MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM BINGHAM
OF PHILADELPHIA

Rulers of the Republican Court

For a quarter of a century after the close of the Revolution the words “Mr. and Mrs. William Bingham of Philadelphia” signified beauty, social prestige, and such luxurious living as only the greatest wealth could supply. At the time of their marriage on October 26, 1780, Mr. Bingham was a widely-travelled and successful merchant of twenty-eight, while Mrs. Bingham, only sixteen, was already known as the beautiful Ann Willing, eldest child of Thomas Willing, the great merchant and banker of the Revolution and of the early Federal period. A few days after the wedding another Philadelphia girl wrote to her mother,

Speaking of handsome women brings Nancy Willing to my mind. She might set for the Queen of Beauty, and is lately married to Bingham, who returned from the West Indies with an immense fortune. They have set out in highest style; nobody here will be able to make the figure they do; equipage, house, clothes, are all the newest taste,—and yet some people wonder at the match. She but sixteen and such a perfect form. His appearance is less amiable.

But John Jay, who had met Bingham in Martinique and liked him, considered the match as nearly perfect as one could be.

Although William Bingham is generally said to have been the product of “humble stock,” the term in his case is somewhat misleading. His immigrant ancestor John had been a goldsmith of London. His great-grandfather James removed from New Jersey to Philadelphia, where he was a blacksmith by trade, a vestryman of Christ Church, and a large property owner at his death. A second James, who was a saddler, also increased the family property, all of which eventually fell into the hands of his only surviving son William. This William married in 1745 Mary, daughter of John Stamper one time mayor of Philadelphia. They had five children, the youngest

1 *Pennsylvania Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, November 1, 1780.
of their three sons born March 3, 1752, being named William. Substantial, prosperous, middle-class seem to be truer adjectives than humble as applied to the forebears of the husband of Ann Willing Bingham. Young William Bingham was not quite seventeen when his father died early in 1769, yet he had already graduated from the College of Philadelphia. His father and uncle Joseph Stamper had been partners in the profitable West Indian rum trade and the former had left his wife and children a comfortable estate.

The Willings were a family long established in the mercantile world. Charles Willing had come to America in the early part of the eighteenth century to take charge of the Philadelphia end of his father’s business, had married Anne, daughter of Joseph Shippen, and was at the height of a successful commercial and political career in the colony when he died suddenly in 1754. His eldest son Thomas continued in his footsteps. Before the outbreak of the Revolution he was one of the leaders of the movement against British oppression, but his opposition to the Declaration of Independence caused him to be supplanted by others who favored the move, chief among them being his partner Robert Morris. Willing, Morris & Company was an important factor in the financing of the Revolution, but Willing and his family remained in the background while the war was on. Thomas Willing had married Ann McCall in 1763, and they had five sons and five daughters who lived to maturity. Surrounded by her aunts, Mrs. Tench Francis, Jr., Mrs. Samuel Powel and Mrs. Robert Hare of Philadelphia, Mrs. William Byrd of Westover, and Mrs. Tench Coxe, her mother’s sister, in addition to numerous other McCall and Shippen relatives and connections, Mrs. Bingham came from the most exalted ranks of Pennsylvania society. But it has been said that even with her beauty, charm, and social position Mrs. Bingham might not have been the spectacular figure she was had it not been for the wealth of her husband which provided so perfect a setting

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9 Pennsylvania Gazette, February 23, 1769.
10 Ibid., May 10, 1764 and May 18, 1769.
11 Philadelphia Wills O, 332. The will of William Bingham, Sr. was made January 6, 1769, and probated March 4, 1769.
14 Balch, op. cit., lxxx-lxx.
Yet her beauty and charm were so exceptional that they have to a certain extent overshadowed the commercial and financial genius of Mr. Bingham.

Shortly after the Binghams were married, the Marquis de Chastellux visited America. William Bingham, as the former Agent of Congress in Martinique, was one of the people whom the Chevalier de la Luzerne advised him to see. He was particularly impressed with Mrs. Bingham's youth and beauty. Later at a ball given by the Chevalier, Chastellux learned that it was customary to compliment distinguished strangers by assigning to them as their partners for the evening the handsomest women in the company. "That of the Comte de Damas was Mistress Bingham, & that of the Vicomte de Noailles Miss Shippen. Both, like true philosophers, showed a great respect for the customs of the country, & did not leave their pretty partners throughout the evening."

The years 1781 and 1782 in Philadelphia were socially quite gay, due partly to the feeling that the war was over, and partly to the presence of a large number of French visitors in the city. The Binghams undoubtedly participated in many of the festivities, but they had their full share of troubles. Mrs. Bingham's mother died early in 1781, shortly after the birth of her thirteenth child. John Benezet, the husband of Bingham's sister Hannah, was lost at sea sometime during the same winter when the ship on which he had set out for Europe was lost and never again heard from. And John Stamper, Bingham's grandfather, died in the summer of 1782. On January 6, 1782, their first child was born and was named Ann Louisa.

Late in May, 1783, the Binghams set out for England on a combined business and pleasure trip, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Rob-
ert Hare, and arrived at Gravesend early in July.\textsuperscript{23} The Bingham's established themselves in Bloomsbury Square, and while there their second child, Maria Matilda, was born on December 9.\textsuperscript{24} Early in 1784 the Bingham's moved to Harley Street, near Cavendish Square.\textsuperscript{25} It is probable that during the spring or summer following Gilbert Stuart undertook the painting of a family group. The story is that he began work on one large canvas with Bingham's horse at the right, Mrs. Bingham holding the baby on the horse's back, but looking down over her right shoulder at Ann Louisa who was tugging at her mother's skirt, while Mr. Bingham in riding clothes looked on with an expression of some amusement. When the picture was partly finished some disagreement about the pose caused Stuart in a fit of temper to refuse to finish it. The unfinished canvas came back to America with the Bingham's, and years later was divided into three pictures under the direction of Thomas Sully: one showing Mrs. Bingham and the baby, another the head of Mr. Bingham, and the third a full length of Ann Louisa.\textsuperscript{26}

During their stay in England the Bingham's were widely entertained by their friends, relatives, business connections, and by others whom they met while there. Among the latter was Lord Shelburne, later the Marquis of Lansdowne. Just how they became acquainted it is impossible to say, but whenever Shelburne noticed what he considered an able piece of work by a young man he made a point of meeting him. In 1783 the Earl of Sheffield, a political opponent of Shelburne, wrote a pamphlet entitled \textit{Observations on the commerce of the American states with Europe and the West Indies}, with which Bingham had disagreed and which he answered in a pamphlet of his own entitled \textit{A letter from an American now resident in London, to a member of Parliament, on the subject of the restraining proclamation; and containing strictures on Lord Sheffield's pamphlet on the commerce of the American states} (London 1784). Bingham's views were similar to those of Shelburne, and it is possible that the Englishman sought him out after reading his pamphlet. The friendship of

\textsuperscript{23} Balch, \textit{op. cit.}, 96-98, Thomas Willing to William Bingham June 22, 1783; Gratz Collection, Provincial Delegates, H. S. P., I. 5, Willing to Bingham, September 12, 1783, H. S. P.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}, V. 17, Willing to Bingham, November 29, 1783; Robert Blackwel's Private Parish Register.

\textsuperscript{25} Simon Gratz Collection (H. S. P.), Jonathan Williams to William Bingham, February 1, 1784.

\textsuperscript{26} Lawrence Park, \textit{Gilbert Stuart}, I. 151-55.
Shelburne and the group of which he was a member could not have failed to make England an attractive place to the Binghams.

Late in the summer of 1784 they went to Paris. Shortly after Mrs. John Adams and her daughter Abigail arrived from America to join Mr. Adams. In their entertaining letters and journals these ladies tell more about the life the Binghams led while abroad than can be found anywhere else. After Mrs. Bingham's first call Mrs. Adams formed an opinion of her which never changed materially. She was, wrote Mrs. Adams to her friend Mrs. Warren, "a very young lady, not more than twenty, very agreeable, and very handsome; rather too much given to the foibles of the country for the mother of two children, which she already is."27

Abigail made frequent mention of them in her journal. When her parents gave a dinner on September 25 they included the Binghams, and Abigail noted28

Mr. Bingham is possessed of a large fortune. . . . Mrs. Bingham . . . is pretty, a good figure, but rather still. She has not been long enough in this country to have gained that ease of air and manner which is peculiar to the women here; and when it does not exceed the bounds of delicacy, is very pleasing. Mrs. Bingham has been in Europe two years. I admire her that she is not in the smallest degree tinctured with indelicacy. She has, from the little acquaintance I have had with her, genuine principles; she is very sprightly and very pleasing.

Next week she saw the Bingham's again at a dinner at Jefferson's and remarked:29

Mrs. Bingham has a most pleasing address, and a very happy turn of expression, with a good deal of politeness—she will not fail to please. Mr. Bingham is an agreeable man—he is delicately attentive, and his behaviour to Madame is pleasing.

A few days later:30

Mr. Bingham came flourishing out in the morning to accompany papa to Versailles, to be presented to his most Christian majesty, the King of France, with his four horses and three servants, in all the pomp of an American merchant. About twelve they returned, as there was no court.

The following week, the Adams family attended a dinner at the Binghams,31

29 Ibid., I. 20.
30 Ibid., I. 27-28, October 19, 1784.
31 Ibid., I. 28-29, October 26, 1784.
MRS. WILLIAM BINGHAM AND HER YOUNGER DAUGHTER, MARIA MATILDA

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Painted by Gilbert Stuart, 1784
at their hotel, which is the Hotel Muscovy. There was much company: Mrs. Bingham gains my love and admiration, more and more every time I see her; she is possessed of more ease and politeness in her behaviour, than any person I have seen. She joins in every conversation in company; and when engaged herself in conversing with you, she will, by joining directly in another chitchat with another party, convince you that she was all attention to everyone. She has a taste for show, but not above her circumstances. Mr. Bingham is an agreeable man, but seems to feel the superiority of fortune more than Mrs. Bingham.

A few weeks later, there was among the guests at the Adams' a certain Mr. Jackson, who made a very great impression on the eighteen-year-old Abigail. "My papa calls him the Sir Charles Grandison of this age; I was never acquainted with him until I came to France; I consider it an acquisition." And a few days later she referred to him as "my favourite." This same Mr. Jackson, Bingham, and a third gentleman were introduced at court late in November. According to Abigail, "Mr. Bingham's ambition promoted it; what it will promote him to I know not; if to what he wishes, it is easily determined." The rumor was, according to Mrs. Adams, that Bingham wished to be appointed American Minister to one of the European courts.

That he was interested in diplomatic work is plain from the fact that he had endeavored to secure for himself, before departing for Europe, the post of minister for foreign affairs, but failed to obtain it, chiefly because political considerations required an incumbent from some state other than Pennsylvania. He was justified in thinking that there might be a diplomatic future for him. He was young, wealthy, with powerful connections, and he had acquitted himself creditably in his official capacity as Congressional Agent in Martinique from 1776 until 1780. But, if he were seeking such an appointment, the logical place for him to be was Philadelphia, where he could manoeuvre for it among the politicians who had it in their power to give it to him.

Abigail Adams soon showed some disapproval of Mrs. Bingham

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83 Ibid., I, 33.
84 Ibid., I, 34-35.
85 Letters to Mrs. Adams, 207-208.
86 Edmund C. Burnett (ed.), Letters of the Members of the Continental Congress, V. 555, Thomas Burke to William Bingham, January 30, 1781; Dreer Collection: Members of the Old Congress, H. S. P., 66; Burke to Bingham, no date, probably February, 1781.
87 Papers of the Continental Congress (Library of Congress) No. 90, I. 218-21, Marquis de Bouillé to the President of Congress, March 23, 1780; Burnett, op. cit., V. 173, Samuel Huntington to the Marquis de Bouillé, May 27, 1780.
also. At another dinner given by the Adams', Abigail “sat next to Mr. Jackson at table, and next to him was seated Madame Bingham who by an exuberance of sprightliness and wit, slips from the path of being perfectly agreeable; a little judgment would amend whatever defects may appear.” It is entirely possible that Mrs. Bingham was merely being as “agreeable” as usual, and that the girl who had shortly before expressed such warm admiration for this particular Mr. Jackson resented the competition she had that evening. The Bingham had known Jackson in America. He had come to Europe the year before on business in which both Robert Morris and Bingham were interested, and consequently had often seen the Bingham in London. Abigail’s irritation did not last long, however, for in January Mrs. Adams and Abigail called on the Binghams at their new home in the Palais Royal, and on returning home the girl wrote in her journal,

I . . . must confess that she has excellencies that over balance every want of judgment, or that love for gay life, which is very conspicuous in her, but which I do not wonder at, at all. It is united with so many agreeable and amiable qualities, that it is impossible not to admire her. They are really domestic, and the principles of affection and domestic happiness are so very apparent, that I never see them that I do not gain a higher opinion of that state.

Abigail was not charmed out of all reason. They were all invited to Jefferson’s to dinner on February 7, 1785, and to watch the Carnival. While there, Mrs. Bingham confided to Abigail how delighted she was with Paris, and how she preferred staying there to returning to America, a state of mind incomprehensible to her friend. A few weeks later she told Abigail such tales of the life led by a group of their French friends who turned night into day and spent their time and fortunes gambling, that the girl from New England was puzzled to understand how anyone with real intelligence could tolerate such an existence, much less like it. As the winter progressed, Abigail became more and more annoyed with Mr. Bingham. At a dinner at the Lafayette’s she was seated next to him and he was “insupportably disagreeable. I cannot but dislike his manners in general; to his wife they are better than any man I have ever known.”

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^{1} Journal and Correspondence of A. A. Smith, I. 36, December 2, 1784.
^{2} Gratz Collection, Robert Morris to William Bingham, November 5, 1783, H. S. P.
^{3} Journal and Correspondence of A. A. Smith, I. 44.
^{4} Ibid., I. 47.
^{5} Ibid., I. 56-58.
^{6} Ibid., I. 49-50, February 21, 1785.
fortunate that Abigail was not more specific about his bad manners.

Early in March Mrs. Bingham drove out to Auteuil to have tea with Mrs. Adams and Abigail, and told them that she and Mr. Bingham were planning to leave Paris about the first of May to travel in Switzerland and Italy. They went first to London for a few weeks, however. After bidding them farewell, Abigail noted in her diary, I could not but regret her leaving Paris, although I have seen but little of her, yet I never see her without feeling a degree of regard for her. She is most sweetly amiable, possessed of a great share of sensibility: had she married a man of sense and judgment, who would have endeavoured to turn her attention to something more important than dress and show, and recommended them only as ornaments to adorn good sense, and an improved mind, she would have shown with distinguished lustre, in every point of view; for even now, she is possessed of many qualifications to make her beloved and respected. I have not formed such an opinion of Mr. Bingham. I am mistaken if he does not lack some essential qualifications to make him either respected or admired.

To the information Abigail has given us about the Binghams, Mrs. Adams in a letter to her niece has added a few facts:

He is said to be rich and have an income of four thousand a year. They have two little girls now with them, and have been travelling in England, Holland and France. 'tis said he wishes for an appointment here as foreign Minister; he lives at a much greater expense than any American Minister can afford to do. Mrs. Bingham is a fine figure and a beautiful person; her manners are easy and affable, but she was too young to come abroad without a pilot, gives too much into the follies of this country, has money enough and knows how to lavish it with an unsparing hand. Less money and more years may make her wiser, but she is so handsome she must be pardoned.

The Adams family followed the Binghams to England, and after she had had the opportunity to observe the famous court beauties there, Mrs. Adams wrote to her sister, notwithstanding the English boast so much of their beauties, I do not think they have really so much of it as you will find amongst the same proportion of people in America. I have not seen a lady in England who can bear a comparison with Mrs. Bingham, Mrs. Platt, and a Miss Hamilton, who is a Philadelphia young lady. Mrs. Bingham ... taken altogether, is the finest woman I ever saw. The intelligence of her countenance, or rather, I ought to say animation, the elegance of her form, and the affability of her manners, convert you into admiration; and one has only to lament too much dissipation and frivolity of amusement, which have weaned her from her native country, and given her a passion and thirst after all the luxuries of Europe.

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43 Ibid., I. 52, March 5, 1785. 44 Ibid., I. 70-71, April 8, 1785.
45 Letters of Mrs. Adams, 207-208, December 3, 1784.
46 Ibid., 271, September 30, 1785.
The early part of the summer found the Bingham family at Spa, Brussels, and The Hague. Their trip to Switzerland and Italy was made in the autumn and early winter of 1785-86, in the company of the Marquis de Bouillé, who had been General of Martinique during part of Bingham's residence there. When the news reached America that the Bingham family was planning to remain abroad until sometime in 1786, Thomas Willing wrote to his son-in-law that the accounts he had from their newly returned friends of you and your family are highly pleasing to me who am so deeply interested in your happiness & welfare. It was very natural for Nancy to wish to gratify her curiosity fully, by staying another year. She had crossed the Ocean already, & had an indulgent friend in you, ready & able to gratify her.

The Bingham family returned to London and set out for America in March, 1786. William Hamilton of Woodlands was in England at the time, and sent the news of their departure to a friend at home.

Mr. Bingham and his family are to be passengers with Willet. He takes two carriages and 8 servants, &c, and imagine means to make a great Show. What a terrible thing would it be if the Lady was to get into the Dey's Seraglio. They must have nearly chartered the ship if they brought with them such an entourage. A record of the baggage, if any had been kept, would have made interesting reading. The Paris finery which Mrs. Bingham wore on her return to Philadelphia must have filled an astonishing number of trunks. The description of one outfit which she produced during the following winter indicates the number and the bulk of her costumes.

She blaz'd upon a large party at Mr. [Robert] Morris's in a dress which eclips'd any that has yet been seen. A Robe a la Turke of black Velvet, Rich White sattin Petticoat, body and sleeves, the whole trim'd with Ermine. A large Bouquet of natural flowers supported by a knot of Diamonds, Large Buckles, Necklace and Earrings of Diamonds, Her Head ornamented with Diamond Sprigs interspers'd with artificial flowers, above all, wav'd a towering plume of snow white feathers.

Soon after their return, Mrs. Bingham received a frequently

48 Robert Gilmor, Jr., Memoir or Sketch of the History of Robert Gilmor of Baltimore (privately printed), note facing p. 17.
49 Emmett Collection (New York Public Library), 918, Thomas Willing to William Bingham, August 29, 1785.
50 Wharton, op. cit., 142.
51 "Letters of Molly and Hetty Tilghman," Maryland Historical Magazine (1926), XXI. 145-46, Molly Tilghman to Polly Pearce, February 18, 1787.
WILLIAM BINGHAM

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Painted by Gilbert Stuart, 1784
quoted letter from Thomas Jefferson who was still in Paris, to which she replied at length. They had disagreed about the charm of Paris life. He was convinced that after a year at home she would agree that the quiet domestic life of women in America was far superior to the useless rounds of pleasure of Parisian women of similar position. He drew a vivid picture of what appeared to him the senseless pleasures of the French women known to them both, and asked her to tell him "truly and honestly" what she now thought. Mrs. Bingham's reply, dated June 1, 1787, has so seldom been reproduced as to leave the impression that she was just as empty headed as the extreme character he had pictured, chiefly because in his reply to her letter he mildly rebuked her for still preferring Paris, as he painted it rather than as she saw it, and sent her some fashions and gossip. As so few of Mrs. Bingham's letters have been preserved, probably because most of them were of a purely social nature, parts of this one to Jefferson are worth quoting to show the manner in which she was able to express her mind in a positive but courteous fashion to the diplomat who was twice her age:

"I am too much flattered by the honor of your letter from Paris not to acknowledge it by the earliest opportunity and to assure you that I am very sensible of your attentions. The candor with which you express your sentiments merits a sincere declaration of mine. I agree with you that many of the fashionable pursuits of the Parisian ladies are rather frivolous, and become uninteresting to a reflective mind; but the picture you have exhibited is rather overcharged; you have thrown a strong light upon all that is ridiculous in their characters, and you have buried their good qualities in the shade. It shall be my task to bring them forward, or at least to attempt it. The state of society requires corresponding manners and qualifications. Those of the French woman are by no means calculated for the meridian of America, neither are they adapted to render the sex so amiable or agreeable in the English acceptation of those words. But you must confess that they are more accomplished, and understand the intercourse of society better, than in any other country. We are irresistibly pleased with them, because they possess the happy art of making us pleased with ourselves. Their education is of a higher cast, and by great cultivation they procure a happy variety of genius, which forms their conversation to please either the fop or the philosopher.

In what other country can be found a Marquise de Coigny, who, young and handsome, takes a lead in all the fashionable dissipations of life, and at more serious moments collects at her house an assembly of the literati, whom she

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52 *Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Monticello Edition), VI. 81-84, February 7, 1787.
53 *Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Ford Edition), V. 8-10, May 11, 1788.
54 Meredith Collection (H. S. P.) Mrs. Bingham to Mrs. Meredith.
55 Sarah N. Randolph, *The Domestic Life of Thomas Jefferson*, 98-100, June 1, 1787.
charms with her knowledge and her *beau esprit*. The women of France interfere with the politics of the country, and often give a decided turn to the fate of empires. Either by the gentle arts of persuasion, or the commanding force of superior attractions and address, they have obtained that rank and consideration in society which the sex are entitled to, and which they in vain contend for in other countries. We are therefore bound in gratitude to admire and revere them for asserting our privileges, as much as the friends of the liberties of mankind reverence the successful struggles of the American patriots.

The agreeable resources of Paris must certainly please and instruct every class of characters. The arts of elegance are there considered as essential, and are carried to a state of perfection, and there the friend of art is continually gratified by the admiration for works of taste. I have the pleasure of knowing you too well to doubt of your subscribing to this opinion. With respect to my native country, I assure you that I am fervently attached to it, as well as to my friends and connections in it; there, perhaps, there is more sincerity in professions, and a stronger desire of rendering real services, and when the mouth expresses the heart speaks.

I am sensible that I shall tire you to death with the length of this letter. . . .

It is quite time I bade you adieu; but remember this first of June I am constant to my former opinion, nor can I believe that any length of time will change it. I am determined to have some merit in your eyes, if not for taste and judgment, at least for consistency. . . .

Mrs. Bingham had not entirely wasted her time in Paris. She had certainly observed what was going on around her. She was hardly a feminist, but she frankly admired the French women for having made a place for themselves in the life of their country apart from their domestic occupations.

In addition to their servants, carriages and baggage, the Binghams brought home plans for a house. They both liked society and wanted to entertain on a large scale. Only a palatial home, therefore, could satisfy them. They had had the opportunity to see many of the mansions of various European capitals, and of them all the London house of the Duke of Manchester seemed best to fill their requirements. In good American fashion, they copied it but on a larger scale than the original had been constructed.\(^6\) Located on the northwest corner of Third and Spruce streets, it was surrounded by spacious gardens, protected by a high wall. The house caused quite a sensation, being the most pretentious one ever erected in Philadelphia up to that time. The Quakers naturally would not approve of so showy a place. On the way home from tea at the Emlens, Ann Warder, an English Quakeress lately arrived in Philadelphia, “looked at Bingham’s new house which causes much talk here being upon a new plan, but very ungenteel I think, as it much resembles some of our heavy public

\(^6\) Griswold, *op. cit.*, 259.
buildings—bow windows back and front, with figures of stucco work.\(^{57}\)

The interior was very elaborate. One description given by an English traveller in 1794 gives some idea of what the place was like. After attending the service at Christ Church on June 8, he\(^ {58}\)
dined this day with Mr. Bingham, to whom I had a letter of introduction. I found a magnificent house and gardens in the best English style, with elegant and even superb furniture: the chairs of the drawing-room were from Seddons’s in London, of the newest taste; the back in the form of a lyre, adorned with festoons of crimson and yellow silk, the curtains of the room a festoon of the same: the carpet one of Moore’s most expensive patterns: the room was papered in the French taste, after the style of the Vatican at Rome.

Some of the rooms were decorated with Gobelin tapestries, and there were so many mirrors about as to confuse some people.\(^ {59}\) Years later, the son of one of Mrs. Bingham’s cousins wrote,\(^ {60}\)

I remember well their charming residence, standing back on Third Street, with gardens all around it to the south on Spruce Street, and westward to Fourth Street... the spacious stables at the head of Bingham’s Court. The Drawing-rooms and Parlour with Mrs. Bingham’s Boudoir and State Bedchamber, occupied the second floor, to which you ascended by a broad stone staircase, wide enough for plants and flowers on each side on Gala occasions. The banqueting rooms and Library were on the ground floor. I have never seen any private house more admirably adapted for the reception of company.... [They] had brought from Europe every thing for the house and table which the taste and luxury of the times had invented. China and silver of course, but they first introduced silver pronged forks; for the older silver forks were only silver handled with steel prongs; the silver handled knives which paired with them having round blunt ends, which might be put in the mouth.

The house and gardens occupied about half a square on the north side of Spruce, from Third to Fourth streets. “In the garden was a profusion of lemon, orange and citron trees; many aloes, and other exotics,”\(^ {61}\) and running about were two fawns sent to the Binghams by their friends the Jacob Reads of South Carolina.\(^ {62}\) A greenhouse furnished flowers throughout the year.\(^ {63}\)


\(^{58}\) Henry Wansey, \textit{An excursion to the United States of North America in the summer of 1794} (Salisbury, 1798; 2d ed.), 123-25.


\(^{60}\) Fisher, \textit{op. cit.}, 200-02.

\(^{61}\) Wansey, \textit{op. cit.}, 123.

\(^{62}\) William Bingham’s Letter Book, 1791-93 (H. S. P.), 155; William Bingham to Jacob Read, October 10, 1791.

\(^{63}\) Estate of William Bingham, 1804-18 (H. S. P.).
Among their near neighbors were members of most of the leading families of the period, such as the Willings, Shippens, Mc Calls, Francises, Powels, Stampers, Blackwells, Moores, Merediths, Mor rises, Penns, Chews, Hamiltons, and Whartons, many of them relatives or connections by marriage of either Mr. or Mrs. Bingham. The locality was aptly named Society Hill.  

After the Revolution a tendency toward extravagance and display seems to have developed in Philadelphia. It was distinctly disapproved of by the French traveller, Brissot de Warville, who was in Philadelphia in 1788, when noticeable attempts were being made by others to copy some parts of the Bingham's luxurious way of living. Consequently he could have referred only to them when he wrote.

A very ingenious woman in this town is reproached with having contributed more than all others to introduce this taste for luxury. I really regret to see her husband, who appears to be well informed, and of amiable character, affect, in his buildings and furniture, a pomp which ought forever to have been a stranger to Philadelphia; and why? to draw around him the gaudy prigs and parasites of Europe. And what does he gain by it? jealousy; the reproach of his fellow citizens, and the ridicule of strangers. When a man enjoys pecuniary advantages, and at the same time possesses genius, knowledge, reflection, and the love of doing good; how easy it is to make himself beloved and esteemed, by employing his fortune, and perhaps increasing it, in enterprises usefull to the public!

Brissot was quite right in saying that the extravagance of the Bingham's would make others jealous, and this very jealousy was undoubtedly at the bottom of much of the criticism of him. But all travellers were not inclined to ridicule their hospitality. At a time when hotels were anything but comfortable and often unclean, most travellers would have been glad of the chance to accept the luxury available at the Bingham's. The Bingham's had been extensively entertained while abroad, and they naturally had an open house for their European friends and those who brought letters of introduction from them.

How much good Bingham might have done for the public if he had employed his fortune "in enterprises usefull to" them, will never be known. There is evidence that he was interested in the development

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64 Philadelphia City Directories (1790-1800); Wharton, op. cit., 144; George Hazl hurst, A Part of Old Philadelphia, 6.
65 "Memoir of John Ross, Merchant, of Philadelphia," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (1898), XXII. 82.
66 Brissot de Warville, New travels in the United States of America performed in 1788 (N.Y. 1792), 175-76.
of higher education in Pennsylvania. He was a trustee of the College of Philadelphia after 1789, and was one of the trustees and early benefactors of Dickinson College at Carlisle. Whether his taste was good or not, he was willing and even anxious to encourage art in America at a time when such men as Copley, West, and Stuart had been compelled to go abroad for appreciation of their work. An Englishman travelling in America in 1794 noted that "the arts and improvements proceed very slow in America, from the want of that patronage so prevalent in England." Bingham's willingness to supply that want must have been known at the time, for, when William Russell Birch decided to come to America he had the opportunity to bring many letters of recommendation, but thought one from Mr. West, being an American and then President of the Royal Academy, would be sufficient, which he offered me directed to Wm. Bingham, Esq., of Philadelphia. Mr. Bingham was my first employer in America, to instruct his two Daughters in Drawing at his own House, attended with one of their friends, three scholars twice a week at half a Guinea per lesson each. I then built me a furnace. I painted a full size picture in enamel of Mr. Bingham and a smaller one from it for Miss Bingham. . . . Finding orders for portraits came in fluently I gave up my scholars. . . .

Shortly before this Bingham had been responsible for securing a statue of Benjamin Franklin to be placed over the doorway of the Library Company of Philadelphia. Early in April, 1792, the statue was put in its place. It had been made of white marble by Francois Lazzarini in Italy, and about a year later was sent to America. Bingham had not gone abroad to find a sculptor for this statue because he wanted to, but because there were none in America who could do the work. In a long letter to Ceracchi, the sculptor, who had just returned to Rome, Bingham objected to his comparison of the arts in America with those in any European country, on the ground that the means of patronizing the arts were wanting in America, but "from the rapid Rise of this Country, & its increasing resources,

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77 Thomas H. Montgomery, History of the University of Pennsylvania 1749-1776, 89; Correspondence of Benjamin Rush (Library Company of Philadelphia), Dickinson Coll., Pt. I, XLI, 8, 12, copies of letters to William Bingham.

78 Wansey, op. cit., xi.


80 Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine (April, 1792), VIII. 284; Bingham Letter Book (H. S. P.), 37, Bingham to Nicholas Low, June 3, 1791; 57-59, Bingham to Thomas Buckholm, September 30, 1791; 137-38, Bingham to Robert Gilmor and Company, October 15, 1791; 202-203, Bingham to Low, March 21, 1792; 330-31, Bingham to Buckholm, May 9, 1792; 277-78, Bingham to Low, June 29, 1792.
I have little doubt of a considerable Change Speedily taking place relative to the Encouragement of Works of Genius."

Gilbert Stuart had been commissioned by the Marquis of Lansdowne to paint a portrait of George Washington. When the Binghams heard of this, they asked Stuart to let them present the portrait in appreciation of the courtesies Lansdowne had shown them while they were in England. Mrs. Bingham then persuaded Washington to pose for Stuart, and the result was the famous full length portrait known as the Lansdowne portrait. Stuart made replicas of this as he did of his others of Washington. According to some authorities, Lord Lansdowne received one of the copies, as did Samuel Vaughan of London of the Washington portrait he had ordered from Stuart, while William Bingham was supposed to have had in his possession the original of both the Lansdowne and the Vaughan portraits.

But a contemporary who visited Stuart's studio in the summer of 1797, after Lansdowne had received the portrait, reports that "the Picture he had there of the President was the first copy he had made of the celebrated full length which he had painted for Mrs. Bingham intended as a present to the Marquis of Lansdowne. . . . This copy was for Mr. Bingham's own use." It is quite possible that Bingham's Vaughan portrait was likewise a copy.

When the portrait was sent to Lansdowne late in 1796, Bingham asked Rufus King, the American Minister in London, to see that it was admitted and delivered promptly; the portrait had been, he wrote, "executed by Stewart . . . in his best Manner, & does great Credit to the American Artist. . . . The Frame that accompanies it, is manufactured in Philada with much Taste & Elegance." Bingham was plainly proud of this American product about to be displayed abroad. And Lord Lansdowne seems to have been quite pleased to receive it. There was one unfortunate circumstance growing out of this presentation. Stuart claimed that Bingham had taken

71 Bingham Letter Book (H. S. P.) 370-72, Bingham to Ceracchi, November 12, 1792.
73 Robert Gilmor, Jr., Memorandums made in a Tour to the Eastern States in the year 1797, 6.
74 Rufus King Papers (New York Historical Society), XLI. No. 9; Bingham to King, November 29, 1796.
the portrait on the understanding that Lord Lansdowne would refuse permission to anyone who wanted to make engravings of the picture, unless Stuart should give his consent. Lansdowne, however, did permit someone to make the engraving, Stuart protested to Bingham, and Bingham refused to do anything about it when Stuart was unable to produce any written agreement between them. Bingham seems to have been quite unaware from the beginning that he was responsible for any arrangement which Lord Lansdowne might make. After hearing of the safe arrival of the portrait, he had written to Rufus King that

Stewart has been much disappointed in his Hopes, relative to Profits which he expected to derive from this Picture. He had wrote to his Friend West, requesting him to engage an able artist to execute an Engraving therefrom which, from the general Admiration the Picture attracted, might have been disposed of, to great Advantage in this country. He has not heard from Mr. West & he is fearfull that Lord Lansdowne's obliging Character may induce him to permit Some other artist, to take off the Impression.

Bingham’s interest in promoting art in general and American art in particular makes it quite unlikely that he would purposely hinder Stuart from making engravings of his own pictures.

The luxury in which the Binghams lived in their city home was duplicated in their country seat. In the latter part of the eighteenth century, the Atlantic coast of northern New Jersey was becoming a popular summer resort among Philadelphians. William Bingham purchased an estate of about two hundred acres near the mouth of the Shrewsbury River in the summer of 1791, and seems to have set the fashion of having summer homes in that region, for “country-seats were much resorted to after the year 1793.” Bingham’s new property was located on a promontory known as Black Point, and included a good sized house built on an elevation which gave it an excellent view of the surrounding country and the sea. The house as it stands to-day is a large and cumbersome structure, of no particular style, with bulgy wings on either side of what appears to be the original house and a wide porch stretching across the whole front.

**Notes:**

- Rufus King Papers, N. Y. H. S., XLI, No. 28; Bingham to King, July 10, 1797.
- Monmouth County, N.J., Conveyances Book E3, 479, July 26, 1791. Alexander Baring as a trustee of Bingham’s estate disposed of this property to Eleazer Parmley, September 10, 1833. This deed gives the date of Bingham’s purchase from Joseph Wardell.
The Binghams made extensive alterations in the place between the date of purchase and the time they took possession the next spring. Bingham engaged one William Lloyd to superintend the alterations during the fall and winter, and to remain in charge of the place the year round. Bingham's letters of instructions to Lloyd and orders which he sent to Nicholas Low in New York for supplies to be delivered at Black Point give some idea of what he did to remodel and add to the original farm house. He was responsible for the addition of the wings and a complete renovation of the interior of the old house, which cost him "considerably more than it was at first calculated." To the grounds and farm he gave particular attention. During that first year he wanted to plant a "Number of young Locust Trees & Some Poplars." Late in May he wrote to Lloyd "I hope you have been able to engage a Number of good Cows, as we Shall have occasion for a considerable Quantity of Butter, Cream & Milk . . . [and] I hope you have employed Mack in raising Some Vegetables as we were [the preceding summer] very badly Supplied from the resources of the Neighbourhood." Judging by the quantity of glass which was ordered from New York, he must have had a greenhouse erected during the spring of 1792. This and a "Necessary" were the only structures built until the following fall, when a barn, milk house, and ice house were all added. For the new barn, Bingham had

sent to the Point, ten thousand Shingles, by a Vessel which was to touch there, on her way from Indian River to New York. . . . In building the Barn, you will doubtless pay Attention to Some necessary Appendages, that relate to the Care of Poultry, Pigs &c, for as I wish, when my Family are on the Farm, to be as independent as possible, with respecte to these Supplies, it becomes expedient to make Provision for raising them. At the Same Time, I wish you to pay particular Attention to having a good Milk house, So circumstanced as to preserve Milk at least 48 Hours.

I have a Strong Inclination to pay a Visit to the Point this or the approaching Month, when I suppose I should find the Ice House entirely compleated. It will be necessary to dam up the River in Several Places, as Soon as possible,

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Bingham Letter Book (H. S. P.) 151-52, Bingham to Joseph Wardell, October 11, 1791; 153-54, Bingham to Nicholas Low, October 11, 1791; 323-24, Bingham to William Lloyd, May 11, 1792; 315-16, Bingham to Low, May 20, 1792; 312-14, Bingham to Lloyd, May 20, 1792; 303-304, Bingham to Lloyd, June 6, 1792; 978, Bingham to Cyrus Griffin, August 16, 1791; 305-306, Bingham to Low, June 6, 1792; 386, Bingham to Low, October 20, 1792; 387-89, Bingham to Lloyd, October 23, 1792; 281-82, Bingham to Lloyd, June 22, 1792.
in order that the Bank may become firm & Solid, to be enabled to resist the
Body of Water that will press against it—especially in Times of heavy Rain—
this will be a better Expedient than procuring the Ice from a Distance.

The poplars and locusts of the preceding year were also added to.

The Trees I hope, are planting on the river Side. I wish a Number of Locusts
in Clumps to be interspersed in the Field, betwixt the House & the Road.
Indeed, there cannot be too many Locusts planted. If the Fields from the
Road to the River were Skirted with them, it would be Money & Labor well
employed, as they Succeed well in that Soil, & are a valuable Wood on a Farm.
. . . I did intend to have Sent you a Parcel of Pears, Peaches, Plumbs &c to
have planted within the Paling, around the House; but I could not procure
them, there has been Such a Demand on the Nurseries around the Town. I
think I Shall be able to obtain them from New York.

Bingham’s intention was to use this place regularly as the summer
residence of his family, and as such he intended to make it as
comfortable as possible. Some of the furniture they would need,
Bingham sent around by boat, which had to travel down the Dele-
ware from Philadelphia, up the Jersey coast to New York, and
be reshipped from there to Black Point. When this shipload of
furniture arrived,

the Oxen & Cart may be employed in bringing them up to the House, which
must be done with great Care & Attention, as Some of the Articles, particularly
Looking Glasses, & other Kinds of Glass, will be much injured by rough Usage.
. . . When they arrive at the House, I wish you would have them carefully
placed in one of the Rooms on the Ground floor, & Secured by Lock & Key
untill my Arrival. A Disappointment in any of the Articles would be a Serious
Matter, as it would be So difficult to replace them.

Other items, which could be secured from New York, Bingham
ordered from Nicholas Low. One of his orders gives some idea of
the number of guests they expected to have. Bingham asked Low
to purchase for him “four dozen handsome Windsor Chairs. . . . If
they were painted Straw Colour & picked out with Green I Should
prefer it—but there will be no time to bespeak them.” For the
“Hair of Some Beds & for procuring Feathers for Some Ticks which
I shall Send to you,” Bingham was going to depend on Lloyd.

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81 Ibid., 248-50, Bingham to R. Harrison, November 26, 1791.
82 Ibid., 312-14, Bingham to Wm. Lloyd, May 30, 1792; 305-306, Bingham to Nicholas
Low, June 6, 1792; 303-304, Bingham to Lloyd, June 6, 1792; 281-82, Bingham to
Lloyd, June 22, 1792.
83 Ibid., 280, Bingham to Nicholas Low, June 23, 1792.
84 Ibid., 303-304, Bingham to Wm. Lloyd, June 6, 1792.
From London, Bingham requested that the balance of the bill of exchange he was sending be invested in "Some of Argaud's Lamps of the most approved Form for Lighting Dining Rooms."  

On the roof of the original section of the house, there was a sky parlor which was an excellent spot from which to observe the view. This Bingham equipped with a barometer, a thermometer, a "Land Telescope," and a "Spy Glass of a good Quality," as well as with "Concave Mirrors, which reflect the Surrounding Country, & where there is much diversity of Appearance, have a happy Effect in exhibiting Prospects, centered into a Smaller Compass."  

It was so difficult to travel back and forth between Philadelphia and Black Point that Bingham did not intend to continue any engagements which would keep him in the city during the summer. In 1788 he had been made the Captain of the City Troop of Light Horse, and in the spring of 1792 he resigned on the ground that his absence from the city would be "incompatible with that Attention to training & manoeuvering the Troop, which its new Establishment will demand, & which is essential to its good Government & Respectability." But business was able to bring him back and he actually spent considerable time in Philadelphia at work on the proposed improvement of the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike, as president of the company which was doing the work.  

It is hard to believe that any place on the Jersey coast could be as inaccessible as Black Point was in the 1790's. Bingham had left instructions in Philadelphia that the newspapers should be sent to him in care of Nicholas Low in New York, who would forward them to him "by Conveyances that may from time to time offer." Jacob Hiltzheimer of Philadelphia visited the region in August of 1792, and it took him from early morning of one day until after dinner of the second to reach "the sea shore." Soon after his arrival he went in his "chair to the Hon. William Bingham's place to dinner, by invita-
tion of his wife, who received me very kindly & made much of me. Mr. Bingham was expected hourly from Philadelphia."\(^91\)

In spite of the fact that the summer residents of the coast seem to have gone there for the sea bathing, “they had no surf there, & were content to bathe in a kind of water-house, covered; even Bingham’s great house near there, indulged no idea of surf-bathing. The tavern entertainment at Black Point was quite rude,” which must have made the tavern guests such as Hiltzheimer most grateful to the Binghams for their hospitality.\(^92\) The season at Black Point generally lasted from June into November, but the men who had homes there had to make frequent trips to Philadelphia on business.\(^93\)

The Binghams had another country seat on the banks of the Schuylkill. Though it was theirs for only a few years, their name rather than that of its first owner, John Penn, is generally associated with it. In 1773 Penn had purchased from Dr. William Smith a tract of a hundred and forty-two acres on the west bank of the Schuylkill where he built a summer home which he called “Lansdowne” and which was said to be the largest and most distinguished of all the beautiful homes on the hilly banks of the river.\(^94\) For several years prior to 1792 Penn was in England. During this time the Binghams had leased “Lansdowne” from him and occupied it as a country place until his return. The lease seems to have been made on very friendly terms. When Bingham heard from Penn that he expected to return to Philadelphia in the spring of 1792 and would like to make arrangements for the termination of the lease, Bingham wrote\(^95\)

> I never viewed myself as a Tenant on any other Conditions, than in entire Subserviency to your Interests & Convenience—the moderate terms on which the Lease was granted, could imply no other Species of Arrangement. I therefore cheerfully resign the Same, with my best Wishes for your long Enjoyment of Lansdown.

But Penn was not destined to live there long. He died in 1795, and his widow gave the place to her brother’s daughter, Ann Penn Allen,

\(^91\) “Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer, 1768-1798,” Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (1892), XVI. 416, August 18, 1792.

\(^92\) Watson, op. cit., 307.

\(^93\) Bingham Letter Book (H. S. P.), 263-64, Bingham to Count Andriani, August 7, 1792; 258, Bingham to Robert Gilmor, September 17, 1792.

\(^94\) Howard Jenkins, “The Family of William Penn,” Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (1898), XXII. 84.

\(^95\) Bingham Letter Book (H. S. P.), 219-20, Bingham to John Penn, January 19, 1792.
the wife of James Greenleaf, a partner of Robert Morris in his unsuccessful land speculations of the late 1790's. When Greenleaf was unable to meet his obligations in the winter of 1796-97, his creditors compelled him to sell his property at a great sacrifice. For anyone who had ready money, this provided an opportunity to invest to great advantage. Although Bingham likewise had invested so heavily in lands that money was somewhat scarce with him at the time, he was unable to resist the temptation to acquire "Lansdowne" when it was offered for sale. "The Buildings are excellent, the Land good, & the local Situation of the Place, very agreeable & commanding," he wrote to General Knox in Maine. "The Price at Sheriff's Sale was $39050, which must be paid in a very Short time." And Knox who had undoubtedly been entertained there while Bingham was Penn's tenant, replied, "It ought to be yours & I sincerely wish you & yours may possess long & happily all the delights incident to that charming place."96

Beautiful though the place was said to be, and famous as the home of both the Penns and the Binghams, no accurate account or description of the place has been preserved. So far, two sketches of the exterior have come to light—one of these was by William Russell Birch,97 and the other by Robert Gilmor, Jr., of Baltimore, who visited the Binghams at "Lansdowne" in the summer of 1797 on his way to New England.98 The destruction of the house by fire in the middle of the nineteenth century removed the last opportunity of securing any such description.

When he wrote to Penn in January 1792, Bingham had remarked that Philadelphia had "become a much more pleasing Residence than when you left it. There is a greater Resource in the Numbers as well as Choice of Society, & I have no doubt you will be gratified on your Return."99 Although this was in large part due to the fact that Philadelphia had lately become the seat of the Federal government, it was also partly due to the fact that so many English travellers and French political refugees flocked to America during the 1790's. After visiting the chief cities of America in 1794, the English traveller Wansey

96 General Henry Knox Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society, property of New England Historic and Genealogical Society), XL. 104; Bingham to Knox, April 23, 1797; XL. 116; Knox to Bingham, May 5, 1797.
97 William Russell Birch, Autobiography, H. S. P.
98 Gilmor, Memorandums of a Tour.
99 Bingham Letter Book (H. S. P.), 219-20; Bingham to John Penn, January 19, 1792.
LANSDOWNE
Country Seat of Mr. and Mrs. Bingham
From an Engraving by Birch
decided that "Boston is the Bristol, New York the Liverpool, and Philadelphia the London of America."\textsuperscript{100} By the time Wansey wrote this the new government was firmly established, and with the widening of the diplomatic corps, it was natural that the formality of the European courts should have some effect on the society of the capital of the new country, particularly in a period when the pendulum was once again swinging back from the extreme democracy of the revolutionary period. The leaders of this new Republican Court became the arbiters of American society.

The most spectacular of these leaders were the Binghams. Their social position was high in Philadelphia before it became the capital. Afterwards, this position combined with his wealth and her beauty and charm attracted nearly everyone of importance and many obscure people to the entertainments at their Third Street house and at "Lansdowne." Only the inaccessibility of "Bellevue" at Black Point limited their guests there to those who were able to take the long trip to the sea shore. In spite of the fact that there were some people who did not approve of the "freedom of speech" and "oaths" which were common in the Binghams circle, Mrs. Bingham must have been as nearly a perfect hostess as one could be. "She was not regularly beautiful, but had a combination of expression, grace, and figure, which made her the most attractive woman of her day. She was not witty, but bright, always at her ease, and extremely kind and courteous to all."\textsuperscript{101}

When the Federal government removed from New York to Philadelphia, some people were dissatisfied. Mrs. John Adams wrote to her daughter, "when all is done, it will not be Broadway," nor, in her opinion, was the Schuylkill to be compared to the Hudson. The ladies, however, were quite as friendly as those in New York. Mrs. Bingham came several times to see Mrs. Adams and the latter thought her "more amiable and beautiful than ever."\textsuperscript{102} About a month later, on the night before Christmas, at the Washingtons, Mrs. Adams had an opportunity to observe Mrs. Bingham at a large social gathering for the first time since 1785, and wrote to her daughter\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{100} Wansey, \textit{op. cit.}, 57.  
\textsuperscript{101} Fisher, \textit{op. cit.}, 202.  
\textsuperscript{102} Letters of Mrs. Adams, 349; Mrs. Adams to Abigail Adams Smith, November 21, 1790.  
\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Ibid.}, 350-51, December 26, 1790.
On Friday evening last I went with Charles to the drawing-room, being the first of my appearance in public. The room became full before I left it, and the circle very brilliant. How could it be otherwise, when the dazzling Mrs. Bingham and her beautiful sisters were there; the Misses Allen, and the Misses Chew; in short, a constellation of beauty? I am serious when I say so, for I really think them what I describe them. Mrs. Bingham has certainly given the laws to the ladies here, in fashion and elegance; their manners and appearance are superior to what I have seen.

As Mrs. Adams became better acquainted, the charms of the Hudson and Broadway seemed less important. Within a few months she concluded that “the ladies here are well-educated, well-bred, and well-dressed. There is much more society than in New York, and I am much better pleased and satisfied than I expected to be when I was destined to remove here.”

Either Mr. Bingham or Mrs. Bingham or both had a leaning toward formality and ceremony. They tried to establish the custom of having their guests announced by having the servants relay the names to the door of the room where they were receiving, but the confusion and ridiculous errors which resulted soon made them drop this practice. But even their critics were quick to say that “Mrs. Bingham’s conversational cleverness in French and English, graceful manners, and polite tact in doing the honors of her splendid establishment, rendered it exceedingly attractive,” and that their entertainments were superior to those of anyone else. William Maclay, the staunch anti-Federalist and political enemy of Bingham, dined with him on January 6, 1791, and wrote thereof in his journal, “I can not say that he affects to entertain in a style beyond everything in this place, or perhaps in America. He really does so. There is a propriety, a neatness, a cleanliness that adds to the splendor of his costly furniture and elegant apartments.” This was a reputation for the Binghams to uphold, and they seem to have done it, although it was often difficult to secure the articles they wanted. One example is that of some table linen which Bingham ordered from abroad in the summer of 1791, and which finally arrived in March 1793. When it came it was “too Small for the Purposes I intended.”

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104 Ibid., 359, Mrs. Adams to Mrs. Shaw, March 20, 1791.
106 Ibid., 25-27.
108 Bingham Letter Book (H. S. P.) 240-41, Bingham to Robert Gilmor, December 6, 1791; 237-39, Bingham to Gilmor, December 11, 1791; 352-53, Bingham to Gilmor, December 5, 1792; 479-82, Bingham to Gilmor, February 15, 1793; 438-40, Bingham to Gilmor, March 21, 1793; 430-31, Bingham to Gilmor, March 26, 1793.
ing way to do shopping and meant planning far in advance. Other articles came without so much difficulty, however. In the spring of 1792, Bingham ordered from Liverpool "a handsome Set of Queen's ware edged with Chocolate or some other dark Color. . . . I wish my Crest to be placed on each Piece, which is an Eagle rising from a Rock—Such as you will see designed on the Seal of this Letter." The set was to include three tureens, six sauce tureens, two salad bowls, twenty-six covered dishes of various sizes, four dozen soup plates, ten dozen plates, and three dozen cheese plates. "I wish," added Bingham, "a handsome Desert Set, of a proportional Size, at the Same Time. I shall thank you to recommend this Order to be executed with Taste, & to be shipped in good order & well packed." Other orders for china were sent to France, one being for "24 small coffee cups, with a design similar to those used by the Queen & the Duke d'Angoulême," and some pretty porcelain figures for table decorations. Table delicacies were also imported, and the orders which have been preserved include such items as French wines, mocca coffee, vinegar, mustard, dried sweetmeats and fruits, olives, and olive oil.

Of all the distinguished travellers from abroad who came to America during the years that Philadelphia was the capital, there were few who were not entertained by the Binghams. In the summer of 1791, Lord Wycombe, eldest son of Lord Shelburne, now the Marquis of Lansdowne, arrived in the city with letters to several friends of his father, including Bingham. When Bingham replied to Shelburne's comments on politics and commerce and thanked him for some architectural plans and gardening information for the Black Point estate, he also reported the excellent impression that had been made by Lord Wycombe's "unaffected Demeanor, his Information & Good Sense."

Wansey, "a manufacturer from England, who, out of curiosity as well as business, had made an excursion to America, to see the state of society there," dined with Bingham and we may thank his curiosity for having noted in as much detail as he did the general appearance

109 Ibid., 212-13, Bingham to Robert Gilmor and Company, March 10, 1792.
110 Ibid., 99-100, Bingham to Pierre Richard, November 20, 1791.
111 Ibid., 164-65, Bingham to Boyer, Mozler & Zimmerman, October 5, 1791; 21-24, Bingham to Robert Gilmor and Company, June 19, 1791; 73-74, Bingham to Pierre Richard, September 11, 1791; 130, Bingham to Etienne Cathalan, October 18, 1791.
112 Ibid., 125-29, Bingham to Lord Shelburne, October 22, 1791; 101-102, Bingham to B. Vaughan, November 20, 1791.
of the Bingham house and gardens on Third Street. Unfortunately for himself, Wansey was not a house guest of the Bingham. He lodged at the City Tavern, which was second only to Oellers Hotel, but there "met with my old tormenters, the bugs."\textsuperscript{113}

Isaac Weld, another Englishman who was in America about the same time Wansey was, remarked how all the men in Philadelphia were engaged in business, and if their fortunes happened to be sufficient to live on in luxury they devoted their time to increasing their property, chiefly by trading in lands.\textsuperscript{114} Of these land traders in the 1790's, the most active in Philadelphia were Robert Morris and William Bingham, and it was in connection with the purchase of some that another Englishman set out for Philadelphia late in 1795. This was Alexander Baring, son of Sir Francis Baring of the English banking house of John and Francis Baring & Company, but in this instance the representative of Henry Hope & Company of Amsterdam as well. He was only in his early twenties, but he had already shown such sense and courage in the care of Hope's property in Holland during recent difficulties with the French as to be intrusted with vast sums for investment in American lands. Learning that Baring was on his way and that this was his aim, Bingham wanted to be the first to catch him in order to sell him a tract in Maine. Bingham's agent, David Cobb, was sent to Boston to meet Baring when he landed and bring him directly to Philadelphia. This Cobb succeeded in doing, and on the afternoon of January 15, 1796, he was able to report to Bingham in Philadelphia. After a little more than three weeks discussion of terms, the sale was arranged. During this time Cobb and Baring dined frequently at the Binghams both alone with the family and in large company, and later in the evening "supped upon Oysters."\textsuperscript{115}

Thomas Pinckney, then in London, recommended strangers to Bingham's "good offices [which] I know it gives you pleasure to have a proper opportunity of offering."\textsuperscript{116} The Marquis of Lansdowne sent the most prominent of the French émigrés to Bingham,

\textsuperscript{113} Wansey, \textit{op. cit.}, 91-93, 97, 111, 123-25.
\textsuperscript{114} Isaac Weld, \textit{Travels Through the States of North America and the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada 1795-97} (London 1799), 12.
\textsuperscript{116} Gratz Collection (H. S. P.), Thomas Pinckney to Bingham, October 20, 1794.
among whom were Talleyrand and Beaumetz, and later the Duke of Orleans, who became Louis Philippe, and his brothers. The Duke was, according to a contemporary, quite a popular addition to Philadelphia society, and seems to have spent much of his time with the Binghams.

He was an accomplished amateur portrait painter. I saw at an evening party at Mrs. Bingham's, a fine miniature likeness of Miss A. Willing, which was drawn by Mr. D'Orleans, & placed on the mantle of one of the chimneys of a reception room, for the inspection & admiration of the Company. The Prince was said to be so fascinated by her handsome person, polished and graceful deportment, that he even asked her hand in marriage. She was the sister of Mrs. Bingham, who for high breeding, and refined politeness, was herself the leader of gentility & fashion; moving in style and social elegance without an equal in American society.

Of Mrs. Bingham's other sisters, Mary had married Henry Clymer and Dorothy had married her cousin Thomas Willing Francis in the summer of 1794, while in 1795 Elizabeth had married the William Jackson who had so charmed young Abigail Adams eleven years before in Paris. Abby Willing was nearer the age of the Bingham children than of Mrs. Bingham, and had spent much of her time in the care of her older sister. Beautiful, charming, wealthy, with many powerful family connections, it is not strange that the young Duke thought she would be a good match and promptly lost his heart. Rumor had it in the city that the match was arranged, and when it was broken off without any public explanation tongues wagged furiously for a time. Soon after, the Duke and his brothers—the Duke de Montpensier and the Duke de Beaujolais—set out on a tour of the country, equipped with a letter of credit from Robert Gilmor, Bingham’s partner in Baltimore.

The Duke de la Rochefoucault-Liancourt was another Frenchman who came to America about the same time as the Duke of Orleans and his brothers. Years later Samuel Breck referred to him as an "amiable and inoffensive Duke . . . who had been a courtier all his

117 LaCaite-Shelburne MS (William L. Clements Library), Bingham to Lord Shelburne, no date, probably 1793.
118 Balch, Letters and Papers relating to the Provincial History of Pennsylvania, 303-305.
119 R. Blackwell's Private Parish Register, H. S. P.
120 Wharton, op. cit., 155-56, letters of Mrs. John Redman Coxe.
121 Breck, Memorandums of a Tour, 7.
life, and was... master of the wardrobes of Louis XVI.... [He] lodged... in an obscure cul de sac, or blind alley, running from 4th just below Market Street, & filled with livery stables." After returning to Europe he wrote an account of his travels in America which was "full of error; & which were too insignificant to justify a reprint in this Country I think." In this work the Duke criticized the Philadelphians for showing no discrimination in inviting people to their homes, for rudely dropping all those who on further acquaintance were found to have no wealth, for vulgar display of their own riches, and for a breathless pursuit of money to the exclusion of culture. Nevertheless, he did admit that Philadelphia was

perhaps the most agreeable [city] of the United States for a foreigner. ... Although in Philadelphia, as throughout America, no one is sufficiently free from employment to give himself wholly to letters or the sciences, this city contains more than any other, persons who cultivate them, and whose society is extremely interesting when those subjects are discussed.

When Bingham learned of the publication of the Duke's book and of his critical attitude toward America, he sent his views on the subject to Rufus King, then the American Minister at the Court of St. James. When he first arrived in this country he sought it as an asylum, & was so highly gratified that he was extravagant in its Praises. But when he saw a Prospect open for his return into France, & supposed that he could facilitate his Views by his abuse of the United States & the People [the United States and France being then on the verge of war] he regarded every object with a jaundiced Eye. This opinion of his Conduct arose from my own observations, & I have been told, is confirmed by the Publication of his Book. I hope some Answer will be made to it—for, Such Sentiments, falling from so great a Height, may make a considerable impression, & be injurious to the American Character. It is said he has prefixed his name to the Work.

Of all the people who visited the Binghams during the 1790's, two give in their writings a good idea of how the family lived: Thomas Twining, a young Englishman, aged nineteen, on his way home from India, and Robert Gilmor, Jr., aged twenty-one, the son of Bingham's partner in nearly all his commercial undertakings after 1782.

Breck, op. cit., 17.

Rochefoucault-Liancourt, Travels through the United States of North America, the country of the Iroquois, and Upper Canada, in the years 1795, 1796, and 1797 (London 1799), II. 383-85.

Rufus King Papers, N. Y. H. S., XLI, No. 45, Bingham to King, June 5, 1798.
Twining arrived in Philadelphia early in April 1796, on board the India, in which Bingham was interested. The purser took young Twining to call on Bingham, who was, he tells us:

the principal person in Philadelphia, & the wealthiest, probably, in the Union. His house . . . was by far the handsomest residence in the city. I found here a large party. Besides Mr. & Mrs. Bingham & their two daughters, were Count de Noailles, Count Tilley, Mr. Alexander Baring and others.

Twining was pleased with Mr. Bingham who “not only gave me a general invitation to his house, but offered to take care of my great sheep during my stay in America.” He had set out from India with a Bengal cow, doombah or sheep and Cashmiri goat, the latter having died the day before they reached the Delaware. The next day he called at Mr. Bingham’s, where I found my doombah grazing upon the garden lawn at the back of the house. While I was looking at it with Mr. Bingham, several inhabitants of the city came to gratify their curiosity, for Mr. Bingham, having observed this, had ordered that everybody should be admitted, & considerable numbers had already come to the garden in consequence. My Bengal cow, which I found in the stable not far off, also had numerous visitors.

Twining had travelled out to India in the company of the elder brother of Alexander Baring. When Alexander and his younger brother called upon him in Philadelphia, Twining noted that he “thought the former a clever, well informed young man,” but did not comment on Henry. On the first Sunday after his arrival at Philadelphia, Twining dined & drank tea with Mr. Bingham, met the Count de Noailles, Count Tilley, the celebrated Monsr. Volney, the two Messrs. Baring, & several members of the Senate & House of Representatives—in all a very large party. Mr. Volney, next whom I sat at dinner, was very inquisitive about India. Mr. Alexander Baring, who sat nearly opposite to me, took a leading part in the general conversation.

Robert Gilmor, Jr., visited Philadelphia in the summer of 1797. As this was the first season that the Binghams were able to occupy “Lansdowne” as its owners, they seem to have temporarily deserted Black Point for the Schuylkill, and it was there that young Gilmor was entertained. About the middle of July he had set out with a friend for New England. On his way north as well as on his way home he stopped to visit his father’s partner.

When he arrived in Philadelphia on July 26, he

128 Thomas Twining, Travels in America One Hundred Years Ago, 29-30, 34-36, 37, 40-41.

127 Gilmor, Memorandums of a Tour, 5.
waited upon the Viscount de Noailles. . . . In the evening he drove me in his gig out to Lansdown, Mr. Bingham’s delightful country residence which he lately purchased from the last of the family of the old proprietor of Pennsylvania, Mr. Penn. It is a most superb place, & supposed to be the best country house in America. It commands a noble view of the Schuylkill & the seats in the neighborhood, & at a distance the steeples of some of the churches in Philad. I had the pleasure of seeing at Lansdown the two eldest daughters of the celebrated Count de Grasse for whom I had brought letters from a French lady at Baltimore. They pleased me very much by their amiable and agreeable manners, perfectly ladies in their demeanor & conversation, yet extremely cheerful & lively.

He was quite as much impressed by the two Bingham girls, aged fifteen and thirteen at the time.

The Miss Bingham I found very much improved since I last saw them, both in their persons & accomplishments. They are certainly very fine girls: French is almost as natural a language to them as their mother tongue,—They speak Italian also, and converse well on any subject. Yet these young ladies are mere children in point of years, and have only improved their natural talents, & acquired information from the extensive and variety of acquaintance they are obliged to make from their peculiar situation in life aided by the stimulus of example which the talents of conspicuous characters daily set before them.

After spending the next morning in the city, Gilmor and the friend with whom he was travelling dress[ed] for dinner & the carriage we hired for the day carried us out to Lansdown where we dined with Mr. Bingham’s family, some of Mrs. Bingham’s relations & several Spaniards who went out with the Viscount de Noailles. The day was passed in a pleasant, agreeable manner. The company got to exercises of strength & activity in which we were joined by the young ladies who proved that tho’ accomplishments of a masculine nature were commonly appropriated to the gentlemen yet they were not incompatible with female delicacy & indulgence when conducted in a suitable manner.

Two days later they

spent the morning in visiting and went to dine at Lansdown. Mr. Clymer drove Mr. Bingham & myself out in his Phaeton. The three princes [the Duke of Orleans and his brothers] dined with us and in the evening the usual sports on the lawn were resumed, and the party was a very pleasant & agreeable one among people whom we should never have expected such perfect freedom and ease.

When Gilmor was on his way home from New England in September, he reached Philadelphia during a yellow fever epidemic. He waited in Frankford for the Viscount de Noailles who arrived early in the afternoon of the 10th to drive him to “Lansdowne.” They went through the outskirts of the city, crossed the Schuylkill on the

188 Ibid., 7-8.
MRS. WILLIAM BINGHAM

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Attributed to Gilbert Stuart
ferry at Market Street, and an hour and a quarter after they had met they\textsuperscript{129}

arrived at Lansdown & I experienced the most welcome reception from Mr. Bingham's family, I had met with since my absence. A great deal of company came out to dinner today, among which were the three princes. We spent a charming afternoon & at night Mr. Bingham would not permit me to leave his house but insisted on my staying there all the time I meant to spend near Philad.\textsuperscript{a}

I remained here about a week, passing my time in the most agreeable manner. Company were continually visiting Lansdowne, & added to its own made a most sociable society. During the day I either amused myself with hunting or retired to the Library where Stuart the painter was engaged in painting the whole family. In the evening we played at the French game of the Lottery, in which we were occasionally joined by the Princes & viscount who staid after night. Our party was increased by the arrival of Mr. Alexander Baring (son of Sir Francis Baring) whom Mr. Bingham invited to stay in the family. He is an extraordinary young man, of great mercantile talents & possessed of much information. Tho' a young man of about twenty five, he is respected by all the old characters who know him. . . . One day the family of the British Minister, Mr. Liston, dined at Lansdowne. . . . The day passed as usual; very agreeable & the company did not sit long at table, particularly the young people who assembled in the portico & on the Lawn. . . .

Having at last concluded on returning home, I wrote a note to the Viscount to secure a place for me in the mail Stage to take me up at Gray's ferry, whither Mr. Bingham sent me in his carriage. I left this charming family with regret, & fully sensible of the politeness, attention & kindness they shew'd me during my short residence with them.

Twining was a stranger who, young as he was, had probably heard little or no gossip about the Binghams, and was open minded and disposed to be friendly. Gilmor was the son of Bingham's closest business associate and had known him all his life. Long after both his father and Bingham were dead, Robert Gilmor, Jr., wrote of the latter,\textsuperscript{130}

He was well educated, shrewd and intelligent; of handsome person and gentlemanlike deportment. . . . I usually stayed [at his home] when in Philad\textsuperscript{a} for he would not let my father or me lodge any where else, & met at his table or in his parlour frequently the present King of France Louis Phillipe. . . . Alexander Hamilton (whom I met at his house) Gen\textsuperscript{1} Knox, & all the most distinguished men of the day were his intimate friends. Gen\textsuperscript{1} Washington was attached to him, & I have seen him walk arm in arm with Mrs. Bingham round a ball room.

But others who were not so fond of the Binghams gave less pleasant pictures of them. Mrs. Bingham's aunt, Mrs. Samuel Powel, was reported to have "boiled over with jealousy when she saw him

\textsuperscript{129}Ibid., 21-22. \textsuperscript{130}Gilmor, \textit{Memoir of Robert Gilmor}, notes facing p. 17, 22.
[Washington] walk past her house of an afternoon, when official duties were over, not to stop at the house of her lovely niece, Mrs. Bingham, but to enjoy the lively conversation of Mrs. General Stewart.131 In 1798 Mrs. John Adams wrote of them to her daughter,132

I can say with truth that I think her a very fine woman, and vastly superior in manners and understanding to her husband; she has a fine person, affable manners, and a ladylike deportment. Money, Money is his sole object, and he feels the weight of it; he is not without some talents, but they are all turned to gain; for that he would make sacrifices, which a man who considers the honour and independence of his country at stake, would sooner sacrifice his life than submit to. I am warranted in saying this from his public conduct. Yet in company he is a social pleasant man, and always seemed good humored.

It is too bad that Mrs. Adams was not a little more specific in her criticism of Bingham's public conduct. A chronicler of the times said that he "was lavish of his wealth, acquired, some thought, in a discreditable way, partly in privateering, & speculating in Government warrants; for in those days, many thought fair & intelligent enterprises & honourable industry, the only proper foundations to fortune."133 But that would scarcely merit Mrs. Adams' criticism.

In the autumn of 1798 Mrs. Benjamin Stoddert of Maryland, wife of the new Secretary of the Navy, arrived in Philadelphia, but her letters sound as though she wished she had been permitted to stay home. She freely expressed her opinions in letters to friends and relatives at home, and Mrs. Bingham received her full share of comment. In January of 1799 she wrote that "Mrs. Bingham has at last thought proper to show her painted face here, & her two daughters—they were without paint." Mrs. Bingham's free use of cosmetics had bothered young Abigail Adams in Paris fourteen years before. Judging by orders sent to Paris for supplies of this kind, Mrs. Bingham continued to use them extensively. In June of 1791 she ordered thirty-six pots of face cream and as many "rouleaux of Pommade" of six different varieties and six pounds of powder of three varieties, as well as laces, artificial flowers and feathers for dress and hair ornaments.134 In the following October another order went for twenty-four more pots of the same six varieties and four more pounds of powder.135

132 Journal and Correspondence of A. A. Smith, II. 153-54, Mrs. Adams to Mrs. Smith, April 11, 1798.
133 Fisher, op. cit., 193.
134 Bingham Letter Book (H. S. P.), 25-27, Bingham to Pierre Richard, June 18, 1791.
135 Ibid., 130, Bingham to Etienne Cathalan, October 18, 1791.
In justice to Mrs. Bingham, it should be remembered that powdered hair was then the fashion, which would account for some pounds of that item. But there is nothing to show whether she divided the face cream among her numerous female relatives or used it all herself.

Mrs. Stoddert continued: 136

You must not suppose from my manner of speaking about Mrs. Bingham that I am offended with her for not coming before. I should have been better pleased if she had, to tell the truth; but if she had not come at all I should not have cared; though she is of great consequence, in some people’s opinion, in the city. As she has put it in my power to go to her house, I shall certainly see all that I can by asking for. I am determined to see her garden, her greenhouse, and everything else that is worth seeing. Their house and all the outside look very pretty, and I daresay the inside corresponds with the external.

Just about a year later Mrs. Stoddert sent to her sister a long account of one of Mrs. Bingham’s balls. 137

To begin with the beginning, and relate just as it really was, or as it appeared to me, I believe will be best. About half-past seven I called for Mrs. Harrison, and we made our appearance at Mrs. Bingham’s. But instead of her being in the little room, as you have been told, till all her company arrived, she was seated at the head of the drawing-room, I should call it, or, in other words, on one side of the chimney, with three ladies only. There were some young ladies in another room, where, her two daughters were also, who, upon my inquiring after their health, were sent for by their mamma. I should suppose that it was near nine o’clock before the dancing commenced. At the end of the first dance, or near it, punch and lemonade were brought in. That was the first refreshment. Some time after, I think, it was brought in again, and soon after the best ice-cream, as well as the prettiest, that I ever saw was carried around in beautiful china cups and gilt spoons. The latter I had seen there before.

Except punch and lemonade, nothing more to eat till supper, which we were summoned to at eleven, when the most superb thing of the kind which I ever saw was presented to our view,—though those who have been there before say that the supper was not as elegant as they had seen there. In the middle was an orange-tree with ripe fruit; and where a common spectator might imagine the root was, it was covered with evergreens, some natural and some artificial flowers. Nothing scarcely appeared on the table without evergreens to decorate it. The girondale, which hangs immediately over the table, was let down just to reach the top of the tree. You can’t think how beautiful it looked. I imagine there were 30 at the table, besides a table full in another room, and I believe every soul said, “How pretty!” as soon as they were seated; all in my hearing, as with one consent, uttered the same thing. The only meats I saw or heard of were a turkey, fowls, pheasants, and tongues, the latter the best that I ever tasted, which was the only meat I ate. The dessert (all was on the table) consisted of everything that one could conceive of except jelly; though I daresay

136 Kate Mason Rowland, “Philadelphia a Century Ago,” Lippincott’s Magazine (1898), LXII. 808.
137 Ibid., 816.
there was jelly, too, but, to my mortification, I could not get any. I never ate
better than at Mrs. Bingham's. Plenty of blanc mange, and excellent. Near me
were three different sorts of cake; I tasted all, but could eat of only one; the
others were indifferent. Besides a quantity to eat, there was a vast deal for
ornament, & some of them I thought would have delighted my little girl for
her babyhouse. In short, take it altogether, it was an agreeable entertainment
to me. Notwithstanding the crowd—or numbers, rather, for the house is so
large that it was not crowded—there was no noise or the least confusion.

At twelve o'clock or a little after Mrs. Harrison & I left the ball. We were
among the first to come away. Never did I see such a number of carriages, ex-
cept on a race-ground.

About a month after the yellow fever had broken out in Phila-
delphia in 1798, Bingham wrote from Black Point to a friend in New
York,\textsuperscript{188}

Your Ideas are very just with respect to the Salubrity of the Air of Bellevue
[his house]. We have enjoyed a perfect State of Health, a cool Summer, a great
deal of Exercise & Luxurious Living. We have had many Visits from our
Friends. . . . In Short, if my Pleasures had not been checked by contemplating
the Sufferings of our devoted City, I might truly say that I never should have
passed a more Agreeable Summer . . . [but] If Some Means cannot be adopted
to prevent the Introduction of these destructive Fevers into our Cities, they
will be in a great Measure depopulated.

The marriage of Ann Louisa Bingham, the eldest daughter of Mr.
and Mrs. Bingham, to the young Englishman, Alexander Baring,
had been scheduled to take place at “Lansdowne” in October of 1798.
But when it became plain that the city was in for a long siege of the
yellow fever, the plan was changed and the wedding took place
instead at Black Point on August 23.\textsuperscript{189} Bingham was much pleased
with the match, and wrote to a friend a few weeks later,\textsuperscript{140}

I experience the greatest Satisfaction from the consideration of the unex-
ceptionable character & amiable Qualities of the Gentleman with whom She is
connected. When in the progress of Time & the Course of Events, you Shall
witness So Solemn a Scene in your own Family, I hope my friend, you may
have cause to view it with the Same cheerfull Composure, that I witnessed this
Ceremony.

Bingham had had excellent opportunities to observe his new son-in-
law during the nearly three years he had been in America. He had
spent a good deal of time as a guest either at “Lansdowne” or at
“Bellevue,” and in the summer of 1796 had been with the Binghams
on their trip to Maine. Bingham did not live to see Alexander Bar-
ing's greatest success. Not only did he become the head of one of the greatest banking houses of his time, but as Lord Ashburton he won diplomatic laurels when he and Daniel Webster settled the long disputed eastern boundary of Maine. Twenty years after this wedding an Englishman who met the Barings in Paris remarked in his diary: 141

Mrs. Baring is . . . a very agreeable & I understand excellent woman. . . . Mr. Baring is, in his manners, the best model of a natural, unaffected, plain, sensible, well-informed liberal merchant I have ever known, of immense commercial concerns in England, on this continent & America, even beyond what the house of Hope's ever attained.

But the Binghams' younger daughter, Maria Matilda, was not so happy in her choice. In April, 1799, at the age of fifteen, she eloped with the Comte de Tilly. As he was "said to be of very bad character, in point of morals and rather low in Purse about 40 years old," it is no wonder that "the whole family are sunk in the deepest affliction and seem to admit of no consolation." 142 Mrs. Stoddert reported the event to her connections in Maryland in some detail. After expressing her dislike of French people in general, she told of the elopement. 143

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Bingham suspected any such thing. Between the hours of twelve and one in the night she eloped from her father's house and was carried by him [the Count] to some French woman's, where they were married by a Mr. Jones, a Universalist (all of a piece, you see!), and from thence went to his lodgings, a milliner's, where they were discovered by some persons who were in pursuit of her. Mrs. Bingham is very ill, I understand, and I have heard that Mr. Bingham has lost his senses. I really feel for them as I should for any body in their situation. This count is a man of horrid character in every sense of the word, besides not being worth a farthing; but that is nothing, for the lady's father is so rich that if a deficiency of money had been the only objection it could, and I daresay would, have been removed. What a misfortune it is to have only two children, with hundreds of thousands to give them, and for one to have acted as she has!

Mr. Bingham immediately set about securing a divorce for Maria Matilda, and it was granted by the Pennsylvania legislature on January 17, 1800. Bingham had claimed that the Count had bribed his servants to deliver letters secretly to his daughter, and had persuaded her to elope with him in order to extort money from her

141 Francis Bickley, The Diaries of Sylvester Douglas, II. 287-88.
142 J. J. Boudinot, Life, Public Services, Addresses and Letters of Elias Boudinot, II. 151, Boudinot to Samuel Bayard, April 12, 1799.
143 Rowland, op. cit., 810.
parents. The fact that he had actually surrendered his marital rights for a sum of money and then left the country was offered as proof of his plan. Precisely who was to blame will probably never be known. Certainly the Count was an old hand at that sort of game, and undoubtedly had led astray a girl who was hardly more than a child. But even a year before the elopement some people had noticed that Maria Matilda seemed to be the type who would attract trouble. There would always be some people who would put the blame on her parents for neglecting her or leaving her to the care of untrustworthy servants. But there is more evidence that Mrs. Bingham kept her daughters with her than that she shoved them aside, although she may have been less strict with them than some people thought she should have been. While the divorce was pending, Maria Matilda was frequently seen in the company of her mother, but dressed in a shockingly scanty fashion. For Mrs. Bingham's and Maria Matilda's defense, it should be remembered that the Bonapartes were coming into fashion and in a very short time the most proper ladies in America were dressed in much the same way as Maria Matilda had appeared.

Three years after this episode, Maria Matilda married Henry Baring, younger brother of her sister's husband. It seemed for a time as though she were settled for life, but after some years there was another divorce. She then went to France where she married a French nobleman and lived to an advanced age. Whatever her sins and follies may have been, she seems to have become quite a charming old lady with an excellent disposition.

In the spring of 1799, soon after Maria Matilda's elopement, the first child of the Barings was born, and at the age of thirty-five Mrs. Bingham was already a grandmother. It was not until late in 1800

144 Journal of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives (1800), X. 134, and Journal of the Senate X. 85.
145 Tilly, Memoires. His account of the Bingham affair is in III. 244-56.
147 See Twining, Gilmor, and Henry Knox Papers, M. H. S., XL. 25, Knox to Bingham, December 3, 1796.
148 Morison, op. cit., I. 137.
150 Fisher, op. cit., 196.
that William Bingham, Jr., the only son of the Binghams was born.\textsuperscript{151} As the capital had been transferred to Washington early that fall, and as Bingham was in the Senate, he was away from Philadelphia most of the time after the beginning of the new year until the inauguration of Jefferson on March 4, 1801. During this winter Mrs. Bingham caught cold as a result of a sleighing party and went into a rapid decline. Sleighing was an extremely popular diversion and the short time the snow was on the ground induced people to seize every possible opportunity of enjoying it.\textsuperscript{152} When Bingham returned from Washington he found Mrs. Bingham in a serious condition.

Her Disorder has been gaining Ground on her & the Physicians . . . have therefore recommended an immediate Change of Climate & I Shall embark with her to morrow or the next Day for the Island of Madeira, where I have great hopes that she will be restored to health, after experiencing the good Effects of a Sea Voyage,

he wrote to his agent in Maine.\textsuperscript{153} They set out on the 13th of April. As Benjamin Henry Latrobe reported it to a friend in Washington,\textsuperscript{154}

Mrs. Bingham, as the last resource for life, goes this day on board a Vessel intended to carry her to Lisbon. Her husband & daughter & Abby Willing accompany her & as she is scarcely expected to live a week her leaden coffin is part of the Cargo. What a melancholy set!

Thomas Willing wrote in his notebook,\textsuperscript{155}

My Daughter Bingham left . . . on board the Ship America Capt. Wills . . . reduced by a defluction on her breast to the lowest State of debility, My Daughter is induced to try this Voyage, as the last hope for relief. May God grant success to the attempt, & restore to health & to her family, this Amiable, deserving, & beloved Woman, justly esteemed an Ornament to Society & an honor to her Sex.

On May 26th he added,

this day Mr. Bingham return’d from Bermuda where my dear daughter died on the 11th of May 1801.

She was buried in the churchyard of St. Peters in Bermuda.

\textsuperscript{151} R. Blackwell’s Private Parish Register, H. S. P. William Baring was born June 9, 1799; Bingham Letters, H. S. P., 103-104, Cobb to Bingham, February 11, 1801.

\textsuperscript{152} William Priest, \textit{Travels in the United States of America commencing in the year 1793, and ending in 1797}, 47-48.

\textsuperscript{153} Bingham Letters, H. S. P., 107-109, Bingham to Cobb, April 9, 1801.

\textsuperscript{154} “Notes and Queries,” \textit{Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography} (1918), XLII. 183.

\textsuperscript{155} Wallace Papers, H. S. P., IV. 153.
Philadelphia in 1801 was no longer the place it had been for the last decade. The Morris failure of the late 1790's "dragging so many of our best families into poverty... repetitions of the fearful pestilence of 1793 in 1797 & 1798, diffused gloom & terror & drove away many residents," the removal of the capital to Washington in 1800, and finally the death of Mrs. Bingham who had contributed so largely to the glamour of the city, meant that many things ended with the century.

Mr. Bingham quickly arranged his affairs so that he could leave for England, placing some matters in the hands of Willings and Francis of Philadelphia, with Charles Willing Hare as his legal representative, and giving great latitude to Robert Gilmor of Baltimore in the investment of his surplus funds. Four months after Mrs. Bingham's death he was established in England. His elder daughter was already there, and he had taken Maria Matilda with him. After spending some time "at the Isle of Wight, & at Stratton Park, an Estate of Sir Fran' Baring's," they had settled in London.

A year after his wife's death, Bingham wrote to her brother from London, apparently in reply to a question as to when he intended to return to America,

My Plan of Life must essentially vary as the Scenes which constituted my domestic Happiness have vanished & thereby compelled me to Seek for other Resources, than those which have for So long a time engaged my Attention.

I am much pleased at the Information you give me of the Health of my dear Boy. I cannot express to you the degree of Tenderness & anxiety I feel on his Subject. he has Claims upon me of a different & more endearing Nature than are usually attached to the Situation of Children. He will never know the extent of the irreparable loss he has Sustained, nor feel that Poignancy of Grief with which the remembrance of their Misfortune afflicts his Sisters.

But he was not so wrapped up in his troubles as to be forgetful of the interests of others, and added as a postscript to this letter,

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156 Fisher, op. cit., 245.
157 Personal Manuscripts, Library of Congress, Bingham to Willings and Francis, October 2, 1801: Dreer Collection, H. S. P., 42; Bingham to Robert Gilmor, January 1, 1802; Gratz Collection, H. S. P., David Lenox to Charles Willing Hare, October 29, 1802; John A. McAllister Coll., Library Company of Philadelphia, C. W. Hare to George A. Baker, July 12, 1802.
158 Rufus King Papers, N. Y. H. S., XXVI, No. 94, Bingham to King "rec'd 25 Sept. 1801"; Personal Manuscripts, Library of Congress, Bingham to Willings and Francis, October 2, 1801.
159 Gratz Collection, H. S. P., Bingham to Thomas M. Willing, May 22, 1802.
I send you a curious Book which may be usefull to the different Branches of
the family who are making Garden Improvements—it is Forsyth on Fruit &
Forest Trees. you will show it to Mr. Francis & Mr. Clymer, who may
secure some usefull Hints from it. it is in a Box directed to Abby.

Alexander Baring came to America on business in the winter of
1802. In June, while in Philadelphia, he wrote to Robert Gilmor
that “My letters bring me the information of the Marriage of my
brother Henry with Miss Bingham an event which though it did not
much surprize me was unexpected.” Thereafter Bingham divided
his time chiefly between Bath, Tunbridge Wells, Stratton near Lon-
don, and London, with a visit of several months on the continent in
1803 when he stayed for a time in Paris and returned to England
by way of Switzerland, the Rhine, and Holland. By the fall of
1803 he had returned to London. In October he wrote to the agent
in charge of his Maine lands that “The Time which I limited for
my Excursion to Europe, being nearly expired, I contemplate return-
ing the next Season—except Some unforeseen Circumstances Should
occasion a further Detention.... Indeed my affairs essentially require
my Presence.” An unforeseen circumstance did occur. Sometime
between October and the following February, Bingham again went to
Bath. Sir Francis Baring arrived there early in February, and on
February 9 this notice appeared in the London Sun: “Died—on Mon-
day (6th) last, at Bath, in the 52nd year of his age, the Hon. Wm.
Bingham of Philadelphia, lately a Senator of the United States of
America.” He was buried in Bath Abbey and a monument to him is
in the south aisle near the west end of the church.

With the exception of a marriage portion of £10,000 sterling for
Maria Matilda, bequests of £2,000 each to his five executors (Alex-
ander Baring, Henry Baring, Robert Gilmor, Thomas Mayne Will-
ing and Charles Willing Hare) and to Mrs. Bingham’s sister Abby
Willing, and £1,000 each to her brother Richard Willing and her
niece Maria Clymer, Bingham’s vast estate was bequeathed to his

160 Dreer Collection, H. S. P., Alex. Baring to R. Gilmor, June 16, 1802.
161 Bingham Letters, H. S. P., 131-37, Bingham to Cobb, January 1, 1802; 167-70 and
127-30 Bingham to Cobb, August 28, 1803; Gratz Collection, H. S. P., Bingham to
Willings and Francis, March 28, 1803; Rufus King Papers, N. Y. H. S., XXVI, No. 93,
Bingham to King, November 24, 1801; XXVI, No. 95, Bingham to King, January 30,
1803.
162 Bingham Letters, H. S. P., 171-76, Bingham to Cobb, October 15, 1803.
163 London Sun, February 4, 1804. 164 Sawtelle, op. cit., 225.
The trustees were instructed to sell any of the real estate they thought advisable and to invest the proceeds in American stocks. The trust could be continued indefinitely through the election of new trustees and is still in existence. Bingham's daughters remained in Europe, and, according to the terms of his will, his son joined them in 1808. All of the Bingham descendants have continued to reside away from America.

In spite of the influence of the Binghams on Philadelphia when that city was the capital, there is no reminder of them left but the statue of Franklin over the door of the Library Company of Philadelphia and their copy of the Lansdowne portrait of Washington, placed in the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts by the trustees of the Bingham estate.

New York City

MARGARET L. BROWN

165 Philadelphia Wills, No. 1, 365-69.