. In the most famous passage of the *Proposals*, Franklin wrote :

As to their STUDIES, it would be well if they could be taught *every Thing* that is useful, and *every Thing* that is ornamental: But Art is long, and their Time is short. It is therefore propos'd that they learn those Things that are likely to be *most useful* and *most ornamental*, Regard being had to the several Professions for which they are intended.⁷

Historians have often viewed this passage as an expression of Franklin's pragmatism. By emphasizing his stress on the useful, they have seen Franklin's statement as excluding theory and art in favor of immediate material gains. Yet Franklin's *Proposals* shows an educational ideal that balanced ornamental and useful studies because, as Franklin had experienced in his own rise, ornamental disciplines could also be essential to mobility. The curriculum stressed community interaction and participation, presenting both useful actions and images to the society. Franklin was not advocating a vocational school, but an academy designed to make its students beneficial to the community at the same time that it educated them.

The Philadelphia academy would strive to make its students useful citizens in both appearance and reality. The correct pedagogy, Franklin believed, would have long-term ramifications for the town:

I think...that nothing is of more importance for the public weal, than to form and train up youth in wisdom and virtue. Wise and good men are, in my opinion, the *strength* of a state: much more than riches or arms....I think also, that

6. Benjamin Franklin, "On the Need for an Academy," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 24 August 1749, in *Papers*, III: 385-388.

7. *Papers*, III: 404.

general virtue is more probably to be expected and obtained from the *education* of youth, than from the *exhortation* of adult persons; bad habits and vices of the mind, being, like diseases of the body, more easily prevented than cured.⁸

Franklin laid the foundation of his academy's curriculum on John Locke's pedagogical methods viewed through the lens of mid-eighteenth century Philadelphia. The curriculum included penmanship, drawing ("a kind of Universal Language, understood by all Nations"), "Arithmetick, Accounts, and some of the first principles of Geometry and Astronomy," English grammar learned through studying "clear and concise" writers, and reading aloud. "To form their Stile, they should be put on Writing Letters to each other, making Abstracts of what they read; or writing the same Things in their own Words," Lockean ideas that Franklin and his fellow artisans had themselves followed years before. In addition, students would learn pronunciation by reciting speeches and making declamations. Each of these aspects of Franklin's curriculum was community-centered as well as practical: students were taught to write, speak, and communicate in other forms that would prepare them for future interpersonal action.⁹

As a document in American educational history, Franklin's proposal was remarkable for what it did not include: religion. The academy was not founded by a particular religious group, did not have overt religious goals, and while it would stress morality, it did so only insofar as that morality benefitted the community. In part, this absence of denominational affiliation was rooted in Franklin's personal religious quest. He was a lapsed Presbyterian who flirted with deism and married outside his church. Yet throughout his career he stressed the importance of religion as a guide for the public, and he worked to help various churches. In addition, Franklin was once again thinking of his locale. Neither the Friends' schools nor those established by other religious groups had been able to accomplish much in public education. Franklin embraced the reality of religious diversity in Philadelphia when he kept religion outside of his proposals, realizing that in order to succeed the school would need the support of adherents to diverse faiths.

8. Franklin to Samuel Johnson, Philadelphia, 23 August 1750, *Papers*, IV: 41.

9. *Papers*, III: 404-10; James Axtell, editor, *The Educational Writings of John Locke: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge, 1968). Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas L. Pangle, *The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders* (Lawrence, KS: 1993), 78-79. Franklin's curricular outline is firmly based in Locke's writings. Locke advocated drawing, arithmetic, accounting, and the reading of contemporary authors.

Without religious instruction, how would students encounter morality in the proposed academy? Franklin stressed the practical and didactic qualities of studying history as part of his curriculum in order to provide moral lessons in addition to benefitting the students' knowledge of geography, chronology, and "Ancient Customs, Religious and civil." In Franklin's estimation, history provided moral lessons that supported what later readers might call middle class values:

[B]y descanting and making continual Observations on the Causes of the Rise or Fall of any Man's Character, Fortune, Power, &c. mention'd in History; the Advantages of Temperance, Order, Frugality, Industry, Perseverance, &c. &c. Indeed the general natural Tendency of Reading good History, must be, to fix in the Minds of Youth deep Impressions of the Beauty and Usefulness of Virtue of all Kinds, Publick Spirit, Fortitude, &c.¹⁰

History showed the importance of oratory and explained the need for public religion ("the Advantage of a Religious Character among private Persons; the Mischiefs of Superstition, &c. and the Excellency of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION above all others antient and modern"). In addition, history molded and strengthened community ties by showing the importance of forming societies and governments.¹¹

The "usefulness" of Franklin's curriculum was evident in the many areas that he included which were outside of the classical education tradition. Horticulture studies, with "Excursions made to neighbouring Plantations of the best Farmers, their Methods observ'd and reason'd upon for the Information of Youth," provided two benefits to the community. First, youths would have a better idea of agricultural work and its benefits. Several of the artisans who joined the Junto took a keen interest in the cultivation of plant life and conducted detailed correspondence with similar men in other parts of the world to discuss and supplement their interest. Second, the method of learning, using empiricism to observe methods of successful farming, both furthered Enlightenment practices and gave the vast majority of Pennsylvanians

10. *Papers*, III: 412.

11. *Papers*, III: 413; Pangle and Pangle, 72. The Pangles point out a dichotomy between Franklin and Locke over the study of history. Whereas Franklin pointed out the importance of studying history for society, Locke saw historical knowledge as the root of violence, when youths read history and saw the constant gains made through violence and read of the praise given to conquerors. John Locke, *Some Thoughts concerning Education in John Locke on Politics and Education*, Howard Penniman, ed. (Roslyn, NY, 1947), 306.

potential interest in their college as it combined their traditional role with that of the learned educator. Franklin's practicality went further, advocating the teaching of the history of commerce and the importance of mechanical studies.¹²

Foreign language training was a point of some contention in Franklin's educational ideas. In the *Proposals*, Franklin advocated learning classical languages because they contained "the finest Writings, the most correct Compositions, the most perfect Productions of human Wit and Wisdom." Classical languages, Franklin wrote, were both practical and ornamental. They contained writings of science and other fields, and "to understand them is a distinguishing Ornament...and their Industry [will be] sharpen'd in the Acquisition of them."¹³ The *Proposals* called for divinity students to study Latin and Greek; physics students to study Latin, Greek, and French; law students were to read Latin and French; and future merchants French, German, and Spanish.

Yet language training was the most troubling area of Franklin's curriculum, the one that would eventually lead to the class-based conflict among the supporters of the Academy of Philadelphia. Language's connection to certain areas of study decidedly shows that Philadelphia was an international community, interacting with different parts of the world. Prospective merchants learned modern languages in order to be prepared to join an international business network. That physics students studied French in addition to the classical languages acknowledges the academy's ties to the work of French natural philosophical writings.¹⁴

But Franklin's advocacy of the study of Latin and Greek was perhaps the most controversial section of his paper. In later years, he would recall that the addition of Latin and Greek curriculum was pressed by leading men in the community, whose financial and social support he needed to further his academy proposals. Franklin's own background in the classics was limited. Denied a classical education at Boston Latin School because of financial restrictions, he likely smarted as he wrote in the *Proposals* that Latin and Greek were the "Language of Learned Men in all Countries." While his wealthy supporters may have approved this passage, Franklin knew that in the phrase "Learned" might also be read

12. *Papers*, III: 417-18.

13. *Papers*, III: 415.

14. On the study of classical languages and natural philosophy, see Edwin Wolf II, *The Book Culture of a Colonial American City: Philadelphia Books, Bookmen, and Booksellers* (Oxford, 1988); Raymond P. Stearns, *Science in the British Colonies of America* (Urbana, Ill.: 1970).

“rich,” and he desired a school that would help the artisan class learn and advance, as he had done. In his *Autobiography*, Franklin noted that he began to study languages in 1733, starting with French and eventually mastering it, followed by Italian and then Spanish. Having studied those languages, Franklin said he then was able to understand Latin quite well. By beginning with practical modern languages that could help his business career, Franklin gained abilities in the classics.

From these Circumstances I have thought, that there is some Inconsistency in our common Mode of Teaching Languages. We are told that it is proper to begin first with the Latin, and having acquir'd that it will be more easy to attain those modern Languages which are deriv'd from it....I would therefore offer it to the Consideration of those who superintend the Education of our Youth, whether, since many of those who begin with the Latin, quit the same after spending some Years, without having made any great Proficiency, and what they have learnt becomes almost useless, so that their time has been lost, it would not have been better to have begun them with the French, proceeding to the Italian &c. for tho' after spending the same time they should quit the Study of Languages, & never arrive at the Latin, they would however have acquir'd another Tongue or two that being in modern Use might be serviceable to them in common Life.¹⁵

The contrast between these two models, one proposed publicly in 1749, the other written privately in the 1780s, marks the great conflict in Franklin's educational writings. For expedient reasons, Franklin accepted the creation of a Latin school as part of his middle-class academy in the 1750s. But that compromise marked the beginning of the Academy's turning away from Franklin's ideal of an institution imparting useful information to middling sort youths.

The Social Context of Franklin's Proposal

When Franklin began to advocate the academy, he did so with beliefs firmly rooted in the Philadelphia community and with hopes that the school would have positive repercussions on its citizens. “The good Education of Youth has been esteemed by wise Men of all Ages, as the surest Foundation of the Happiness both of Private Families and of

15. *Autobiography*, 168-69. This passage comes from the third section of the manuscript, written in 1788. The informal, self-examining tone of the first section of the autobiography written seventeen years earlier had given way to a public, pronouncing style that is evident here. Franklin was also much concerned with education at this point in his life, both in seeing his grandsons prepared for careers and for the public in general.

Common-wealths," Franklin wrote at the beginning of the *Proposals*. Yet what did he think that "happiness" was? And in what ways had the school idea been formed by this special ideal of community?¹⁶

The "happiness" Franklin called for was not mere personal joy. In this eighteenth-century context, "happiness" implied a public experience, rather than an individual feeling. Franklin's statement appears to have been part of the same meaning attached to the phrase by Scottish-Enlightenment philosopher Francis Hutcheson in 1755: "the surest way to promote...private happiness [is] to do publicly useful actions." Franklin's educational proposal was specifically attuned to its social context, the Philadelphia of late 1749. The expanding economy that accompanied King George's War brought with it a belief in the potential of civic plans at the same time that social developments created a need for redefined philanthropic activity and a widened participation in creating social institutions. But the educational proposal was also a plan that had been developing in Franklin's mind for years, and one that was a part of several long-standing intellectual and cultural traditions.¹⁷

Decades later, Franklin recalled that he first prepared plans for an academy in 1743. That plan tied into Franklin's general insight of Philadelphia's growth and his changing perception of his role within it:

I had on the whole abundant Reason to be satisfied with my being established in Pennsylvania. There were however two things that I regretted: There being no Provision for Defense, nor for compleat Education of Youth; No Militia nor any College. I therefore in 1743, drew up a Proposal for establishing an Academy; and at that time thinking the Revd. Mr. Peters, who was out of Employ, a fit Person to superintend such an Institution, I communicated the Project to him. But he having more profitable Views in the Service of the Proprietors, which succeeded, declin'd the Undertaking. And not knowing another at that time suitable for such a Trust, I let the scheme lie a while dormant. I succeeded better the next Year, 1744, in proposing and establishing a Philosophical Society.¹⁸

16. *Papers*, III: 399.

17. See *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 737. For a discussion of the term and its importance to eighteenth-century Anglo-Americans, see Jan Lewis, "Happiness," in Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, eds., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1991), 641-647. Here Lewis is quoting Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy*, Vol. II (1755).

18. *Autobiography*, 181-2. Franklin was mistaken in reporting the founding date of the American Philosophical Society, which was 1743. No surviving sources clarify whether Franklin was similarly mistaken in recalling the date of the academy proposal.

Franklin's tying the creation of a public academy to a method of defense symbolized his view that the academy would be a source of protection to the town. Education, as Franklin is representing it, is as integral to the survival and prosperity of Philadelphia as a military unit. The statement is also representative of Franklin's belief that a citizen could and should be involved in schemes to advance the town and its people. The story of Richard Peters's prominence in the account of the failed academy plan was more vitriolic than might at first appear. Franklin's reference to the directorship of the academy as "a Trust" and his statement that Peters had "more profitable Views in the Service of the Proprietors" portrays the minister as more interested in personal gain than the well-being of the community, a striking contrast to the way he portrayed his own actions and ideas at the time. This report was colored by the intervening decades in which Franklin's opposition to the Penn family's rule of the colony grew and in which the clergyman frequently reported the printer's communal and political activities to the proprietors. The politics of the 1750s and 1760s were obviously shaping Franklin's autobiographical recollection. But Franklin's statement that the Academy was an expression of concern for the public good over the individual gain was a theme that ran through his writings and actions for the rest of his life.

Franklin's estimation that economic and political issues were the only reasons Peters refused to participate in the academy plans may, some historians believe, overlook the significance of religious diversity for the academy's founding. Perhaps religious beliefs, and the controversies surrounding the religious revival known as the Great Awakening, were his motive for declining the academy position in 1743. Peters was dedicated to traditional Anglican religious practices and was a strident opponent of George Whitefield. "Interested though Mr. Peters was in the education of youth...he did not consider Mr. Franklin's idea timely," one biographer wrote. "He did not himself care to become the head of an academy, which should in its physical contours be reconstructed out of a Whitefieldian environment. He preferred better auspices for the founding of a college."¹⁹ Whitefield's connection to the founding of the

19. Hubertis Cummings, *Richard Peters: Provincial Secretary and Cleric, 1704-1776* (Philadelphia, 1944), 143. For more on the religious and political controversies of the era, see William Pencak, "Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship: Benjamin Franklin, George Whitefield, the 'Dancing School Blockheads,' and a Defense of the 'Meaner Sort,'" *Proteus: A Journal of Ideas* 19: 1 (Spring 2002), 45-50; Nicole Eustace, "Vehement Movements: Debates on Emotion, Self, and Society during the Seven Years' War in Pennsylvania," *Explorations in Early American Culture* (2002), 79-117.

Academy of Philadelphia thus bears importance in understanding who supported the institution, when, and why.

The Great Awakening had profound social and cultural ramifications in British North America, but just how much it affected the creation of the Academy and College of Philadelphia is not so clear. The University of Pennsylvania dates its founding from Whitefield's charity school in 1740, and has honored him by erecting a statue of the great evangelist on its campus. But how accurate is the assumption that Whitefield was in fact connected with the Academy of Philadelphia's founding? An examination of the early history of the college, academy, and charity school requires a more thorough consideration of the extent to which Whitefield's actions and ideas led to the founding of the latter institution.

Beginning in the fall of 1739, George Whitefield had taken Philadelphia by storm, but local opinions differed as to whether that storm was the welcome relief to a drought or the first sign of a potentially dangerous tempest. Whitefield brought a message of the new birth, of conviction to each person's potential for salvation, and a call for increased activity from all people in the causes of religion and religious philanthropy. Whitefield was as impressed by the young town as its residents were impressed by him. He noted that Pennsylvania's mandated religious toleration had created a prosperous village that "flourishes above other provinces" because "liberty of conscience...is given to all to worship God in their own way; by this means, it has become...an asylum or place of refuge for all persecuted Christians." Whitefield's journal for 1740 further said that growing prosperity of the city, where "Above seventy new houses were built in the last year" and more were expected, was due to the city's conviction to religious diversity. Yet the religious toleration that Whitefield celebrated did not extend to the inside of its churches. Leaders of the city's houses of worship began to fear the evangelist and his message, and on Whitefield's second journey to the city he began to find its pulpits barred to him. Richard Peters was among the Anglican clergy who publicly argued with Whitefield and his religious ideology. Initially, Whitefield preached outside, but inclement weather and the religious convictions of his followers pushed for the creation of a structure that would be open to any religious denomination. The result was the "New Building," a seventy-by-one-hundred-foot hall near the corner of Fourth and Mulberry (Arch) streets. Subscriptions of funds and services were requested to support the building, as when the New Building's trustees announced in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of June



Statue of George Whitefield on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania, sculpted by R. Tait McKenzie in 1919.

11, 1741 that they were seeking “Money, or any Goods that will suit Workmen, in Carpenters Work, Bricklayers Work, Lime, Smith Work, Nails, Shingles, Boards, Plaistering, Labour, &c.” In addition to being open to any Protestant sect, the building was also proposed to house a charity school for the colony’s poor.²⁰

The impact of the “Whitefieldian” charity school was minimal, and Hubertis Cummings’s argument that it kept Franklin and Peters from working together on the academy is anachronistic. The school planned for Whitefield’s New Building never materialized. Most sources confirm that Whitefield was a skilled fundraiser and inspirational leader, but had far less skill as an organizer. He wrote to an acquaintance on November 20, 1740 of his recent experience in preaching in the still-unfinished New Building and of his plans to secure the services of a schoolmaster and -mistress, but he was distracted from the task by the pressures of constant movement and evangelizing. Although a directorate made up of men of divergent religious sects was created, Whitefield’s ideas for educating the children of the poor in the building had relatively little impact on the formation of the Academy of Philadelphia. The school plan that Franklin was remembering from 1743 was a different institution from that which had been announced three years earlier, and although Franklin maintained what has been called “a most unlikely friendship” with the evangelist, he was not asking Peters to direct the Whitefieldian school, but another institution altogether. In essence, Whitefield had little connection to the organization or ideology of the Academy of Philadelphia, providing only a bricks-and-mortar connection to the school that Franklin established almost a decade later.²¹

What Whitefield’s experiment did provide was a building. Although Franklin’s 1749 proposals called for the construction of an academy near the city, but presumably in the surrounding countryside, the New Building — by 1749 little used and in a derelict condition — became a

20. *Autobiography*, 175-76; George Whitefield, *Journals* (Edinburgh, 1960) 489-90; Edward Potts Cheyney, *History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1740-1790* (Philadelphia, 1940), 23-26.

21. David T. Morgan, “A Most Unlikely Friendship – Benjamin Franklin and George Whitefield”, *The Historian*, 47 (1985). Another, perhaps even more ironic, explanation is evident for the University of Pennsylvania’s celebration of Whitefield’s contribution to the founding of the school. The decade following the mid-1740s was a fruitful time for college founding in colonial America, and Penn’s near neighbor – and foremost sports rival – was among those schools founded, in 1746. To use Franklin’s academy proposals as its founding date, Penn would be acknowledging Princeton’s more senior status. Thus, the university’s celebration of Whitefield’s minimal contribution to its founding likely has more to do with its desire to lead Princeton in academic marches than any actual dedication to Whitefieldian ideas.

logical place to locate the school. Franklin's *Autobiography* portrays the creation of the Academy and its movement into the New Building as almost coincidental. Initially, classes were held in another structure, but "The Scholars Encreasing fast, the House was soon found too small, and we were looking out for a Piece of Ground properly situated, with Intention to build, when Providence threw into our way a large House ready built, which with a few Alterations might well serve our purpose."

Franklin revealed his financial ingenuity and his involvement in philanthropic activities through the 1749 academy's decision to move into the "Whitefield Chapel." By 1749, with the evangelical fervor somewhat cooled down, the building was in disrepair, and some of its cause's former advocates were losing interest. At the death of the building's Moravian trustee, Franklin was elected to replace him, although he was "merely an honest Man, and of no Sect at all." Franklin's involvement in both the academy and the running of the New Building thus provided the connection between the proposed institution and the otherwise-unconnected building. It was relatively cheap and required only remodeling, not construction. Its existence guaranteed that the school would be an urban rather than rural institution, an experience that would shape both the ideas of the school and its activities in the years to follow. Religion and the religious revival movement were not the key to the foundation of the Academy of Philadelphia. Instead, it was grounded in new ideals of philanthropy, expanded ideas of public participation, and a thriving city.²²

Profound economic and cultural changes took place in Pennsylvania during the 1740s, and those influences were evident in the pedagogical ideas that surrounded the academy founding at the end of the decade. It is impossible to compare Franklin's 1743 plan to the one he publicly announced in 1749, since no evidence of the former survives. But certainly the intervening years had ramifications on the city of Philadelphia and concomitantly on Benjamin Franklin, his work, and his ideas.

Just as the 1740s were a time of transformation in Franklin's own life, the decade preceding the publication of *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth* was one of intense change for Britain's North American seaports and for Philadelphia in particular. The War of Jenkins's Ear and

22. *Autobiography*, 191-192; *Papers* III: 435-6; Cheyney, 26, quoting the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of December 4, 1740. Franklin's letter to Whitefield in England of July 6, 1749 shows that the plan was already afoot to make use of the New Building, but that nothing had yet taken place. The surviving documentary evidence therefore implies that Franklin was mindful of the availability of the building during the months he was writing his *Proposals*.

King George's War (1739-1748) altered the economy significantly. "In both Philadelphia and New York the Anglo-Spanish and Anglo-French Wars brought prosperity that spread downward through the urban ranks in a way that made their experiences different from Boston's....Instead of contributing money and lives to large-scale attacks against the centers of Spanish and French power, the seaports of the middle colonies concentrated on privateering and trade," Gary Nash writes.²³ In Philadelphia's case, its cultural distinctiveness, particularly the pacifist influence of the Quakers, kept the entire colony from active participation in the wars of the 1740s, freeing Philadelphia's inhabitants, as Nash suggests, to concentrate on economic opportunities. The rich farmlands west of the city of brotherly love produced much-needed foodstuffs for other British colonies and military expeditions. The naval war increased the need for ships and related materials to an extent that affected the entire economy of the city. These two economic factors likely combined to help draw new residents into Philadelphia. While the population of the city was estimated as 9,874 in 1739, by 1749 it had grown to 13,521 and would increase by over 500 residents in the next year. This increase led to an intense growth in the building trades, as Philadelphia scrambled to house its new arrivals. Thus, the prosperity of the 1740s touched people of all classes, from wealthy merchants involved in the grain trade to middling artisans involved in building to day laborers and poor mariners, now needed for the increased shipping. Philadelphians could look back on the 1740s as a decade of change and prosperity, but also a decade that created new problems and responsibilities along with opportunities.²⁴

For Franklin, Philadelphia's growth and prosperity created personal opportunities for an expanded economic world and a diversification of work and ideas. In 1748, Franklin retired from active control of his printing business, turning his attention to increased participation in civic affairs and to his growing interests in natural philosophy and scientific experimentation that subsequently placed him on the world stage as an active player in the intellectual debates of the Enlightenment. Philadelphia shaped Franklin's entrance into these realms; the growing number of ships entering the city's port brought printed matter that

23. Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1979), 176, 179.

24. Susan Klepp, "Demography in Early Philadelphia, 1690-1860," in Klepp, ed., *The Demographic History of the Philadelphia Region, 1600-1860, Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 133, 2, (Philadelphia, 1989), 104.

considered intellectual advancements in politics, education, and science. The immigrants to the city included men whose interests in Enlightenment ideas of humanity and science mirrored and shaped Franklin's. Furthermore, the needs of the growing city affected the way that Franklin perceived the natural and civic philosophy he was reading.

The stories that precede the academy's creation in the *Autobiography* portray how Franklin saw his social and mental worlds expand. For example, the invention of the Pennsylvania Fireplace, to which history subsequently affixed Franklin's name, showed both his sophisticated understanding of the nature of heat and smoke, but also his social understanding of what it meant to live in the cold of a pre-modern setting in a town that had to deal with the fuel crisis that resulted from its population growth. Franklin publicized his invention, but declined the patent that the governor offered him, stressing the community aspects of an invention: "*That as we enjoy great Advantages from the Inventions of others, we should be glad of an Opportunity to serve others by any invention of ours, and this we should do freely and generously*" [italics his].²⁵ The stove, like the electrical experiments that followed, was shaped by the thoughts and activities of the growing city of Philadelphia. Through both his scientific and philanthropic work, Franklin was expanding his actions in the community to use his keen understanding of the natural science of the Enlightenment to create a niche as the philosopher-mechanic leader in the colonial city.²⁶

When Franklin later recalled that the academy and militia proposals were connected in his desires for Philadelphia and its people, he was recalling how strongly he viewed the school as a means of protecting the cultural structure of the colony, just as the Association would protect its wealth. Franklin stridently portrayed the academy as a means of defense. His *Pennsylvania Gazette* letter explained why the academy was needed in Philadelphia:

Since those times [of wealth and leisure] are come, and numbers of our inhabitants are both able and willing to give their sons a good education, if it might be had at home, free from the extraordinary expence and hazard in sending them abroad for that purpose; and since a proportion of men of learning is useful in every country, and those who of late years come to settle among us, are chiefly foreigners, unac-

25. *Autobiography*, 192.

26. Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr., "Supplement: The Franklin Stove," in I. Bernard Cohen, ed., *Benjamin Franklin's Science* (Cambridge, 1990), 199-212; Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *As Various as Their Land: The Everyday Lives of Eighteenth-Century Americans* (New York, 1993), 67-68.

quainted with our languages, laws and customs; it is thought, a proposal for establishing an ACADEMY in this province, will not now be deem'd unseasonable.²⁷

Franklin's call for an education that could "be had at home, free from the extraordinary expence and hazard in sending them abroad" reveals his perceptions about the city and the opportunities therein. By calling for the creation of an academy within Philadelphia, Franklin was attempting to protect the city's youths. But Franklin's use of the phrase "hazard in sending them abroad" is more complex than an initial reading might indicate. Long-distance travel, either within the North American continent or to Europe, was made potentially dangerous both by normal dangers of shipwrecks, infectious disease, and the warships and pirates which posed a threat throughout the 1740s, but that alone does not explain the potential hazards. Rather, Franklin's reference has a much deeper meaning, and refers to a more diverse group of cultural dangers that affected young Philadelphians. The danger of certain classes being excluded from educational opportunities was one example. Surely, the cost of educating a child in England or in other colonial or European cities was prohibitively expensive for any but the richest families, and therefore sending sons away to school might be hazardous to the financial well-being of families. Franklin was calling for an educational institution open to all deserving young men. But those families who could afford to educate their youths in another setting could still expect other types of hazards.²⁸

By stating that the education of a young man abroad was a "hazard," Franklin was acknowledging a changing concept of the mother country and the cultural characteristics of Philadelphia's population. By the eighteenth century, many colonists were coming to question just how pure the home country was. Even as North Americans imitated the styles and ideas of England, they increasingly grew wary of the moral and social corruption that seemed to be pervading it. Franklin's own experience in London from 1724 to 1726 had left him with mixed impressions of the home country. His fellow journeymen's demands of

27. "On the Need for an Academy," Franklin, *Papers*, III: 386. Franklin had used almost the same phrasing a few years earlier in "A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge," the document in which he called for the creation of the American Philosophical Society; *Papers* II: 380.

28. On the risks involved in sending young men abroad to study, see Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 3, 1735 which relates the story of a group of young men from Surinam who were returning from studies in Holland aboard a ship upon which the crew mutinied. The students were put to sea in a long boat, along with the ship's chief mate.

customs like "St. Monday," their heavy drinking habits, and their extorting drink money from him, symbolized how Americans were viewing growing corruption in England.²⁹ Throughout British North America, the changing perception of Britain confirmed Franklin's youthful observations. Printed sources told colonists of the vices, the threats to liberty, and the corrupting luxury that dwelled in England. As the century wore on, travelers' letters home recounted these same attributes. Franklin's pedagogy, strongly influenced by John Locke's emphasis on keeping youths away from bad examples, proposed the family and community as safeguards. Sending a young man abroad for his education could be a threat to the quality of his still-impressionable character.³⁰

Franklin, with a canny understanding of the role of Philadelphia's religious distinctiveness and toleration and their importance to the city's successes, sensed that potential supporters of his academy might have concerns about sending their sons away to church-run schools or to institutions where residents did not share Philadelphia's mandated toleration. The toleration that had always been the rule in Philadelphia, as well as the public virtue that still reigned there, would make the city an excellent location for an academy, he wrote. Franklin knew that sending a young man abroad might be a risk to the cultural distinctiveness of Philadelphia's inhabitants. By calling for an academy within the city, Franklin displayed a view that Philadelphia could educate youths together without attacking their religious diversity. The risk of losing religious traditions, made most evident by rich Quakers' sons converting to the more socially-prestigious Anglicanism, was a potential hazard involved in education outside of the sect. The Philadelphia model would alleviate that hazard by basing its teachings in morality, but not in any particular theology. By doing so, Franklin proposed the first institution of higher learning that was neither created by a religious sect nor as the private philanthropy of one individual.³¹

29. *Autobiography*, 99-100.

30. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1967), 85-92. Franklin's point of view on the potential causes for concern in sending sons away to school was one echoed throughout the colonies during the eighteenth century. See Kenneth A. Lockridge, *The Diary, and Life, of William Byrd II of Virginia, 1674-1744* (Chapel Hill, 1987), 17-22; Carl Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin* (New York, 1942) 193-95; Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge, 1982) 12-13.

31. Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1783* (New York), 140-42; Sally Schwartz, "A Mixed Multitude:" *The Struggle*

At the same time Franklin expressed this optimistic view about the city, he also voiced concern with its transformation during the quarter-century he had lived there. By mid-century, Philadelphia had become an ethnically diverse city, with large numbers of German settlers. Franklin wrote in his *Gazette* letter that "those who of late years come to settle among us, are chiefly foreigners, unacquainted with our language, laws, and customs."³² Philadelphia was not just a growing, prosperous city; it was a city whose Anglo-American culture was under attack, he believed. As Franklin's own life and career progressed in Philadelphia's distinctive milieu, he became alarmed about what he saw as a threat to the English culture in the colony. In a 1753 letter to Peter Collinson, Franklin summed up his anti-German feelings:

Those who come hither are generally of the most ignorant Stupid Sort of their Own Nation, and as Ignorance is often attended with Credulity when Knavery would mislead it, and with Suspicion when Honesty would set it right; and as few of the English Understand the German Language, and so cannot address them either from the Press or Pulpit, 'tis almost impossible to remove any prejudices they once entertain. Their own Clergy have very little influence over the people; who seem to take an uncommon pleasure in abusing and discharging the Minister on every trivial occasion. Not being used to Liberty, they know not how to make a modest use of it....[the Germans] seem to think themselves not free, till they can feel their liberty in abusing and insulting their Teachers....Yet I am not for refusing entirely to admit them into our Colonies: all that seems to be necessary is, to distribute them more equally, mix them with the English, establish English Schools where they are now too thick settled, and take some care to prevent the practice lately fallen into by some of the Ship Owners, of sweeping the German Gaols to make up the number of their Passengers.³³

Franklin's observations on German immigration are illustrative of the cultural diversity of the era as well as revealing his belief that education was integral to social formation. While obviously xenophobic, Franklin was correct in his observation that Pennsylvania's German population had greatly increased in recent years. More than 9,500 Germans had

for Toleration in Colonial Philadelphia (New York, 1987) 150-51. See also Nancy F. Rosenberg, "The Sub-Textual Religion: Quakers, the Book, and Public Education in Philadelphia, 1682-1800;" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Michigan, 1991).

32. *Papers* III: 386.

33. Benjamin Franklin to Peter Collinson, Philadelphia, 9 May 1753, in *Papers* IV: 483-85.

arrived in Philadelphia in the fall that Franklin proposed his academy, and an average of 9,500 would arrive annually in the next five years.³⁴ Undoubtedly, these settlers brought a striking cultural diversity to Philadelphia that surpassed anything the historically diverse city had experienced. Using ethnocentricity as his weapon, Franklin proposed an academy that would not just help the sons of established citizens of Philadelphia, but would also acculturate divergent newcomers into Anglo-American cultural patterns. In Franklin's model, all that was needed to turn "the most ignorant Stupid Sort" of immigrant into useful citizens was a system of training them to accept the values and social customs of the English inhabitants of colony. The means of acculturation that Franklin called for were not unlike the pattern established in the Junto Questions twenty years before: new arrivals in the city were to be observed to see if they had proper moral characteristics and then trained to be more effective members of the community.³⁵

Just as Philadelphia affected Franklin's educational philosophy and actions, Franklin and his fellows intended the academy to affect Philadelphia. At their core, the academy plans were intended to improve the growing city, to direct it in decades ahead. The conclusion of the *Proposals* stated:

The Idea of what is *true Merit*, should also be often presented to Youth, explain'd and impress'd on their Minds, as consisting in an *Inclination* join'd with an *Ability* to serve Mankind, one's Country, Friends and Family; which *Ability* is (with the Blessing of God) to be acquir'd or greatly encreas'd by *true Learning*; and should indeed be the great *Aim* and *End* of all Learning.

Educated men would be "useful" to Philadelphia; a term that permeates Franklin's pedagogical writings. But what did he mean by useful? The *Proposals* appeared during the most productive years of Franklin's philanthropic work, a period in which he and other middling Philadelphi-

34. Marianne S. Wokeck, "German and Irish Immigration to Colonial Philadelphia," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 133 (1989): 132, 141. Franklin's fears surrounding too much German immigration during these years manifested themselves in many ways, and – when made public – led in part to his defeat in the legislative elections while serving as speaker of the Pennsylvania House in 1764.

35. Elizabeth Lewis Pardoe, "Poor Children and Enlightened Citizens: Lutheran Education in America, 1748-1800," *Pennsylvania History* 68, 2 (Spring 2001); John B. Frantz, "Franklin and the Pennsylvania Germans" *Pennsylvania History* 65, 1 (Winter 1998). I explore the Junto questions in more detail in chapter two of my dissertation, "The Surest Foundation of Happiness: Education and Society in Franklin's Philadelphia" (Ph.D.diss., Indiana University, 1998).

ans redefined their class and their role within the city. A more detailed analysis of their civic plans is necessary to fully understand how the *Proposals* were intended to affect Philadelphia in this era.

This period of Franklin's life was marked by the perception that the colony's established leaders were incapable of meeting the needs of its thriving population. As a result, he and other leaders of the middling sort redefined their own responsibility and ability within the community to meet the community's needs, as well as their own ambitions. Franklin tied the educational and military needs of Philadelphia in these years together when he wrote his *Autobiography* decades later. The *Proposals* followed on the heels of a militia project that redefined that class and the concept of philanthropy in Philadelphia.

In the winter months of 1747-48, Franklin organized the Association, a militia unique in that it was called for, organized, and created out of the ranks of the common folk of Philadelphia. Franklin and his fellows created the organization by working around the provincial government, still controlled by members of the Society of Friends and influenced by their pacifist ideals. The Association was remarkable in a number of ways. Foremost, it was a military organization that was extra-governmental. But it was also created through Franklin's use of the city's print culture, and it arose from a social rank of people who were traditionally excluded from such leadership, a striking departure from the way citizens created institutions that influenced their city.³⁶

The methods by which Franklin and others created the Association disclosed how Philadelphia's leading artisans viewed their changing place in society, and serves as a prologue to subsequent creation of the Academy. In what historian Sally Griffith has described as the "booster ethos," Franklin redefined how he and his fellows would influence their town. As Griffith states, the idea allowed American communities to advance themselves economically and to structure society in a mutually-beneficial way. "It fused economic and moral values in the belief that a town's prosperity depended upon its collective spiritual condition, particularly upon its citizens' unity and public-spiritedness," she writes. This idea drew men from diverse backgrounds and social ranks together, prompted them to volunteer time and funds, and connected their personal identities to the greater community.

36. Barbara A. Gannon, "The Lord is a Man of War, the God of Love and Peace: The Association Debate, 1747-48," *Pennsylvania History* 65, 1 (Winter 1998):46-61.

In creating the Association, Franklin used methods that would become the paradigm for nineteenth-century civic improvement: a public cry to immediate and necessary action, holding a public meeting to address the issue at hand and to draw together the people and raise funds. A key aspect of the booster plan was to use the media to draw attention to the cause and to sustain public interest. Yet the booster ethos would not be a publicity act for an individual or single group. Actions taken were to be clouded in the rhetoric of public spirit and the anonymous public sphere, and portrayed as a movement overwhelmingly supported by the populace.³⁷

The Association also made an important statement about social rank in colonial Philadelphia. Franklin began his famous rallying cry for the Association with the words "we, the middling People, the Tradesmen, Shopkeepers, and Farmers of this Province and City." Griffith states that in this passage Franklin showed that the Associators intended to act as a class in the protection of their city. As a class – no longer divided by specific craft or skill level – they strove to meet the needs of their community when those needs could not or would not be met by their government. The idea was radical in its era, and showed a decisive break in concepts of community and the mental world of the men forming the Association. Class is a term difficult to use in the eighteenth-century context, but the way that these middling Philadelphians joined together and identified themselves as a group with a common interest is important to a complete understanding of this period.³⁸

It was for the benefit of the middling people and the community as a whole that Franklin proposed his academy, and this was part of a wide-ranging spectrum of public works that he undertook in the period. His educational plans have often been seen as part of a larger misinterpretation of his work and ideas, wherein he is viewed as the proto-individualist, his memoirs as the model for Horatio Alger stories. But his life — particularly the years in which he created the Association and the Academy — belies that interpretation. The good of the community was central to Franklin's ideas and work throughout his life. As Michael Zuckerman writes, "Franklin did not doubt that he could do well while doing

37. Sally Griffith, "Order, Discipline, and a few Cannon": Benjamin Franklin, the Association, and the Rhetoric and Practice of Boosterism," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 116, 2 (April 1992):131-155. Quoted material is from page 132.

38. *Plain Truth*, Griffith, 144; Nash, *Urban Crucible*, xii. See also E. P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?" *Social History* 3 (1978); Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York, 1983), 61-69.

good.” Improve the community, he believed, and eventually it would help the individual. This idea was central to the plan for drawing together an unpaid militia to defend the city from attack. Franklin’s Academy proposals and the subsequent work as a writer, philanthropist, and politician that he dedicated to the institution were among his most strident statements of his theory of community improvement and interaction.³⁹

Putting the community above the individual is also evident in Franklin’s personal conduct in the two organizations under consideration: in the Association, he declined the election to officer rank, citing inexperience, and instead took his place as a common soldier. In the Academy, he accepted the presidency of the board, undoubtedly a title of some prestige, but this position was more focused on running the nuts-and-bolts aspects of forming the school, raising money and preparing buildings. While his reputation as an educational leader was obvious to the community in his role in the Library Company, and he would shortly become the most internationally famous natural philosopher in British North America, Franklin did not seek or receive the prestigious position of rector of the Academy or subsequently as provost of the college. Instead, he took his place as one citizen working on a project for community good.⁴⁰

This era of Franklin’s life was dominated by public projects designed to increase the public’s happiness. Within a ten-year period, he proposed the American Philosophical Society, organized the militia, and worked to establish the Pennsylvania Hospital, at the same time he maintained an active role in city and colony politics. An examination of Franklin’s *Papers* in the eighteen months preceding the academy proposals shows his mind was active in a vast array of intellectual endeavors: in addition to his philanthropic activities, Franklin’s scientific work was taking on new sophistication as he advanced ideas in his electrical experiments, and he remained a very active member of the Pennsylvania Assembly. His call for educating men who could be useful to the community obviously reflects that these people would imitate his own civic contributions. This attitude of public concern was paramount to his writings concerning the formation of the Academy of Philadelphia.

39. Michael Zuckerman, “Doing Good While Doing Well: Benevolence and Self-Interest in Franklin’s *Autobiography*,” in J.A. Leo Lemay, Editor, *Reappraising Benjamin Franklin: A Bicentennial Perspective* (Newark, Del., 1993), 443.

40. Griffith, 139- 41.

Cultural Contexts of Franklin's *Proposals*

Franklin's proposals for the school in Philadelphia held radically new ideas of pedagogy, but the founding of colleges and academies was almost as old as the American colonies, and Franklin had observed and critiqued these models for decades. His lack of formal education had stung him from his youth onward, and was repeatedly the theme of his personal and public writings. As early as 1722, Franklin had used his first literary persona to question the worth of a formal collegiate education and the quality of study that was carried on by the young men who attended college. In the fourth "Silence Dogood" essay that the young Franklin wrote for his brother James' *New England Courant*, he reveals his earliest published thoughts on education and how these developed in the nearly three decades that separated that essay's publication from the founding of the Academy of Philadelphia. Franklin, just sixteen years old at the time he wrote the Dogood essay, showed the anger that he felt at others being given the prestige of a collegiate education due to their wealth, when he himself was kept from it because of his family's financial straits.

Silence Dogood's critique of Harvard College was very much a part of this experience. From his earliest youth, Benjamin Franklin had expected a collegiate education and had worked diligently for it. But his family's financial woes, his father's status as a middling artisan in a craft that did not pay particularly well, kept him from the education for which he showed aptitude. The Dogood essay blasts those "dunces and blockheads" who were allowed the education that Franklin wanted and deserved. This is the first writing wherein Franklin equates higher education with class distinction, but it was by no means the last. Dogood's concentration on the idleness and ignorance of the rich young men who attended Harvard, the reference that college graduates learned "little more than how to carry themselves handsomely, and enter a Room genteely," and his notation that true learning could be had through native-produced newspapers like the *New England Courant* rather than the acquisition of ancient languages, all pointed to the impracticality of collegiate education and portended his academy plans of the 1740s.

Silence Dogood's perception that Harvard College was a training ground for the manners of the colonial elite was a fairly accurate assessment for that school and others like it in eighteenth-century America. "As in the English universities, the offspring of magistrates, professionals, and landed families predominated, with a sprinkling of youngsters from artisan and tradesmen backgrounds; few sons of husbandmen

came," Lawrence Cremin wrote of Harvard College in its first century.⁴¹ Rhys Isaac's analysis of the cultural world that surrounded the College of William and Mary is indicative of what was taught, both inside and outside of the classrooms, to prepare college students to assume positions high in the colonial social structure. "Degree courses were rarely undertaken," Isaac explains, "since the college's most important function was as a provincial center where young gentlemen from the various parts of Virginia could simultaneously acquire higher accomplishments, knowledge of governmental affairs, and acquaintance with one another."⁴² Virginia's colonial college differed in theological and other cultural aspects from schools in other colonies, but in this aspect it was representative of all other eighteenth century schools. In each of the colonial colleges, gentlemanly deportment was central to the curriculum: students were exposed to it both in the way they learned to "carry themselves handsomely, and enter a Room genteelly," that Dogood blasted, but also in a gentlemanly curriculum of Latin and Greek that, while not obviously practical, definitely positioned the young scholar as a member of the elite. Colonial colleges were founded by divergent groups with differing cultural backgrounds and theologies, but whether it was intended to educate Calvinist clergymen or Chesapeake planters, each of the schools which was established before 1750 was implicitly designed as a training ground for the elite of its culture.⁴³

For the most part, the divergent colleges in North America followed similar curricula, but that system was changing by the mid-eighteenth century. Studies at mid-seventeenth century Harvard, for example, were strongly based on the models of Oxford and Cambridge. The majority of the students' time was put to work on Greek, Hebrew, and rhetoric, with significantly less emphasis placed upon ethics, politics, history, and natural philosophy.⁴⁴ Curricular changes of the eighteenth century based on ideas of the Enlightenment brought science to the fore: requirements in physics and mathematics were added to Harvard's cur-

41. Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York, 1970), 217.

42. Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill, 1982), 130-31, 81.

43. Numerous studies have been written on the founding of colonial colleges. Most important for my purposes have been Jurgen Herbst, *From Crisis to Crisis: American College Government, 1663-1819* (Cambridge, 1982); Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York, 1983); Richard Hofstadter, *America at 1750: A Social Portrait* (New York, 1971).

44. Cremin, 213-15. Cremin bases his study of Harvard's curriculum on the 1643 pamphlet *New Englands First Fruits*.

riculum in the 1720s. The College of William and Mary added similar requirements in the same decade, and Yale's Thomas Clap added significant course work in natural philosophy and mathematics around the same time. Franklin was obviously familiar with traditional courses of study in other colonial colleges and the developments of recent decades when he designed the curriculum of the Academy and College of Philadelphia.

Yet as collegiate studies were changing in British North America, so too was the landscape of the American college scene by the mid-eighteenth century. The establishment of Philadelphia's academy was part of a larger cultural development of the era; colonists established five colleges from the mid-1740s through late 1760s. Two – the College of New Jersey and King's College in New York — warrant the most consideration in this study because they shared the closest geographic and chronological proximity to Franklin's institution, but were created for different reasons and developed in ways that differed significantly from Philadelphia's.⁴⁵

The College of New Jersey, like most of the other schools that began in this era, grew out of the religious pluralism developing in the colonies and the related new ideas about religion and education. Of all of the American colleges, it was the one most influenced by the ideas of the Great Awakening, its cry for respect for New Lights, and its call for a spiritually alive clergy. It was also a school born out of protest. Not only did New Jersey's college attempt to offer a viable alternative to the education at the traditionalist schools like Harvard and William and Mary, but it also was created in direct protest to Yale College, whose reformist foundations had been co-opted by its conservative clergy-faculty's search for hegemony. Thomas Clap, rector then president of Yale College, adamantly opposed the Whitefieldian awakening, and used his position to seriously constrict the religious and personal freedoms of Yale students. New Light ministers and lay leaders in the middle colonies—several of whom had graduated from the college at New Haven—were fearful that their needs would not be met by graduates from the college and were outraged that students there who shared their religious convictions were treated so harshly.

45. The colleges established in addition to the Academy and College of Philadelphia in this era were the College of New Jersey (later Princeton, 1746), King's College (later Columbia, 1754), the College of Rhode Island (later Brown, 1756), Queen's College (Rutgers, 1765). Beard and Beard, *Rise of American Civilization*, 168-69; Cremin, 327-30.

A simple statement, spoken in conversation between two Yale undergraduates, set matters in motion. David Brainerd, who had already been disciplined for attending a separatist meeting, was asked by another student what he thought of Chauncey Whittelsey, a tutor who had just concluded prayers. "I believe he has no more grace than the chair I am leaning upon," Brainerd replied. Overheard by a freshman outside the room, who reported the incident to a "towns-woman," the comment quickly reached Clap, who expelled Brainerd. Clergyman Aaron Burr traveled from Newark, New Jersey, to New Haven to plead for toleration for Brainerd, but with no success. Burr later gave the incident heavy significance in the founding of Princeton: "if it had not been for the treatment received by Mr. Brainerd at Yale College, New Jersey College never would have been erected."⁴⁶

Despite the College of New Jersey's ostensible foundation as a center for training New Light ministers, the institution did offer a broader curriculum of study than its origin suggests. Like Pennsylvania, New Jersey was founded as a Quaker colony but religious divergence quickly became the norm. The New Light Presbyterians, hoping to train generations of ministers for their religious community, also needed the moral and financial support of their fellow colonists, as well as a charter to be granted by a government in the hands of another religious denomination and approved by a monarch whose personal religious convictions were far from reformed Calvinism. The College of New Jersey therefore became the first to allow students of diverse religious backgrounds; at the same time the ostensible goal of training ministers was expanded into a collegiate curriculum to prepare young men for roles in several parts of society. The founders wrote: "Though our great intention was to create a seminary for educating ministers of the gospel, yet we hope it will be a means of raising up men that will be useful in other learned professions—ornaments of the state as well as the Church. Therefore, we propose to make the plan of education as extensive as our circumstances will admit."⁴⁷ Thus, the religious convictions of the New Lights were expanded, and their religious sect took a strong public role. Princeton's founders expected their institution to be both the means by which their group established cultural leadership (their college would be the only one between New Haven and Williamsburg) as well as the pur-

46. Quotations from Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *Princeton, 1746-1896* (Princeton, 1946), 16-18; Cremin, 326-27; Louis L. Tucker, *President Thomas Clap of Yale College* (Chapel Hill, 1962).

47. Wertenbaker, 19-20.

veyor of their beliefs. They modeled their school on Britain's dissenting academies, wherein students moved into the home of a minister, studying and taking their meals with him, and furthered the legitimacy of their plan by offering a curriculum that would include not just religious instruction but the classics, sciences, and philosophy. The founders, largely college-educated themselves, saw a grand utilitarian plan in their actions: "persons who would otherwise be useless members of society would be trained to sustain with honour the offices they may be invested with for the public service."⁴⁸

Colonists in New York began a movement at about the same time for the establishment of a school to suit their distinct culture and its institutional needs. Although King's College was not chartered until 1754, the movement that began in the mid-1746 had several parallels as well as some notable differences to the school plans established in Philadelphia and New Jersey. One of the aspects of New York's college founding that drew the most controversy in the 1740s was its location, and the host of cultural meanings that would be attached to the placement of the college. Several New Yorkers pushed for locating the school in New York City, but Cadwallader Colden led the charge for a rural institution. Colden, principal political advisor to Governor George Clinton, also had an impressive resume as a natural philosopher, working in botany and physical science as well as publishing a tract on New York Indians. Colden saw both the positive draw of the countryside and the negative forces pushing the college away from the city. He was also a friend and frequent correspondent of Franklin's, and offered advice on curriculum and college ideas while Franklin was preparing his plans for the academy in Philadelphia. In the country, Colden stated, students could be taught agriculture, a key to the growth of the province "since it is truly the foundation of the Wealth and welfare of the Country and it may be personally usefull to a greater number than any of the other Sciences."⁴⁹

48. Wertenbaker, 20. It is likely that Princeton's founders developed a collegiate school in order to countermand those Old Sides who had attacked William Tennent's Log College as incapable of training students, both because of its rustic setting and limited curriculum.

49. Cadwallader Colden to BF, *Papers*, III: 430. David C. Humphrey, *From King's College to Columbia, 1746-1800* (Columbia, 1976), 6-9. Humphrey is of the opinion that Colden's extensive correspondence with Franklin concerning the location and curriculum of the College of Philadelphia was also his plan for the establishment of the College of New York. See also George W. Boudreau, "King's College" in Billy G. Smith, ed., *The Facts on File Encyclopedia of American History Series*, vol. 2 (forthcoming).

But the controversy over location, while heated, paled next to the dissension that developed over curriculum and religious foundations of the College of New York. Dissenters in the colony balked at the idea of a "narrow establishment seminary." With a board of trustees that was two-thirds Anglican, the strident advocacy and support of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, and the leadership of Franklin's friend Samuel Johnson, who years before had determined that his own Presbyterian ordination was invalid and had joined the church and clergy of the Anglicans, the dissenters may have had a point.⁵⁰ The college that finally opened was very much a part of the partisan religious battle in New York. Franklin's *Academy Proposals* thus joined a contentious educational context in which both New Jersey and New York were planning colleges. In all three colonies, these establishments raised deep-seated animosities between factions and illuminated cultural and social differences within the societies.

Samuel Johnson's comment that "Nobody would imagine that the draught...was done by a Tradesman" was only partially correct, for it was here that Franklin changed the perception of what tradesmen could do and what their role would be in society. Franklin displayed a mastery of Enlightenment writings, a sophisticated imagination in creating institutions and making complex ideas fit into their social context. This process began with the Junto members holding discussions in their private meetings and then had moved into the public sphere through the organization of the Library Company. Now, Franklin and other middling men were assuming local and colony-wide leadership, bringing their own peculiar take on the Enlightenment's perceptions of human nature and abilities. The *Proposals* were vastly important, as they presented this "tradesman" ideal to a wide audience.

Franklin's *Proposals* is, to a certain extent, a study in contrasts. The most striking aspect of the printed pamphlet is its footnotes, some of which run on for pages. He begins the *Proposals* with a list of "Authors quoted in this Paper," and notes that the works of John Milton, Locke, Hutcheson, Obadiah Walker, Charles Rollin, and George Turnbull were the inspiration for the pedagogy to follow. Yet the text of the pamphlet is obviously very closely tied to the cultural, social, and intellectual backgrounds of the middling sort who had formed the Junto and would support the founding of the academy. Franklin's *Proposals* reflects the training that middling Philadelphians gave themselves in the Junto and

50. Cremin, 345, 404-406; *Papers*, III: 477n.

nurtured in the Library Company. Like pedagogical forms in effect for the sons of Chesapeake planters or Yankee merchants, the education Franklin's essay described was designed to adapt those being educated to their specific expectations and responsibilities.⁵¹

Acknowledging the practical tone of the text of Franklin's essay, one is left asking why Benjamin Franklin would choose to include such a variety of citations and sources in it. In David Tyack's estimation, Franklin's extensive footnotes were a joke played on his readers. While he espoused his own practical, artisan class-oriented views, he cited numerous authors to appear to be an overeducated pedagogue for humor's sake.⁵² By laughing at the over-citation of authorities, Tyack says, readers might become willing to trust a new type of education. But that interpretation does not recognize Franklin's serious tone within the *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*, or the context in which it was written. He could, and did, use humor frequently. He was quite willing to use turn his sarcasm against those he disapproved of, and "educated" snobs were a particularly attractive target. In the midst of formulating his pedagogy and laying the foundations for the academy, he crafted an essay that described exactly what he wanted the school's students *not* to become:

Your Business is to *shine*; therefore you must by all means prevent the shining of others, for their Brightness may make yours the less distinguish'd. To this End,

1. If possible engross the whole Discourse; and when other Matter fails, talk much of your-self, your Education, your Knowledge, your Circumstances, your Successes in Business, your Victories in Disputes, your own wise Sayings and Observations on Particular Occasions, &c. &c. &c.

2. If when you are out of Breath, one of the Company should seize the Opportunity of saying something; watch his Words and, if possible, find something either in his Sentiment or Expression, immediately to contradict and raise a Dispute upon. Rather than fail, criticize even his Grammar.

3. If another should be saying an indisputably good Thing, either give no attention to it; or, if you can guess what he would be at, be quick and say it before him; or, if he gets it

51. As Franklin himself later acknowledged, he incorrectly attributed *Dialogues concerning Education* to Francis Hutcheson instead of David Fordyce. The error does show that Franklin had the latter on his mind while planning the academy, even if not correctly citing him. *Papers*, III: 397-98n.

52. David Tyack, "Education as Artifact: Benjamin Franklin and Instruction of 'A Rising People,'" *History of Education Quarterly* 5 (1966).

said, and you perceive the Company pleas'd with it, own it to be a good Thing, and withal remark that it had been said by *Bacon, Locke, Bayle*, or some other eminent Writer; thus you deprive him of the Reputation he might have gain'd by it, and gain some yourself as you hereby show your great Reading and Memory.

4. When modest Men have been thus treated by you a few times, they will chuse ever after to be silent in your Company; then you may shine on without Fear of Rival; rallying them at the same time for their Dullness, which will be to you a new Fund of Wit.

Thus you will be sure to please *yourself*. The polite Man aims at pleasing *others*, but you shall go beyond him even in that. A Man can be present only in one Company, but may at the same time be absent in twenty. He can please only where he *is*, wherever you are *not*.⁵³

In this sarcastic passage, Franklin used the pedant as a model to be avoided. The essay, in its substance and tone, discloses everything that the educated man should not be, everything that Franklin's *Proposals* would train young educated men to avoid. The *Proposals* stressed that students would join together to learn, that the school, like the Junto, would bring students together in an environment that was intellectually strenuous but nurturing. Franklin's satirical writing, published about a year after the *Proposals* was released, also shows his struggle to be accepted as an educator while he was not an educated man. Franklin's academy plan was a radical departure from the educational experiences of the "best men," and eventually its differences would lead to conflicts among the different classes who were needed to support the project.

Rather than being mere sarcasm then, Franklin's use of extensive sources from the forefront of pedagogy available in the mid-eighteenth-century was intended to do just what they appeared to do: show that the projected academy would be closely connected with Enlightenment educational ideas. Instead of citing these authors to show his own level of academic achievement for pedantic reasons, like his model for becoming a disagreeable companion, Franklin was doing so in order to gain widespread support for his plan in the city. To succeed, Franklin's plan needed both the benefactions of the wealthy Philadelphians who held the city's financial and political power as well as the widespread support of middling families who would be expected to send their sons to the

53. Benjamin Franklin, "Rules for Making Oneself a Disagreeable Companion," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 15, 1750; *Writings*, 346-47.

Academy. Franklin's use of these multiple sources was not a hoax, but was another example of presenting a positive image to the community, showing that an artisan could formulate an educational ideal that could benefit both groups. Locke's pedagogical methods inspired Franklin the most. Franklin had been reading Locke since his youth, and the philosopher's writings influenced his self-education as well as his thoughts in forming the Junto and Library Company. The academy *Proposals* was Franklin's most strident statement of his belief in Locke's ideals. While he cited John Milton and Obadiah Walker, neither carried much influence in the document due to the central part religion played in their educational treatises and the heavy importance they placed on a classical education. In addition, Franklin used the works of George Turnbull and David Fordyce (whom Franklin misidentified as Frances Hutcheson in the pamphlet), two staunch followers of Locke. Franklin's use of Lockean pedagogy showed that he based his academy on the pre-eminent educational ideas in the Anglo-American world just as, earlier, he and his fellow artisans had used the books they read in the Library Company of Philadelphia to position themselves for a more active role in their society's development.⁵⁴

Franklin's extensive footnotes achieved their goal. By presenting an argument for an academy in the city that made use of the thoughts of the foremost educational theorists of the era, Franklin and other academy supporters convinced their audience that the institution would not be the amateur attempts by the middling sort. Yet, in a sense, it was just that. Because Franklin and the other advocates of the academy were not educated in such an institution, their perceptions of what theirs should be like was free from the restraints of earlier models, and was instead founded on ideas of application and practicality. The academy Franklin proposed was the fruition of ideas on human development and potential that he had been refining since the 1720s, a plan that bridged the educational divides that had kept him out of Harvard, that kept the middling rank in Philadelphia out of the leadership of their colony. It was the boldest social statement Franklin had ever written, and it created one of the most bitter disappointments of his life. When finally

54. Pangle and Pangle, 75-76, 80-86. The Pangles' study traces the intellectual roots of Franklin's educational writings to Locke and his followers, but spends little attention on Franklin's own experience of the social realities of eighteenth-century Anglo-America. For the Library Company and its impact, see my essay "'Highly Valuable and Extensively Useful': Community and Readership among the Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia Middling Sort," *Pennsylvania History* (Summer 1996).

realized, Franklin's educational plans became the victim of their own success. His methods, combined with his organizational ability, drew the support of middling Philadelphians as well as the colony's leadership and wealthy Pennsylvanians. Within a few years of the school's founding, the colony's elite overcame their earlier hesitation and began to send their sons there to be educated. That, plus the increasingly contentious political landscape of Pennsylvania in the 1750s and 1760s, led to a split between Franklin and many of the leaders of the academy. On May 11, 1756 the trustees elected Franklin's nemesis Richard Peters their president while Franklin was absent. "The Trustees," Franklin wrote "had reap'd the full Advantage of my head, Hands, Heart, and Purse, in getting through the first Difficulties of the Design, then when they thought they could do without me, they laid me aside." The bitterness of his disappointment would be with him for the rest of his life.⁵⁵

The anger that Franklin felt at those who usurped control of the school reveals the importance he placed on education. The *Proposals* that he published in 1749 were the culmination of pedagogical work that spanned the preceding decades of his life. The academy he envisioned was firmly grounded in the community in which he had matured and in his own experiences as an artisan finding his place within his town and colony. Franklin proposed a school that would educate the middling sort, an institution grounded on the principles that steered the Junto and Library Company, but went further, creating an institution that might surpass anything he had accomplished before. Despite his friend Samuel Johnson's comments to the contrary, the proposals were very definitely written by a tradesman, but a tradesman who was steeped in the ideas of the Enlightenment and its perception of the human mind.

55. *Autobiography*, 196n, quoting a letter from Franklin to Ebenezer Kinnersley, July 28, 1759.