The Pemberton papers, voluminous and rich in material for eighteenth-century colonial and Revolutionary history, are housed in the Manuscript Division of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Most of the manuscripts have been in the possession of the Society for many years, but some, such as those in the Parrish Collection, have been acquired recently. The Pemberton manuscripts consist of one very large collection, known as the Pemberton Papers, and a number of individual volumes and boxes belonging to other collections. Among the latter are the Pemberton papers in the Etting and Parrish collections, which apparently were sorted from the main group before any of the manuscripts had found their way into The Historical Society. Naturally, these papers deal more or less with special phases of history, notably politics, which were of special interest to the collectors.

The Pemberton papers, which range in date from 1641 to 1880, are fullest and of greatest value for the stirring years between 1740 and 1808. The main collection consists of over fifteen thousand items in seventy catalogued volumes and three uncatalogued boxes. The correspondence is found in the first fifty-six volumes and the three boxes. The remaining fourteen volumes contain account books, memoranda, deeds, legal documents, genealogical notes, estate papers, indentures, and land patents. The manuscripts can be divided into the papers of Phineas Pemberton, 1650-1702, Israel Pemberton, 1695-1754, Israel Pemberton, Jr., 1715-1779, James Pemberton, 1723-1809, John Pemberton, 1727-1795, and their descendants. The Etting Collection has two volumes of catalogued Pemberton papers (1654-1806), devoted chiefly to political matters, and one volume of miscellaneous papers pertaining largely to the early history of Pennsylvania. This group also contains an account book and a ledger book belonging to Phineas, and five receipt books of John Pemberton. In the uncatalogued Parrish Collection there are two boxes of Pemberton manuscripts, among which are most of
the extant papers of the Friendly Association. The Cox, Parrish, Wharton Papers (1600–1900) contain miscellaneous Pemberton manuscripts scattered through about fifteen uncatalogued volumes. Consequently, these often furnish the desired letter missing from the main collection. A few Pemberton manuscripts are to be found among the John Hughes Papers, in the Jonah Thompson Collection, Thompson Collectanea, and in the Charles Thomson Papers of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The American Philosophical Society has a large letter book of Israel Pemberton, jr., devoted to commercial correspondence, 1745–1747. The Friends Book Store, Arch Street, Philadelphia, has two or three boxes of letters concerning the Pembertons and other Quaker exiles from Philadelphia during the Revolution. Haverford College also has many papers pertaining to the Quaker prisoners. Some of these are Pemberton letters. The Pembertons were wealthy Philadelphia Friends, and their papers comprise one of the largest collections in the category of Quaker manuscripts. In their broader aspects these papers are rich in material for the social, economic, and political history of the colonies, and of Pennsylvania and the Quakers in particular. The collection is distinguished not only for its size and scope, but for the number of individual correspondents and the many places represented in the English-speaking world. Like other colonial collections it contains an extensive correspondence between England and America through which the impact of the one upon the other can readily be traced.

Phineas Pemberton and his wife Phoebe were among the Quakers who swarmed out of England during the exodus of 1681–1682. They came in the latter year in the ship Submission. People of substance, if not position, they brought with them ample furnishings for both farm and home in wilderness America. At first the Pembertons settled on the banks of the Delaware several miles above Philadelphia, but a few years later Phineas bought a second tract of land some distance from the river and farther north in Bucks County. Here they made their home and named it Bolton after the borough they had left in England.

The papers of Phineas and Phoebe Pemberton are relatively few, but those of their son Israel, 1695–1754, run through many volumes. At an early age Israel was sent to Philadelphia to be educated in
the newly established Quaker Latin Grammar school. Here the boy came under that stern pedagogue, Daniel Pastorius, who so soundly whipped the lad that his father promptly withdrew him from the school. Israel was later apprenticed to Samuel Carpenter, merchant. Subsequently he himself rose to become one of the first merchants of Philadelphia. He was also one of the principal leaders in the Society of Friends and the Pennsylvania Assembly, in which he sat for twenty years. Israel was survived by three sons, Israel, James and John, around whom the greater part of the Pemberton correspondence centers. John, the youngest son, of a deeply religious nature, devoted much of his life to ministrations among Friends in America and Europe. Israel and James, possessing a capacity as well as a desire for leadership in public affairs, soon became prominent in the councils of the day. All three, for a time at least, were leading merchants and exceedingly successful in increasing the family fortune.

The Quaker world with which the Pembertons were associated centered in London and Philadelphia. Both cities served as clearing houses for information regarding the affairs of the Society of Friends. Next to the London correspondence, that with Dublin probably occupies the greatest space among the British correspondence in the Pemberton papers. The great number of New World Quaker communities represented in the Pemberton correspondence is surprising. The Quaker population of Pennsylvania so overshadowed that of the other colonies that the sizable settlements of Friends elsewhere are often overlooked. New Jersey, Delaware, and Rhode Island had many Quakers, and their assemblies usually contained a goodly number of Friends, often enough at one time or another actually to constitute a controlling interest. The rest of the colonies from Maine to Georgia had scattered Quaker communities, and apparently there were Friends living in all the British West Indies. With the exception of business papers, the inter-colonial letters of the Pembertons are usually devoted to social correspondence or to affairs of the Society of Friends. Through their service as clerks of the Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly meetings this family constituted among Friends a principal medium of exchange for ideas and information. It is not at all strange that Israel Pemberton, the younger, came to bear the fitting sobriquet, "King of the Quakers."
As leaders of the Quaker meetings the Pembertons carried over into politics the philosophy and teachings of the Society of Friends. They became a bulwark and defense for Quakerism against its opponents both in Pennsylvania and England. Quaker control of the Pennsylvania Assembly was lost in 1755. After this the Friends attempted to re-establish their power through various expedients. The war ended, they united the Anglicans and other conservatives of the East and successfully maintained control of the Assembly until, finally, the dissatisfied elements in the Province broke their power at the opening of the Revolution.

In the realm of social history the Pemberton papers are equally valuable. The topics of health, marriage, funerals, and religion continually came up for discussion. The marriage of Joseph Pemberton, son of Israel, jr., to Ann Galloway of Maryland, furnishes a fine study of the upperclass wedding. Incidentally, a member of the Pemberton family still possesses the stately portraits of Joseph and Ann, probably painted by John Hesselius at the time of their marriage in 1767. Israel Pemberton, jr., who lived in a large mansion on Chestnut Street—where the acme of Philadelphia society then resided—owned also a country estate in Germantown, a plantation in South Philadelphia, and Bolton, the old homestead in Bucks County; and the letters of his family provide intimate glimpses of their life in these various homes. Israel Pemberton’s second wife, Mary, may be said to be representative of the ladies of the first families of Philadelphia. Her neat and orderly letters reflect a being, resourceful and intelligent, who faced life with a spirit of self-confidence tempered with Quaker humbleness. This attitude of mind appears to be characteristic of the eighteenth-century Quakeress who commanded no little influence in the councils of the Society through the Women’s Meeting and female preaching.

The Pemberton manuscripts shed considerable light upon the eighteenth-century humanitarian movements among the Quakers, especially that to abolish slavery within the Society of Friends. The abolition crusade received its impetus largely from the preaching of Samuel Fothergill, brother of Dr. John Fothergill, who, journeying through the colonies in 1755, attacked slavery wherever he found it. All three of the Pemberton brothers took an active part in the movement for abolition and were not a little responsible for the
banishing of slavery among the Quakers in Pennsylvania by the time of the Revolution. Material relative to this movement is found in the Pemberton, the Etting, and the Cox, Parrish, Wharton collections between the dates 1750 and 1808.

As has been mentioned, the Pemberton papers contain a mass of material pertaining to the Society of Friends. The deliberations and proceedings of the Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings, the spiritual labors of visiting preachers, and the general state of affairs within the Society constitute the substance of much of this correspondence. These papers are best utilized in conjunction with other Quaker manuscripts, such as the journals of the various meetings. Many of the latter are held by the Friends’ Book Store of Philadelphia and others are in the Church and Meeting Collection (1692–1910), of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Much material on the early institutional history of Pennsylvania is supplied by the Pemberton papers. Nearly all the collections in which Pemberton papers are found, and especially the main one, have a wealth of correspondence relating to the Pennsylvania Hospital, its early medical staff and equipment. Israel and James were life-long managers of the Hospital and each was tireless in his efforts to improve it. They worked in harmony with Dr. John Fothergill and other English philanthropists who were keenly interested in the experiment which they helped to support. In any study of this subject the Pemberton manuscripts should be supplemented by the journals of the Pennsylvania Hospital still in the hospital’s custody.

The Pembertons were quick to support any enterprise for civic improvement in harmony with their religion. Israel Pemberton was a member of Franklin’s Library Company, the “Hand in Hand” Fire Company, the American Philosophical Society and several other associations. Next to the Hospital, the Pembertons’ greatest interest in civic welfare seemed to lie in education. Israel Pemberton, jr., gave much time to the betterment of the Quaker school system, helped finance several private schools, and endeavored, with apparently little success, to send teachers to the Indians, and to induce Indian boys to come to the settlements to be taught.

The hundreds of commercial letters left by the Pembertons are for the most part in the main collection, and in Israel’s letter book in the possession of the American Philosophical Society. The Pem-
berton trade extended to London, Dublin, Lisbon, the Madeiras, Surinam, Antigua. Boston and Charleston were frequent ports of call for their ships. The Pemberton papers are heavy with bills of lading, invoices, notices of remittances, references to rates of exchange, bills of exchange, and specie, market quotations, crop expectancies, marine insurance and premiums, and claims for losses at sea. The correspondence takes the student through periods of war and depression, of high profits and frequent heavy losses.

For the period of the French and Indian War, Israel Pemberton, supported by English Quakers, took an active interest in the Indian trade. This enterprise was related to the activities of the Friendly Association and the urgent need of pacifying the Indians along the Ohio. Much light is thrown upon this by the three boxes of manuscripts in the Pemberton Papers. These letters are the sequel to those of Volume I (Pemberton Papers) in the Etting Collection, and taken together with them illuminate Quaker political activities during the critical years 1755–1759.

Correspondence of a political nature for the decade 1740–1750 includes letters from Richard Partridge, agent for several colonies, including Pennsylvania, at the Court of St. James, to John Kinsey, Chief Justice and Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly. That for the period 1750–1775 is chiefly with the prominent and wealthy Quakers of London: Dr. John Fothergill, the eminent Scottish physician, John Hunt, the merchant, and David Barclay and Hinton Brown, the bankers. All in all the papers contribute information relative to nearly every important phase of the political history of Pennsylvania from 1739 to the close of the Revolution. In addition there are letters relating to state and national politics for the period 1783–1809, part of the correspondence of James Pemberton. The Pemberton papers also contain much material relating to the Quaker-German political alliance, the antipathy existing between the Quakers and Presbyterians which colored the political history of colonial Pennsylvania, and the Provincial disputes with the Proprietors. Many of the papers touch upon the pre-revolutionary controversies with the British government. Like others of their class, the Pembertons objected to the new British colonial policy, but feared the democratic aspirations at large in America more than the demands of Crown and Parliament.
The Pembertons were the leaders of the strict Quakers, those who refused to modify their pacificism even when confronted by war and invasion. They not only thwarted all efforts of the government to conscript men for military service and frustrated efforts to raise defense appropriations, but refused to pay the taxes levied for the prosecution of war. The latter stand was too radical for most Quakers and apparently but a few forced the government to collect taxes under duress. From England, Dr. John Fothergill and others counseled the Pembertons—with little success—to pursue a more conciliatory course. Thus pacificism is inextricably interwoven with politics in the Pemberton papers—one is part of the story of the other.

Valuable as the Pemberton manuscripts are acknowledged to be, they, too, have their limitations. Often the reader finds them more tantalizing than informative; or given over to obstruse religious argument when he hoped for a detailed account of contemporary occurrences. In reference to politics especially they can best be utilized in conjunction with non-Quaker collections, such as the Richard Peters Papers, 1704–1776, and the Penn Manuscripts (correspondence of Thomas Penn), particularly the volumes on Indian affairs and official correspondence. Taken as a whole, however, the Pemberton papers constitute a great reservoir of historical material, a fruitful and perennial source for the early history of Pennsylvania.

Ithaca College

Theodore Thayer

Charles Lee to Benjamin Rush

Among the manuscripts purchased by The Historical Society at the Alexander Biddle sale in New York was the very interesting letter, from Charles Lee to Benjamin Rush, which is printed below. After the court martial and twelve-months suspension from the army which followed his actions at the Battle of Monmouth, Lee retired to his Virginia estate and occupied himself by writing complaining letters to Congress and his friends. As a result of a particularly insulting letter to Congress, Lee was finally cashiered from the army on January 10, 1780. The letter here printed affords ample
indication that none of these disciplinary measures in any way punctured his self-conceit. Lee died October 2, 1782.

Berkley County, April ye 22 1780

Sir

The letter of apology which I did myself the Honour of addressing to Congress has, I find been publish'd, and I confess myself much disappointed in finding it not accompanied by some favourable comments. The acknowledging and apologizing for any want of decorum, either in words or actions, towards any Individual, and much more so towards a public Body, has ever been in my way of thinking, a most becoming measure; and on this occasion I hope I shall not give offence in observing that one of the greatest defects in the American character seems to be the almost universal rule they have laid down never to confess themselves in the wrong be it ever so palatable; for instance General Washington's relation to Congress of the affair of Monmouth from misinformation at the time He wrote it (for I cannot believe He wou'd wittingly impose a falsehood on the Public) scarcely contains three sentences of truth, and He ought of course the moment He was convinc'd of his misinformation, to have made some reparation by acknowledging his error, of which He must have been convinc'd by the perusal of the Court Martial unless He never condescended to read more of it than the bare Sentence; I confess I was myself persuaded as well as were many others that He wou'd have taken this honourable step. With respect to the wicked absurd and ridiculous sentence pass'd by the Court Martial, I am confident that it was brought about by the art and management of a particular Junto who waited their opportunity in a thin house; I am confident, had the House been full, that I shou'd have been acquitted with honour, as I have not a doubt but that the consideration of Justice alone wou'd have influenc'd the generality of that Assembly—I think, Sir, I am warranted in advancing this opinion, and in giving the Epithets I have done to this transaction, because proofs cou'd be brought that of the Individuals who compos'd this Majority, some never read the Tryal till long after the confirmation, and that others, as they have profess'd in their open Hours, acted contrary to their sentiments of the real merits of the
cause, on the pernicious principle that Justice must give way to expedience, by which I suppose they must have meant that as General Washington is consider'd a necessary Man, He is to be indulged in the sacrifice of any Officer whom from Jealousy pique or Caprice He may have devoted to destruction. From the Character, Sir, of the present Congress, I can have little apprehension of being thought impertinent in offering the three following queries to their consideration. 1st. ly:—Is it possible to disobey discretionary orders? I might have misconducted myself, but to disobey discretionary orders is as absolutely an impossibility as to ru[n] a dead Man: and that the Generals orders were discretionary is manifested not only by every evidence of the Court Martial; but even by his own letter as far as the part of his letter relative to the orders He had given is intelligible. 2dly. Whether a letter of remonstrance (never published or design'd to be publish'd by the Writer) from the second in command to the first for injurious treatment falls under any American article of War? a law which cou'd be construed into such a sense wou'd render the commander in chief so compleatly despotic as to be too hard for a Russian digestion. 3dly. Whether admitting the retreat to have been mine which it certainly was not, but owing to a fortunate accident; but admitting it to have been mine, whether the retreat of fifteen hundred Men from eight or nine thousand in a Country unfavourable to our Species of Troops as being totally defective in Cavalry; our flanks uncover'd; remote from any support, and perform'd without the loss of a single Gun, a single Battalion, or a single Platoon can be deem'd unnecessary or scandalous? I certainly Gentlemen shou'd not hold this language to a Body of Men whose liberality of mind I had been taught to entertain a low opinion; and as I had in my last letter so freely and in such strong terms express'd my concern for the disrespect I was hurried into I flatter myself that the present Congress will think it not inconsistent with their dignity to pass some public censure on the iniquitors decision of a prede-termin'd faction in a former one; and publickly to make some reparation for the many injuries which have been heap'd on the head of a Man who has risk'd his fortune, sacrific'd his military pretentions, his Relations, connexions and powerful Friends to the American cause; in which he thought were comprehended not only the Political rights of the aggregate, but the civil rights of every Individual; but
however the former may ultimately be establish'd, the latter at present, most certainly are not, as the great basis, the Freedom of the Press has no more existence in this Country than at Rome or Constantinople, or Constantinople [sic]; and it is sanguinely hoped by every real enemy to Tyranny whatever garb it assumes that the present Congress, among their recommendations to the several States, will above all recommend the restoration and protection of this Palladium both of political and civil Liberty.

I am, Sir, with the greatest respect Yur most humble and obedt Servt.

CHARLES LEE.