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BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: A MASONIC ENLIGHTENER IN PARIS

IN an interesting letter to his mother in April of 1738, Benjamin Franklin stated that the Freemasons "have no principles or practices that are inconsistent with religion and good manners."¹ After his induction into St. John's Lodge of Philadelphia between 1730 and 1731, Franklin held several positions in Pennsylvania Masonry; he served as secretary of his lodge between 1735 and 1738, was elected as Grand Master of Pennsylvania in 1734, and fifteen years later was appointed for a short period as the colony's Provincial Grand Master.² Although not easily documented, the motives ascribed to the interest of Franklin in Pennsylvania Masonry can be suggested. This organization assuredly enabled him to meet craftsmen, businessmen, and political leaders in Philadelphia and in other colonial towns. Affiliation with the order seemed to enhance his status as a printer, and he was the first in the colonies to issue copies of the *Constitutions* of the order in 1734.³ Moreover, he endorsed the philanthropic aims of Masonry, displayed interest in its ancient legends and architectural symbols, and subscribed to its deistic doctrines and universal moral teachings. Franklin evidently perceived Masonry, like the Junto or Leather-Apron Club, as being an important educational and humanitarian institution in colonial urban centers.⁴

However, while serving as an American minister to the court of France, Franklin spent his most active years in Masonry and became intimately involved with the Parisian Lodge of the Nine Sisters.⁵ The role and behavior of Franklin in this lodge and learned society have not been extensively investigated and thus are the focus of this article.⁶ It will be shown that the participation of Franklin in the Lodge of the Nine

Sisters was quite intensive and that his leadership of this learned society enhanced the relationship of Masonry to the Enlightenment in Paris. What also will be argued is that Franklin, in many ways, interacted with both major and minor French enlighteners associated with Masonry.

Parisian Masonry, by the time of the American Revolution, had achieved needed stability and became identified with various aspects of the Enlightenment. Until the creation in 1773 of the Grand Orient as the administrative body of the Craft in France, Parisian Masonry was characterized by factionalism and by internal dissension. Under the capable supervision of the Duke of Chartres, the Grand Orient, by 1776, had succeeded in unifying rival Masonic bodies in Paris, had received the tacit support of the crown, and had resisted the few attacks of anti-Masonic groups. Consequently, the leadership of this operable and centralized institution was responsible for inducing aristocratic and bourgeois members to affiliate with local lodges in Paris.⁷ Because of being an important cultural institution, Masonry in Paris continued to increase its ranks. The rites, legends, symbols, and teachings of the order offered vivid explanations of salient doctrines of the Enlightenment; Masonic rituals embodied Newtonian concepts regarding mechanism and materialism. Its rites, also, contained explications of the tenets of classicism, deism, religious toleration, and humanitarianism.⁸ In addition to serving as ritualistic centers, Masonic lodges in Paris operated according to constitutional and republican tenets and sponsored banquets and occasional lectures. As lodges in the French capital continued to enlist the support of numerous enlighteners, the astronomer Jerome Lalande, who was Orator of the Grand Orient, proposed in March of 1776 the establishment of the Lodge of the Nine Sisters and thus began his efforts to fulfill the idea of his deceased friend Helvétius.⁹

Lalande, who became a close friend of Franklin, played the central role in establishing this learned society and in determining its functions. What this astronomer seemed to envision was a Masonic lodge explicitly designed to service the cause of the Enlightenment in Paris through the promotion of the liberal arts and sciences. Lalande, moreover, believed that a Parisian Masonic learned society would provide prominent and obscure Masonic savants with the opportunity to interact with each other, to deliver lectures about various topics, to display paintings and sculpture, to perform scientific experiments, and to sponsor special projects pertinent to Masonry and the Enlightenment. He expected to recruit Masons from academies in Paris and in the provinces and from learned societies in Europe and in America. Despite some opposition

from several officers of the Grand Orient, who well might have been apprehensive about attacks from anti-Masonic groups, Lalande succeeded in having this grand lodge body approve his proposal concerning the creation of the first learned society in Masonry. Such action was taken on the day following the issuance of the American Declaration of Independence. At that time, Lalande responded to his opponents and described the aims and activities of this new society in terms of the language of Masonry:¹⁰

My proposal concerning the creation of the Nine Sisters met with opposition. I favored erecting a temple but found it necessary to imitate the example of Zorobabel. I held the trowel in one hand, and the sword in the other. . . .¹¹

The Lodge of the Nine Sisters in making virtue its base has dedicated itself to fostering the arts and sciences. The aim of the lodge is to restore them to their place of dignity. . . .¹²

The emblem of the Nine Sisters, as well, contained Masonic symbols regarding the objectives of the society. Inscribed within a pyramid were the square, compasses, and the motto "Truth, Union, and Force."¹³ This slogan was to demonstrate the validity of the ancient, Masonic, and Enlightenment belief that virtuous men could cooperate to advance the arts and sciences. According to its constitution, this learned society was to stage assemblies and banquets explicitly devoted to cultural activities, was to award monies from a special fund to members making outstanding contributions to the humanities and sciences, and was to sponsor ancillary cultural institutions.¹⁴ The society, too, was to consist of European and American Masons who were elected either to active or to associate membership and was to be governed by Orators, by a Secretary, and by a Master.¹⁵

There were varying reasons suggesting why Franklin wished to identify with and to participate in the Lodge of the Nine Sisters. Affiliation with this learned society enabled him to make new friends, to entertain, and to be entertained. Franklin leased the Hotel de Valentinois from Jacques Chaumont between March 1777 and July 1785; he developed a social network at Passy, giving dinners and staging special Masonic assemblies and banquets at his beautiful estate.¹⁶ As a result of his feelings for and his friendship with Madame Helvétius, Franklin became a frequent visitor to Auteuil and an active member of the group of savants meeting at her estate:

I was asked whether I wished to see any persons in particular; to

which I replied that I wished to see the *philosophes*. There are two who live here at hand in this garden . . . Who are they? Socrates and Helvétius. I esteem them both highly; but let me see Helvétius first, because I understand a little French, but not a word of Greek . . . I see that statesmen, philosophers, historians, poets, and men of learning are drawn to you, and seem as willing to attach themselves to you as straws about a fine piece of amber. . .¹⁷

I have often remarked in reading the works of Helvétius, that, although we were born and educated in two nations so remote from each other, we have often been inspired with the same thoughts; and it is a reflection very flattering to me, that we have not only loved the same studies, but, as far as we have mutually known them, the same friends, and the same woman. . .¹⁸

Consequently, his participation with Lalande and with other Masonic enlighteners in the Salon of Madame Helvétius can be ascribed as a major motive for affiliation with the Lodge of the Nine Sisters:

At Auteuil, an intimate academic atmosphere was created to enable the blossoming of the arts and sciences. Cabanis and Lalande were moving spirits of the salon. Volney gave historical lectures; and Garat, Franklin, and Tracy engaged in stimulating philosophical debates. These and other guests of the salon discussed, listened, and truly philosophized. . .¹⁹

Finally, through his involvement with this Masonic learned society, Franklin was placed in the position of being able to promote the cause of the American Revolution and to foster the study of Enlightenment ideologies.

Franklin assumed an active role in the activities of the Nine Sisters during the mastership of Lalande. The American sage was involved with a major development of the lodge: namely, the induction of Voltaire into its ranks on April 7, 1778.²⁰ The event was evidently planned to reveal the intimate connections of the lodge to the world of the Enlightenment and to demonstrate its viability as a Masonic learned society.²¹ Because of the age and the poor health of the philosopher of Ferney, his initiation ceremonies had to be abbreviated. Leaning on the arm of his guide, Benjamin Franklin, the blindfolded Voltaire was escorted into the lodge chamber and was asked several questions about his moral conduct. Without being required to receive the three mandatory degrees of Blue Lodge Masonry, he was informed of the signs, secrets, and symbols of the Craft and then was proclaimed a member of the order and the Nine Sisters.²²

During this meeting, Franklin and other members of the lodge paid tribute to Voltaire. The minor painter Monnet presented the eminent French enlightener with a portrait. After the lodge orchestra played several pieces, Court de Gébeline delivered a short lecture about ancient and modern Masonic ceremonies; Gébeline maintained that like Voltaire, the ancient and modern ceremonies of the Craft emphasized the importance of the Supreme Creator, natural laws, religious toleration, and natural liberties.²³ Franklin then congratulated Voltaire and embraced him, demonstrating the meeting of the modern Solon and Sophocles and displaying the strength of Masonry and the Enlightenment in America and in France.²⁴ Lalande concluded the special session with a major speech. He perceived the accomplishments of Voltaire, the concepts of the Enlightenment, and the teachings of Masonry as being intimately related to each other. His incisive speech well explained the importance of the occasion and assessed from a Masonic perspective the achievements of Voltaire:

My dear brother, we have marked a great moment in our lodge and have admitted to our ranks an Apollonian and a friend of humanity. We are delighted with your zeal about being admitted to the Nine Sisters and know that you will continue to promote the arts and sciences . . . In entering Masonry, know that your efforts should be directed to ending fanaticism and superstition. You have raised a temple to the Eternal and were a Mason in spirit prior to receiving your degrees. You have used the square in your actions and worn the apron during your fruitful career.²⁵

The death of Voltaire, which occurred approximately seven weeks after his induction into the Nine Sisters, was meaningful to lodge members and especially to Franklin. Similar to other Parisian learned societies, the lodge on November 28, 1778 held a special meeting to honor this deceased brother. Ninety-five members of the Nine Sisters and one hundred fifty Masonic visitors were present during the lodge of mourning directed by Lalande.²⁶ After this special session, Lalande, who evidently had wanted Voltaire and his supporters to provide direction to the lodge, began to look to Franklin for leadership.²⁷ This thinking is corroborated, since the lodge in July of 1778 held a banquet to honor Franklin and presented the American enlightener with a plaque containing the silhouettes of Helvétius and Voltaire.²⁸ With the departure of Lalande as Master, the lodge on May 21, 1779 elected Franklin as his successor, thus entrusting this American diplomat and sage with the power of directing its cultural operations.²⁹

The mastership of Franklin proved to be extremely active. Despite his

professional diplomatic responsibilities, Franklin took time to recruit Masonic intellectuals to the lodge, encouraged the lodge to give support to auxiliary Masonic bodies, and increased the Enlightenment activities of the lodge through banquets and assemblies. A major assembly was held on August 16, 1779 and revolved around literature and the fine arts. Greuze and Houdon arranged an impressive display for this session. Greuze showed his recent paintings on French villages and his portraits of eminent Frenchmen, and Houdon exhibited his busts of Franklin, La Dixmerie, and other lodge members.³⁰ La Dixmerie, who was elected as a lodge Orator, gave his *Éloge de Montaigne*, and Roucher read stanzas from his poem "Novembre." In this poem, he explained to members of the lodge the importance of state reforms and encouraged them to work for their implementation.³¹ After the reading of this poem, Abbé Robin delivered a lecture concerning the relationship between ancient literature and Masonic rites. In presenting to the lodge important ideas from his *Recherches sur les initiations anciennes et modernes*, published in 1779, Robin claimed that important myths and legends of Egyptian, Greek, and Roman literature constituted the foundations of Modern Speculative Freemasonry.³²

This assembly was devoted as well to sessions regarding history and linguistics. As a result of his association with the circle of Madame Helvétius, Franklin was given the opportunity to interact with the linguistical theorist Court de Gébelin and with the historian Constantin-François Volney.³³ In his presentation to the lodge, Volney maintained that Egyptian priests and Greek and Roman philosophers developed myths to explicate the operations of Nature and the concepts of civic morality. He also believed that the decline of cultural and moral values led to the demise and to the eventual collapse of the political and economic institutions of ancient civilizations.³⁴ The lecture of Court de Gébelin treated concepts advanced in his pioneering works concerning ancient language, myths, and mystery cults. In light of his *Histoire Naturelle De La Parole*, published in 1776, Gébelin explained salient functions of language. He maintained that humans were endowed by the Creator with the ability to speak and thus differed from animals. To Gébelin, humans utilized language to reveal their thoughts and to achieve their material and moral objectives:

God gave man those organs necessary to speak. Speech is the painting of our ideas and constitutes the essence of glory of man. . . . Words convey ideas and thoughts about the beauties in Nature and in the heavens. . . .³⁵

Ideas about the Eleusinian Mystery Cult from G belin's *Monde Primitif* were also examined during this meeting. G belin recognized that this ancient cult and modern Masonry possessed similarities; both societies performed valuable cultural functions, conveying in their rites important moral doctrines and cultural values of ancient civilizations. Both societies as well functioned as cohesive communities and admitted into their ranks enlighteners.³⁶

The sacred rites of the Eleusinian Mystery Cult were administered with great pomp and embodied cultural ideals cherished in ancient empires. The Eleusinian Mysteries served as a rallying point for the ancients and emphasized the beliefs of virtue, justice, and human liberty. . . .³⁷

G belin explained activities pertaining to the conferring of the Eleusinian rites in Greece. Prior to his entry into this ancient cult, the initiate pledged that he would aspire to purify his soul and to lead a virtuous life. As an indication of his desire to cleanse his soul, the candidate submerged himself in a river near the plains of Attica; he then received a wreath of flowers, a symbol of the purity of Nature. The candidate proceeded to the Temple of the Gods, went to its altar, and drank a glass of wine. Hierophant, the head priest administering the Eleusinian mysteries, told him that wine symbolized the fertility of the Earth. Hierophant then offered prayers to the Supreme Being, the Sun, and the Earth and explained to the candidate the secrets of the cult. This priest escorted the new member of the order to the banquet hall and ended the lengthy ceremonies with a feast.

The Eleusinian Mysteries revealed the fecundity of Nature and agriculture and symbolized the prosperity of ancient civilizations. . . . Candidates were required to acknowledge the Attributes of the Supreme Creator and the powers of the Earth and other heavenly bodies. Candidates recognized the importance of the forces of Nature and of the harmony of bodies moving in the heavens. . . .³⁸

Franklin assuredly endorsed the views of G belin regarding ancient civilizations, for both savants became proponents of the great order.³⁹ Both members of the lodge believed that the ancients established similar secular institutions, developed similar languages, and endorsed similar cultural and moral teachings. Both Franklin and G belin agreed that like modern enlighteners, those in the ancient world advanced theories to explain how the universe, Nature, and man were interrelated to each

other. To both Masonic enlighteners, the ancients and the moderns were deists and realized that an Omnipotent Spirit governs the operations of the great order.⁴⁰

During the May 1, 1780 session presided over by Franklin, there were demonstrations about scientific topics. Concepts of materialism shaped the development of chemistry in Paris at this time and offered explanations about the contents, properties, and weights of varying forms of matter.⁴¹ The Englishman John Forster, who spent considerable time in Paris during the 1780's, and Claude Berthollet gave presentations to the lodge about their materialistic studies. Berthollet performed valuable experiments concerning bleaching and dyeing. He demonstrated that if placed in a tub of muriatic acid, cloth containing vegetable colors would be bleached.

When vegetable colors are immersed in oxygenated muriatic acid, they are completely destroyed. A mixture of different colors, in a similar exposure, suffers from the same change. . . . We may conclude that the coloring vegetable matters, which have been acted upon and deprived of their properties of producing color, have taken away the oxygen from the acid by a strong chemical attraction, and have, by means of this combination, acquired new properties, whilst they have lost that of producing color. . . .⁴²

Berthollet and Forster believed that experiments would lead to an understanding of some chemical compounds and would demonstrate their usefulness. Forster developed methods for assaying metals. He performed experiments with iron ores and showed that when exposed to fire, iron could be used for industrial purposes. The experiments of Forster further demonstrated that substances could be classified into four groups: earths, salts, metals, and gases.⁴³

However, major cultural operations of this assembly and of others during the mastership of Franklin illustrated how the Nine Sisters would function as a center for Masonic supporters of the American Revolution. Because of his leadership position, Franklin was able to use the lodge to acquire financial aid for America, to develop friendships needed for the fulfillment of his diplomatic mission, and to generate propaganda about the seditious American states.⁴⁴ Those activities in support of America flagrantly violated Masonic regulations, but were never questioned by Grand Orient authorities. In one of his few letters to Franklin, Jerome Lalande, who well might have silenced objections from the leadership of the Grand Orient, displayed his interest in the American cause:

I pay you homage; you and your compatriots, who are very dedicated to the cause of liberty, should be commended. *Tableau des provinces unies* reveals much about the cause of the thirteen colonies. However, it has been bitterly assailed in England . . . I have profited from reading this work. . . .⁴⁵

As a result of the reticence of Grand Orient officials, the cultural activities encouraged by Franklin permitted the lodge and Parisian Masonry to become identified with this American political and cultural movement. During the August Assembly, Hilliard d'Auberteuil read the preface of his *Essais historiques et politiques sur les Anglo-Américains*, one of the first works about America to appear in France.⁴⁶ In the preface of this detailed work composed from newspaper accounts, d'Auberteuil perceived Americans as advocates of natural liberties and virtue.⁴⁷ He further is impressed with the operations of American state assemblies and with American efforts to detach themselves from the British monarchy:⁴⁸

State assemblies are elected and are designed to operate for the welfare of their citizens. . . . Most state legislatures are empowered to collect taxes and to levy monies for state projects. . . .

Americans are fighting against the tyranny of the English king and nation. This nation has enslaved her American colonies economically and politically. If these virtuous colonies are to end this enslavement by George III and his minister Pitt, French assistance is needed . . . Since 1763, the English have dominated the economic and political institutions of the American colonies and Canada and have posed a threat to the French colonies of Guadeloupe and Martinique. . . .⁴⁹

D'Auberteuil admired the constitutions of Pennsylvania, New York, and Virginia. The constitutions of these three states embodied the republican principles of the separation of powers, of legislative representation, and of freedom of speech, press and religion.⁵⁰ D'Auberteuil was present as well during the lodge feast of May 1780. He gave a lecture about the contributions of Franklin and Washington to the American Revolution and maintained that these two Masons had activated the principles of the Enlightenment and those of the Craft. After this speech, John Paul Jones was honored by members of the Nine Sisters and received tribute from La Dixmerie for "his meritorious service and heroic deeds."⁵¹

While Franklin administered the lodge, a group of Americanophile writers emerged in it. One of the major writers in this circle was Brissot

de Warville. In *Nouveau Voyage*, Brissot maintained that America was the paradise of the Enlightenment and that the political institutions of the thirteen states protected natural liberties and functioned in light of precisely defined constitutional principles. To Brissot, America consisted of reasonable and virtuous citizens and served as a mecca of republicanism and science. He further perceived Philadelphia as the nucleus of the American Enlightenment.⁵²

Philadelphia may be considered as the major metropolis of the United States. It is certainly the finest town and the best built in America; it is the most wealthy, although not the most luxurious. You find here men of great political and scientific knowledge. . . .⁵³

There were other American propagandists in the lodge. Jean Dêmeunier was known for his French translations of American writings and for his *Essai sur les États-Unis*. Dêmeunier in this work emphasized the achievements of state legislatures in America, maintaining that these bodies consisted of elected representatives, enacted laws to guarantee the economic, political, and religious rights of their citizens, and asserted their position against the English crown.⁵⁴ The dramatist Sébastien Chamfort revealed in *La Jeune Indienne* his interest in America. In this play, Chamfort presented portrayals of Indians, merchants, and Quakers; he perceived these three groups as being advocates of the concepts of American liberalism.⁵⁵ After the *Académie française* stages a performance of this play, Chamfort told Franklin that "America was the place in the universe where the rights of man are best understood."⁵⁶

During Franklin's years of leadership, members of the lodge financed and edited *Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique*. Edited by Robinet, Rochefoucauld, and Gêbelin, this journal was published between 1776 and 1779 and was intended to furnish news about the War of Independence and to support the cause of the American revolutionaries. Franklin contributed to this journal; he provided its editors with summaries of political events in England and in America and with information about significant battles of the American Revolution.⁵⁷ The volumes of *Affaires* also contained an occasional editorial and many translations of important American political documents. By publishing the Declaration of Independence and the constitutions of several American states, the Masonic editors of this journal succeeded in revealing to their French subscribers American perceptions of natural liberties and of republican institutions. Since Franklin in February of 1778 secured diplomatic recognition and financial assistance from France, the publication of this journal was terminated during the following year.⁵⁸

Franklin and members of the lodge sponsored projects to promote public education in Paris. As advocates of the Masonic and Enlightenment principle of the separation of church and state in the realm of education, they called upon the crown to terminate the control of Catholic clergymen over French schools.⁵⁹ What Franklin and his Masonic colleagues favored were inexpensive state schools that placed emphasis on the humanities and sciences. In recognizing the need for public educational institutions, Franklin recommended that the lodge should allocate funds for the creation and the maintenance of a school. After the members of the lodge approved this proposal, Franklin on November 17, 1780 announced the opening of the Apollonian Society. This school was open to the public and offered inexpensive courses. Many members of the Nine Sisters were involved with the Apollonian Society; G  belin frequently lectured about linguistics and ancient philosophy. The teaching of ancient music by Rozier and that of European literature by La Dixmerie suggested that the Apollonian Society emphasized the importance of courses in the liberal arts. Prior to closing its doors in 1781, the society also published a journal which probably contained significant lectures given by members of the Nine Sisters who taught in the school.⁶⁰

The lodge during the early 1780's sponsored two *mus  es*. A *mus  e* under the direction of G  belin was opened in late 1781 and, similar to the Apollonian Society, offered an envisaging program in the humanities; students attending the *mus  e* took ancient philosophy from G  belin, literature from Saint-Firmin, and French drama from Cailhava. This *mus  e* held several special events. It sponsored lectures, displayed many busts by Houdon, and honored Benjamin Franklin for negotiating the 1783 Treaty of Paris.⁶¹ The lodge in 1782 opened a second *mus  e*, but in 1784, after the death of G  belin, decided for financial reasons to merge the operations of both schools. With the endorsement of Franklin and the lodge officers, Pil  tre de Rozier was appointed to supervise the operations of the newly created *Mus  e de Paris*. This school, which closely resembled Franklin's Academy, was designed to promote the arts, sciences, and commerce and offered a wide selection of courses. Students took physics from Su   and chemistry from Fourcroy.⁶² Students enrolled in scientific courses were granted permission to utilize the facilities of the Paris Academy of Sciences. The *Mus  e de Paris* also offered courses in mathematics, in anatomy and physiology, in geography, in ancient and modern literature, and in textile manufacturing. After the death of Rozier in 1785, this school was closed.⁶³

The pioneering science of ballooning, which was greatly supported by

the Lodge of the Nine Sisters, occupied the attention of Rozier and the Montgolfier Brothers and aroused the curiosity of Franklin. Joseph and Jacques Montgolfier belonged to the Nine Sisters and the Paris Academy of Sciences, were members of the scientific circle of Rozier, and demonstrated that heated gases could propel their aerostatic balloon. The Montgolfiers in 1782 conducted experiments concerning the density of heated air and concluded that an object filled with hot air could rise from the surface of the Earth. On June 5, 1783, they gave a public demonstration of their machine. When inflated with hot air and released, their aerostatic machine, made of paper and approximately thirty-eight feet in diameter, ascended to a height of about six thousand feet and descended gradually as the air in it cooled.⁶⁴ Franklin made comments about this flight:

An aerostatic machine, thirty-eight feet in diameter, was prepared by Mr. Montgolfier, at the expense of the Academy. I am told that it was constructed of linen and paper and was filled with a different air. . . .⁶⁵

As a result of the excitement aroused by this ascension, Louis XVI insisted that the Montgolfiers present a demonstration of their invention to the royal family. Franklin received from the Montgolfiers a short note and was asked "to be in attendance for the presentation of the new aerostatic machine."⁶⁶ With animals as its passengers, the aerostatic balloon on September 19, 1783 was released at Versailles, ascended to a height of fifteen hundred feet, and then fell to the ground without injuring its passengers.⁶⁷ Approximately one month prior to Franklin's departure to Philadelphia, Rozier, who had made two successful ascensions in the balloon of the Montgolfiers, attempted to cross the English Channel in a globe and, despite admonitions about this "uncertain experiment," was instantly killed.⁶⁸

The lodge was still meaningful to Franklin after his mastership, but seemed to experience numerous changes. Under the direction of the lawyer Elie de Beaumont, the lodge held a special assembly in June of 1785 to honor Franklin prior to his return to the United States. Louis Alexandre, the Duke of Rochefoucauld d'Anville presented to the lodge his translations of American republican writings; the duke distributed to lodge members copies of the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and six state constitutions. Rochefoucauld maintained that these documents well explained concepts concerning natural liberties and the separation of powers and were considered as major contributions to the political thought of the Enlightenment.⁶⁹ Before this

assembly ended, Beaumont announced that the lodge would offer a prize of six hundred livres for the best paper on the topic of "Benjamin Franklin vivant."⁷⁰ From the time of Franklin's arrival in Philadelphia in September of 1785 until the eruption of the French Revolution in 1789, the lodge significantly declined. It lacked leadership and membership, engaged in few cultural activities, and in 1790 became the powerless *Société Nationale des Neuf Soeurs*.⁷¹

Yet, the Lodge of the Nine Sisters contributed to the stay of Franklin in Paris. He seemed to behave as an "intellectual clubman" and especially liked the milieu of the Nine Sisters.⁷² The lectures, demonstrations, and displays of the lodge enabled Franklin to participate in both Masonic and Enlightenment activities. He, too, enjoyed its banquets, being given the opportunity to dine in a relaxed atmosphere and to interact with Masonic enlighteners from Paris and from other European cities. Although predominantly consisting of minor aristocratic and middle class savants, the lodge, in many ways, filled the cultural needs of Franklin. As a result of his involvement in Masonry's first learned society, the elder American sage learned about new materialistic tenets in chemistry and witnessed the launchings of balloons. Moreover, he was exposed to neoclassical features of sculpture and painting and became familiar with the activities and deistic doctrines of an ancient cult. However, the most significant achievement of the lodge was its immense support of the American Revolution.

Franklin, conversely, contributed to this Parisian learned society. He gave the lodge essential direction. Because of his leadership, the lodge held more banquets and assemblies and sponsored ancillary cultural institutions and schools. As a result of his role in the lodge, he implanted into Parisian Masonic soil the seeds of American Enlightenment ideologies. He became a symbol of the success of experimental science, of public education, and of republicanism. With the death of Franklin on April 17, 1790, some members of the Nine Sisters, who were, for the most part, moderate republicans during the French Revolution, paid tribute to him.⁷³ Their eulogies well explained how Franklin contributed to the lodge, to the "international party of humanity," and to the Transatlantic Enlightenment.⁷⁴

NOTES

1. Julius F. Sachse, *Benjamin Franklin as a Freemason* (Philadelphia, 1906), p. 123; and Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1964), pp. 135-136.
2. Sachse, *Franklin as a Freemason*, pp. 50-52.

3. Van Doren, *Franklin*, p. 103.
4. Ronald W. Clark, *Benjamin Franklin: A Biography* (New York, 1983), pp. 51–53; and H. T. C. De LaFontaine, "Benjamin Franklin," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, XLI (1929), 3–27.
5. This Parisian lodge is named for the ancient muses in Greek mythology, is known in French as *Les Neuf Soeurs*, and is referred to in this article as the Nine Sisters.
6. In "UNESCO of the Eighteenth Century: *La Loge des Neuf Soeurs* and its Venerable Master, Benjamin Franklin," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, XCVII (October, 1953), 513–524, Nicholas Hans mentions major events of this lodge, but unfortunately keeps Franklin well in the background of his article. Moreover, he mentions next to nothing in his article about Enlightenment patterns and fails to demonstrate varying relationships of Franklin with Parisian Masons connected to the Enlightenment.
7. Pierre Chevallier, *Histoire de la Franc-Maçonnerie Française: La Maçonnerie: École de L'Égalité, 1725–1799* (Paris, 1974), pp. 172–177; and Gaston Martin, *La Franc-Maçonnerie Française et La Préparation de la Revolution* (Paris, 1926), pp. 17–28.
8. Albert Mackey, *Symbolism of Freemasonry* (Chicago, 1975), pp. 92–108 and pp. 223–224; Oliver Street, *Symbolism of the Three Degrees* (Washington, 1922), pp. 106–108; and D. Ligou, "Structures et Symbolisme Maçonniques," *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française*; CXCVII (July, 1969), 520–523.
9. A short but important account of the role of Helvétius in Masonry is presented by Louis Amiable, *Une Loge Maçonnique D'Avant 1789* (Paris, 1897), p. 10. Amiable has written the most extensive account of the Lodge of the Nine Sisters; he consulted primary sources which would be burned by the Gestapo. Thus, primary materials about this lodge in the American Philosophical Society are of critical importance for an understanding of its operations.
10. Amiable, *Loge Maçonnique*, pp. 14–15.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 33–34.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 35. According to materials housed in the American Philosophical Society, the lodge during most of its history had an annual average roster of one hundred members.
16. On Franklin at Passy, see Luther S. Livingston, *Franklin and his Press at Passy* (New York, 1967), pp. 3–6; Claude-Anne Lopez, *Mon Cher Papa: Franklin and the Ladies of Paris* (New Haven, 1966), pp. 123–149; Bruce Granger, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Man of Letters* (Norman, 1976), pp. 156–158; and Meredith Martindale, "Benjamin Franklin's residence in France: The Hotel de Valentinois in Passy," *Antiques*, LXII (July, 1977), 262–273.
17. Albert H. Smyth (ed.), *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1907), VII, 204–206.
18. Smyth (ed.), *Writings*, VII, 434–435.
19. Amiable, *Loge Maçonnique*, p. 16.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 49–57. Although not a member of the Craft, Voltaire in flagrant violation of Masonic regulations was allowed on March 21, 1778 to attend as a visitor the meeting of the Nine Sisters. After this meeting, the philosopher of Ferney informed Lalande that he would consent to be initiated into the Nine Sisters during its next meeting.
21. Paul Hazard, *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (Cleveland, 1963), p. 271.

22. Amiable, *Loge Maçonnique*, pp. 65–66.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
24. Van Doren, *Franklin*, p. 606.
25. Amiable, *Loge Maçonnique*, pp. 68–69.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 82–89.
27. Alfred Owen Aldridge, *Franklin and his French Contemporaries* (New York, 1957), pp. 252–253.
28. Amiable, *Loge Maçonnique*, p. 132.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 137–144.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 148–149.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 146–147.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
33. Martin Staum, *Cabanis: Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy in the French Revolution* (Princeton, 1980), pp. 17–18.
34. Jean Gaulmier, *Volney* (Paris, 1959), pp. 21–23; and C. F. Volney, *The Ruins*, trans. Peter Eckler (New York, 1913), pp. 110–118 and pp. 184–202.
35. Court de Gébelin, *Histoire Naturelle De La Parole* (Paris, 1776), p. 2 and pp. 15–18.
36. Court de Gébelin, *Monde Primitif* (Paris, 1773), I, 307–308.
37. Gébelin, *Monde Primitif*, I, 306.
38. *Ibid.*, I, 319–324.
39. A splendid study of Franklin's perceptions of a great order has been written by Paul W. Conner, *Poor Richard's Politics: Benjamin Franklin and his New American Order* (New York, 1965).
40. Frank Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (New York, 1967), pp. 250–254; and Count Albon, *Éloge de Court de Gébelin* (Paris, 1785), pp. 4–9. On the deistic views of Franklin, see Alfred Owen Aldridge, *Franklin and Nature's God* (Durham, 1967), pp. 5–6.
41. Arnold Thackray, *Atoms and Powers* (Cambridge Ma., 1970), pp. 92–95; and Robert E. Schofield, *Mechanism and Materialism: British Natural Philosophy in An Age of Reason* (Princeton, 1970), pp. 226–231.
42. Claude Berthollet, *Essay on the New Method of Bleaching* (Edinburgh, 1790), pp. 21–23.
43. John Forster, *An Easy Method of Assaying and Classing Mineral Substances* (London, 1772), pp. 2–6.
44. About the question regarding the use of the lodge as a center of propaganda, see Durand Echeverria, *Mirage in the West: A History of the French Image of American Society to 1815* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 58–59. Incisive generalizations about Franklin's diplomatic designs in France are found in Gerald Stourzh, *Benjamin Franklin and American Foreign Policy* (Chicago, 1969), pp. 164–166. For the details of Franklin's diplomacy in France, consult Jonathan R. Dull, *Franklin the Diplomat: the French Mission* (Philadelphia, 1982).
45. American Philosophical Society, CLXXX, II. I wish to extend my gratitude to the following individuals for their assistance: Roy Goodman of the American Philosophical Society, Theresa Snyder of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Professor Claude-Anne Lopez of Yale University, and Mary Barr of the Butler County Community College

Library. Franklin letters in the Eddy Collection of Princeton University were also consulted for this study.

46. Echeverria, *Mirage*, p. 73.
47. The same emphasis on liberty and virtue appears in an unpublished letter between Franklin and d'Auberteuil. The letter is found in the collection of the APS, XXII, 25.
48. Bernard Fay, *The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America*, trans. Ramon Guthrie (New York, 1966), p. 159.
49. Hilliard d'Auberteuil, *Essais historiques et politiques sur les Anglo-Américains* (Brussels, 1781), xiii-xiv and pp. 2-5.
50. d'Auberteuil, *Essais historiques*, pp. 150-155.
51. Amiable, *Loge Maçonnique*, pp. 150-151.
52. Echeverria, *Mirage*, pp. 114-115.
53. J. F. Brissot, *Nouveau Voyage* (Paris, 1788), pp. 312-313.
54. Amiable, *Loge Maçonnique*, pp. 310-311; and Echeverria, *Mirage*, p. 123.
55. Amiable, *Loge Maçonnique*, p. 311.
56. Echeverria, *Mirage*, pp. 19-20.
57. See Gilbert Chinard, "Adventures in a Library," *Newberry Library Bulletin*, VIII (1952), pp. 223-238.
58. Fay, *Revolutionary Spirit*, pp. 89-91; and Echeverria, *Mirage*, pp. 55-56.
59. John Lough, *An Introduction to Eighteenth Century France* (London, 1960), pp. 180-181.
60. Amiable, *Loge Maçonnique*, p. 152 and pp. 189-190. Amiable explained that the journal of the Apollonian Society has never been found.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 191-193.
62. W. A. Smeaton, *Fourcroy: Chemist and Revolutionary* (Cambridge Eng., 1962), pp. 15-16. For a discussion of the Pennsylvania Academy and its courses, see Van Doren, *Franklin*, pp. 190-194.
63. Pilâtre de Rozier, *Premier Musée* (Paris, 1782), pp. 1-4.
64. Charles Gillispie, *The Montgolfier Brothers and the Invention of Aviation, 1783-1784* (Princeton, 1983), p. 12 and pp. 44-45.
65. Edward E. Hale, *Franklin in France* (1887; rpt. New York, 1969), II, 443.
66. APS, XLI, 76.
67. Amiable, *Loge Maçonnique*, p. 92.
68. Amiable, *Loge Maçonnique*, pp. 92-93; and Hale, *Franklin in France*, II, 444.
69. Amiable, *Loge Maçonnique*, p. 172; and Echeverria, *Mirage*, p. 171.
70. Amiable, *Loge Maçonnique*, pp. 172-173 and p. 175.
71. *Ibid.*, pp. 159-176 and pp. 182-184.
72. Alfred Owen Aldridge, *Benjamin Franklin: Philosopher and Man* (Philadelphia, 1965), pp. 39-46.
73. Aldridge, *French Contemporaries*, pp. 212-219; and Echeverria, *Mirage*, p. 171.
74. APS, III, 10.