John Leacock and The Fall of British Tyranny

Readers of the Pennsylvania Gazette of June 27, 1751, were advised that John Leacock, goldsmith, had removed from Second Street to the Sign of the Cup, in Water Street, Philadelphia, “where he continues to carry on the business as before; and gentlemen may be supplied with all sorts of new and fashionable plate, at the most reasonable rates, and may depend upon its being done in the neatest manner. N.B. He likewise has some goldsmiths tools to dispose of viz:—Raising and bellying anvils, bottom stakes, binding wire, crucibles, files, etc.”¹ The twenty-one-year-old gold and silver smith who inserted the notice had finished an apprenticeship, gained experience in the practice of his craft, and was establishing himself in the life of the city.

Born in Philadelphia on December 21, 1729,² he was the son of John Leacock (1689-1752), pewtersmith and shopkeeper,³ who had come as a young man to Philadelphia from Barbados and had invested in land and in the earliest iron furnaces in the province.⁴ The senior Leacock served as a vestryman at Christ Church, where his marriage took place on July 3, 1715, to Mary Cash (1694-1765), sister of a founder of the historic fishing company known at its institution in 1732 as the Colony in Schuylkill.

The goldsmith’s mother had been brought to Philadelphia as a small child by her parents, Caleb and Elizabeth (Wheat) Cash, of

1 Alfred Coxe Prime, The Arts & Crafts in Philadelphia, Maryland and South Carolina, 1721-1785 ([Topsfield, Mass.], 1929), 76-77.
2 Record in the English Bible of the Cash-Leacock family (inscribed “Mary Leacock Her Book given her by Her father, May ye 1st: 1716”), recently acquired by the American Philosophical Society (APS).
3 The inventory of his shop lists a large stock of pewter and such merchandise as “32 Pairs of Childrens Stockings, Mittens, Handkerchiefs.” Original papers filed with Philadelphia Administration Book F-51, 469, City Hall. There is no indication that the senior Leacock ever worked in silver, and the mark and reputation ascribed to him in a recent work (J. Bennett Nolan, Printer Strahan’s Book Account, a Colonial Controversy [Reading, Pa., 1939], 20-21) represent confusion with his son. This account is also in error in claiming Swedish origin for the Barbados Leacock family, which was of English descent.
Birmingham, England. Caleb Cash was a “sole maker” by profession, and with his Birmingham kinsfolk, the Reads, Norths, and Wilkinsons, represented the English artisan stock which arose to economic and social prominence in the new colonial city. He was the great-uncle of Deborah Franklin.5

Nothing is known of the early years of the Leacock children; five of a family of ten reached adulthood.6 The three sons learned trades and young John was doubtless apprenticed by his prosperous pewter-smith father to an established gold and silver smith, possibly Philip Syng, Jr. Family connections, which embraced a printer brother-in-law, David Hall, a lawyer brother-in-law, James Read, and Benjamin Franklin, made ready contacts for John Leacock with important, thinking men who were laying the cultural foundations of Philadelphia.

The making of silver plate and working in gold in eighteenth-century Philadelphia were profitable for John Leacock. Able to support a wife, he was married at Gloria Dei Church on August 2, 1752, to Hannah McCally, and was soon raising a family.7 Shortly afterward, his father died, and Leacock shared in a sizable inheritance. He changed his place of business, and on November 29, 1753, the columns of the Pennsylvania Gazette again advised the public8:

John Leacock, Goldsmith. Having removed from Walnut-street, in Front-street, opposite Mr. Norris’s Alley, at the sign of the Golden Cup, hereby gives notice, that he continues to carry on the business as formerly; where all persons in town and county may be supplied with gold and silver work, at the most reasonable rates, as usual: Those gentlemen that are pleased to favour him with their custom, may depend upon the best usage, and have their work finished in the neatest manner, and newest fashions:

5 Many members of the English branch of the family were visited in Birmingham by Benjamin Franklin. In a letter to his wife, dated London, Sept. 16, 1758, he gives a detailed account of those he saw and their relationship to Deborah and to their friend, her mother’s cousin, Caleb Cash, Jr., of Philadelphia (brother of Mrs. Leacock). John M. Cowell, “The Family of Deborah Franklin,” PMHB, VIII (1884), 403-406. A genealogical sketch of the Cash-Leacock family is in preparation by the author.

6 In addition to John, the subject of this article, the surviving children were: Mary (1720-1781), who married David Hall, Franklin’s printing partner; Susannah (1722-1774), who married James Read, lawyer, member of the Pennsylvania Assembly from Berks County, member of Congress; Samuel (1726-1766), who married Esther Fleeson, and perished in a fire in Bridgetown, Barbados; and Joseph (1734-1804), clock and watch maker, dealer in potash, Inspector of Pot and Pearl Ashes of the Port of Philadelphia.

7 By Hannah McCally, who died Dec. 11, 1767 (Leacock family Bible record), John Leacock had two sons, one of whom died in infancy.

8 A. C. Prime, 77.
Those that deal with him in the wholesale way, shall have a reasonable allowance; he gives the best prices for old gold and silver. He likewise makes the neatest mourning-rings, and repairs and mends old ones, and where gilding upon any metal is perform'd to the greatest perfection.

Front Street, Leacock's new address, was the center of Philadelphia gold and silver smithing. The shop of the master of the craft, Philip Syng, Jr., was there in a house "seven doors below the Coffee-house."  

Leacock kept his sign of the golden cup throughout a succession of moves and gradually came into the foremost circle of Philadelphia workers in precious metals. Still in Front Street, he advertised in the Gazette on May 15, 1757, a sampling of his skilled work, a "Variety of Silver-mounted Small Swords, either chased, gadroon, or fluted, or plain." His shop was naturally filled with the usual supply of eighteenth-century bibelots, and he offered for sale on January 25, 1759, a great miscellany of silver tea services, snuff and patch boxes, buckles, seals, buttons, rings, unset stones, smelling bottles, thimbles, watches, steel drawing plates, files, stone burnishers, crucible and blue melting pots, which had been "Just imported from the Carolina, Capt. Duncan, and Arrabella, Capt. Bradshaw, from London."  

His beautifully and simply made silver plate was his chief work and became much sought after by rich colonial merchants. The congregation of St. Paul's Church purchased one of his tankards at a cost of £19 10s. and presented it to the Reverend Hugh Neill on June 15, 1768, in order to show their appreciation of his "disinterested ministerial services" as their rector. Other pieces of Leacock's plate, bearing his marks, still exist.
Leacock's craft seems to have brought in elements of the engraver's and printer's work, and his commonplace book, "Observations, Experiments, &c., Extracted from the Philosophical Transactions Respecting Farming, Gardening, &c."

15 contains directions for "Engraving," "Aquaforis for etching," "Engraving the Hair & the Beard," and for "Preparation of Black Printing Ink for engraving on copper." He was probably in close touch with the printing establishment of Franklin and Hall, but the theory that David Hall worked as a silversmith under Leacock's tutelage seems incorrect. The Philadelphia goldsmith, David Hall (who died c. 1779), seems to be distinct from the printer.16

John Leacock soon took his place as a substantial Philadelphian. His signature appeared on a petition dated August 1, 1754, for a lot on which to build St. Peter's Church.17 He was admitted on May 1, 1759, as the eighty-eighth member of the Colony in Schuylkill, the gentlemen's fishing society of which his uncle had been a founder, and subsequently served as fourth coroner of that organization.18 Identifying himself with the dominant merchant class, Leacock was one of a large group of prominent citizens who signed the Nonimportation Resolution in 1765.19

His ties of friendship as well as kinship with the Franklins continued. Deborah Franklin, writing in her homely and uneducated fashion to her husband in England, on September 22, 1765, recorded visits from "my three Cusins Lakockes and Mr. Hall nabor Shoemakers Sones nabor whisters Son and more of the nabors."20 John Leacock seems upon this occasion to have been in the company of his brothers, Samuel and Joseph, and his brother-in-law Hall. His widowed mother, Mary Leacock, died shortly after, in October, 1765. Young Sally Franklin, in a letter to her father dated Philadelphia,
October 14, 1765, wrote, "Cousin Laycock was found dead in her Bed yesterday morning without any Illness."\(^{21}\)

As success increased and its financial benefits accrued, John Leacock gradually relinquished his active career as a gold and silver smith, and sought retirement in the country. He purchased for £26 a plantation of some twenty-eight acres in Lower Merion Township, seven miles from Philadelphia, on October 30, 1767.\(^{22}\) The goldsmith, for so he was still described in the deed to his new property, had barely established his family on the plantation before his wife died.

The transplanted artificer learned how to farm, assisted by Philip Miller's *Gardener's Dictionary* and John Mills's *Husbandry*, listed in his commonplace book as part of his library. He continued the crops of wheat and buckwheat planted by the previous owner, raised vegetables and fruit as well, and kept some stock, chronicling all he did in the commonplace book.\(^{23}\)

Ordinary farming was a full-time pursuit, but John Leacock, during the first months of his rural experiment in the spring of 1768, became sidetracked into a new planting venture—the cultivation of a vineyard for the production of wines.\(^{24}\) The first entry in his commonplace book records vines planted on April 16, 1768, for "Mr Garret, Mr S. Morris, G: Shreir, Doct' Sonmans, S: Kirk, G: Morrison, Chris: Sower." Among the species planted were white, blue, and purple grapes, as well as Lisbon and Muscadine vines. Other scions were had from Samuel Smith and from "Doct' Extine's Garden near Germantown," and, in addition, he planted on March 27, 1775,

\(^{21}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{22}\) *Philadelphia Deed Book I-12, 52, City Hall.* On Sept. 5, 1772, he secured a mortgage of £200 from James Stephens, a Philadelphia baker. To secure the sum of the mortgage and unpaid interest, John Leacock, "Goldsmith, and Martha, his Wife," transferred title to John's watchmaker brother, Joseph Leacock. *Philadelphia Deed Book I-17, 493, City Hall.*

\(^{23}\) The proprietary tax list of the county of Philadelphia in 1769 shows that Leacock possessed in Lower Merion Township: twenty-eight acres, two horses, one cow, and two servants—assessment, £41 19s. 4d. *Pennsylvania Archives*, 3rd Series, XIV, 103.

\(^{24}\) Interest in the manufacture of wine in the province had been strong since 1683 when William Penn brought over several Frenchmen, "skilful vigneron," to plant a vineyard upon his Springettsbury estate. As an industry, wine manufacture did not flourish, although a number of private and corporate vineyards were established near the city in the eighteenth century, all on a local basis. J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884* (Philadelphia, 1884), III, 2281-2282. Leacock's vineyard was on the eastern section of the grounds of the present Waldron Academy, Merion, Pa., just west of the old Seven Mile Stone.
"6 Cuttings of Vines brought from Madeira by Capt. Kerlin viz: one in the Vineyard opposite the House, the 6th vine of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Row towards the Ford Road."

Fired by a newspaper article, and perhaps by acquaintance with its author, he formulated a plan for the establishment of a public vineyard, which he hoped would develop an industry for the benefit of all the colonies together. What he set out to do and how he hoped to make his project pay, was set forth in a letter to the American Philosophical Society:\textsuperscript{25}

Gentlemen.

In the Year 1768 in the New York & Maryland Gazzette, a late worthy Member of your Society, (The Honourable Edward Antill Esqr) proposed and Recommended to the Gentlemen of Fortune & Public Spirit, in the different Colonies in North America, & the Bodies of Men Laudably associated, for promoting of Arts, Manufactures & Agriculture; the Planting a Public Vineyard by Subscription, for the good of all the Provinces, from which might be drawn such vines or Cuttings free of any expence, as might best suit each Province; But as that important proposition at that time was not properly attended to, nothing farther was then done.\textsuperscript{26}

Since which the Subscriber, having been employed in the undertaking, solely, and without any assistance from Public Bodies of Men, or Private Persons, notwithstanding his meeting with many discouraging difficulty's natural Concomitant, in the beginning of such undertaking, has, by dint of Industry, Perseverance & great expence, brought about a Pleasing Prospect of its being practicable & promises future Success, as Several Gentlemen members of your Society, & others have been witnesses of, and expressed their Approbation & good wishes, in the most Pleasing terms, & in encouraging me to enlarge my plan & Set on foot a Lottery to enable me to employ proper hands, procure foreign Vines & inclose it in a Secure manner & & & gave me from time to time such assurances of theirs & the Public's approba-

\textsuperscript{25} Manuscript Communications to the American Philosophical Society, vol. on "Trade, Navigation, Manufactures, etc.," Item No. 5, APS.

\textsuperscript{26} Judge Edward Antill (1701-1770), of Shrewsbury, N. J., member of the Provincial Assembly and Governor's Council of New Jersey, fruit farmer and distiller, benefactor of King's College (now Columbia University), elected a member of the American Philosophical Society in 1768. William Nelson, "Edward Antill and Some of his Descendants," Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society, 3rd Series, II (1897), 25-42. In addition to publicizing his pet scheme by advertising in the press, Antill, who is described as "an oddity," wrote in May, 1769, An Essay on the cultivation of the Vine, and the making and preserving of Wine, Suited to the different Climates in North-America, which was read by Charles Thomson to the American Philosophical Society, and although not seriously considered, published in its Transactions, Old Series, I (1771), 117-197.
tion, that I need not doubt it's success. Having therefore the undertaking much at heart and sincerely wishing it's prosperity not only for my own sake, but others who may hereafter incline to embark in such an undertaking, & who may be assured of all the assistance with respect to Cuttings & Plants, & all the Advice in my power to give, Gratis, which I flatter myself may be of service to them; am come to a resolution of proceeding with the Lottery, & am advised to Solicit Gentlemen your Countenance and Encouragement in it, not as Subscribers, but as Adventurers, either as a Body, or as Individuals, in purchasing any number—of Tickets as you may judge convenient, not doubting but the kind approbation & sanction of so respectable a Body will have it's due weight with other encouragers of every Laudable undertaking, for which I shall not be backward in point of Gratitude, & am Gentlemen

Your much Obliged
Humble Servant
John Leacock

Philadæ decr 29th
1772

Leacock also advertised his project in the Pennsylvania Gazette of February 17, 1773:

The subscriber has been engaged for some time in planting, cultivating and improving a vineyard in Merion Township, within seven miles of Philadelphia, solely and without assistance from public bodies of men or individuals. John Leacock. N.B. Public Vineyard. Intended that the cutting of vines shall be free to whoever wants to grow them.

Although it is difficult to judge public reaction to this altruistic and patriotic scheme, Leacock's letter was read to the American Philosophical Society on January 15, 1773, and that body seems to have given him some support, for he went ahead with the intended "Public Vineyard Cash Lottery" in the same year. Leacock continued at least through 1775 to cultivate his vines. The returns of the provincial tax of Philadelphia County for 1774 show that his farm supported one horse and one cow, but no servants, and was taxed £44 16s. Leacock's assertion that he was doing all his own labor in the vineyard seems to be valid!

27 Lottery tickets signed by John Leacock, Society Miscellaneous Collection, Box 12-A, HSP.
28 Pennsylvania Archives, 3rd Series, XIV, 356.
The farm once again had a mistress, for on June 17, 1770, the Reverend Henry Muhlenberg, the Philadelphia clergyman soon to achieve patriotic renown, performed John Leacock’s second marriage. The bride, seventeen-year-old Martha Ogilby, was nearly twenty-three years Leacock’s junior and not two years older than his son Samuel. By Martha, John had three children, all of whom lived to maturity.

Although Leacock laid aside his work in metals for some years to devote himself to the vineyard and farm, he may have continued to fashion some pieces and was certainly the only member of the Leacock family working as a silversmith at this time. The statement that Joseph Leacock was, “about 1766, a jeweler and silversmith” is clearly in error.

In what leisure he had, the Lower Merion farmer devoted attention to politics. The Philadelphia branch of the Sons of Liberty, which had been organized to protest the passage of the Stamp Act and which under cover of secrecy enforced nonimportation resolutions, organized on May 4, 1772, a new society. This organization, seeking a native American name, called itself the Society of the Sons of St. Tammany of Philadelphia, commemorating a venerated Indian sage, an early chief of the Delawares. John Leacock identified himself with the organization in its early years and was likely one of its founders. At meetings of the Society he mingled with such eminent members as Chief Justice Chew, John Dickinson, the Hamiltons,

29 Samuel Leacock, who came of age in 1775, was given a position in the firm of his Hall cousins, and advertises as “bookseller, inkseller, stationer, At Hall and Sellers in Market,” on July 9, 1777. Copperplate printing, which he may first have learned in his father’s shop, was his specialty and the work which he later practiced in Strawberry Alley in 1784. H. Glenn Brown and Maude O. Brown, A Directory of the Book-Arts and Book Trade in Philadelphia to 1820 (New York, 1950), 74. Samuel’s half-brother, John Leacock, eldest son of the second marriage, was a bookbinder in Philadelphia in 1813.

30 Made by Charles Durang in History of the Philadelphia Stage Between the Years 1749 and 1855. Partly compiled from the papers of his father, the late John Durang; with notes by the editors of the Philadelphia Sunday Dispatch; First Series, 1749-1821, beginning in the issue of May 7, 1854, “Vol. 1, A.D. 1749-1818, Arranged and Illustrated by Thompson Westcott” (1868), 14, manuscript in the Library of the University of Pennsylvania.

31 Joseph Leacock appears in Philadelphia life in only two traceable capacities: as a watchmaker, the trade to which he was trained, and as a dealer in potash. Although it was to Susannah (Leacock) Read that Benjamin Franklin sent “sincere love to our dearest Sukey” when writing to James Read in 1745, to Joseph Leacock and his partner, Robert Towers, was directed from London on Aug. 22, 1772, the sole existing Franklin letter written directly to a member of the Leacock family. Franklin Copy Book, BF 85.56, APS.
Mifflins, and Cadwaladers, Dr. Benjamin Rush and Thomas Wharton, Jr. With all these men colonial politics became a subject of increasing importance. Many of them were to remain loyal to the Crown when rebellion seemed imminent.

John Leacock, however, gave support to the Whig cause. In his commonplace book is found, interspersed with records of vines planted, cures for colds, instructions for engraving and personal financial notations, an original piece of versified propaganda, *Song the Stamp Act*, certainly Leacock's, though unsigned. Other pieces of similar poetry by Leacock were read many years ago by J. Bennett Nolan, biographer of James Read, Leacock's brother-in-law.

Life for the Leacocks on the Lower Merion farm was threatened when a British occupation of Philadelphia loomed in the fall of 1777. John Leacock joined most of fashionable Philadelphia in an exodus to the inland town of Reading. His nephews, William and David Hall, and their partner, William Sellers, moved out their printing presses, and in Reading "began to grind out tons of depreciated Continental currency," which was humorously known as "shinplasters." The Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania appointed special officials to sign and thus legalize the unstable currency, and James Read, despite notorious insolvency, was assigned to this duty.

In 1779 John Leacock himself was appointed to the same position, the minutes of the Continental Congress for February 23, 1779, listing twenty-seven men "appointed signers of bills of credit of the United States," including John Leacock. Leacock seems to have exercised his functions in Easton and Reading.

Returning to Philadelphia later that year, Leacock addressed a letter to the Supreme Executive Council on September 21, 1779,

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33 Nolan, 96.
36 "Mrs. Read's brother, John Laycock [sic], of whom little is known except that he wrote incredibly bad poetry, turned up in Reading. The Continental War Office had given him some kind of a position in Easton but he became sick and rode over to Reading for recuperation." Nolan, 96. In 1950 a dealer in Reading turned up two Continental notes printed by Hall and Sellers and signed by John Leacock; recently acquired by the APS.
offering himself as a candidate for the “Office of Clerk of the Market in the City of Philadelphia” which was then vacant. With James Read on the Executive Council, Leacock probably felt some confidence when applying for the post; his petition, nevertheless, seems to have been fruitless.

By 1780, John Leacock had returned to Philadelphia, leaving the country house and farm to which his brother had taken title some seven years before; a memorandum in his commonplace book dated July 20, 1780, indicates that he had stored his furniture with relatives and friends. If Leacock was not especially solvent at this time, he continued to maintain his social life. He was one of two hundred and fifty Sons of St. Tammany who met on the banks of the Schuylkill on May 1, 1783, “dressed and distinguished in buck tails and feathers,” to celebrate the preliminary peace with Great Britain. The men drank thirteen toasts accompanied by cannon firing and a military band, and “when the toasts were ended our chief sung the first stanza of the original song in praise of St. Tammany, and the remainder was sung with great spirit by Mr. Leacock.”

It is evident that Leacock’s jolly and talented rendition was well received and well remembered by the pillars of the community. He had assured support when, once more seeking political appointment, he offered himself in the following year as candidate for the city office of coroner, advertisements appearing in the Pennsylvania Gazette in August and September, 1785. He won the position, previously held by his first cousin, Caleb Cash, Jr., and he remained in the office until his death, regularly petitioning the electors of the city for their votes and securing annual re-election. The first Philadelphia directory, which came out in 1785, lists “John Leacock,

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39 Ibid., 347.
40 Pennsylvania Archives, 2nd Series, III, 719. The Archives are in error in listing Joseph Leacock as coroner in 1787. According to the Pennsylvania Gazette, Oct. 3, 1787, John Leacock solicited for election to the post, and his election was printed in the issue of Oct. 17, 1787.
Coroner for city and county, & innkeeper, Water, b. Arch and Race-streets.” With his faculty for taking on new enterprises, Leacock was now also keeping a “house of entertainment” on the same street on which more than twenty years before he had worked in precious metals.

John Leacock was fifty-five years of age in 1785. His name was known to his fellow Philadelphians as a skilled silversmith, a promoter of the wine industry, a Revolutionary patriot and city coroner, and as a popular member of the Tammany Society and the fishing club of the State in Schuylkill. His own generation knew him also in a capacity which provides him with even greater interest today, for John Leacock, man of many pursuits, was a playwright.

In January, 1776, nine years earlier, Common Sense appeared in Philadelphia, the vanguard of an extensive Revolutionary literature. The sentiments of Tom Paine strongly influenced the writing of a patriotic drama, The Fall of British Tyranny: or, American Liberty Triumphant, which was sent rolling from the press sometime during the two months following. Two printers from Coates Alley in Second Street had caught the popular appeal of Whig propaganda and recognized the good humor and lyrical airs of the piece. It was a smashing success, and it seems to have been current knowledge in Philadelphia that behind the pseudonym of “Dick Rifle,” by whom the dedication was signed, stood the author, John Leacock. A careful piecing together of material heretofore unrelated indicates the authorship of Leacock and connects him with other pioneer dramatic productions.

Just a year before the new play appeared, the Convention of the province of Pennsylvania had ratified a resolution, which had been passed by the Continental Congress at a session in Philadelphia on October 20, 1774, to discourage “exhibition of shews, plays, and other expensive diversions and entertainments.”

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in accord, and the playhouse was deserted. Interest in the theater could not, however, be stamped out so readily. Melchior Steiner and Charles Cist had probably heard *The Fall of British Tyranny* read to a group of booksellers, critics, and literati, professional and amateur, whose patriotism, inflamed by discussion in the printing shops and coffeehouses, would have eagerly encouraged the printing of the new piece, regulation or not.

*The Fall of British Tyranny* was the first American chronicle play. Vigorously contrasted characters and colorful action against a familiar domestic setting made it an immediate success. Although modern judgment holds the piece hopeless from a stage point of view, "a prologue and epilogue, with the names of the speakers, indicate that it was acted before it was printed, and from the note, printed *post*, it was certainly acted more than once."

From internal evidence it may be inferred that "the writing of the play was finished after the publication of 'Common Sense' in January, 1776, and before the news had reached Philadelphia of the evacuation of Boston, March 17, 1776."

Soon after its publication in Philadelphia, editions were printed in Boston and Providence. The American public evidently agreed that it was a "truly dramatic performance, interspersed with wit, humour, burlesque, and serious matter which cannot fail of affording abundant entertainment to readers of every description."

*The Fall of British Tyranny* contained five acts and twenty-six scenes covering the time between the Battle of Lexington and the evacuation of Boston, and promised that future events would be

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43 Printers and publishers in Philadelphia. Cist came to Philadelphia in 1773 and entered into partnership with Steiner (or Styner, as he sometimes spelled it). Their printing offices were located in Coates Alley above Second in Race, 1775 (*Pennsylvania Gazette*, Dec. 27), 1776 (*Pennsylvania Gazette*, Jan. 3); Second near Arch, 1776–1781 (Brown, 113).


dealt with in a continuation. It was the most ambitious of the patriot dramas, and represented ability on the part of the author, who was not, strictly speaking, a literary man. The play evinced the fact that "Dick Rifle" realized, as Trevelyman and Bancroft have since shown, that contending factions within the English Parliament set off the Revolution. The plotting Cabinet is contrasted with the plain-speaking Pitt and Camden, Burke and Wilkes, the friends of the colonies. The play contained a vigorous argument between a Whig and a Tory, and the scene in which the battles of Lexington and Concord are vividly described demonstrate Leacock's ability in dramatic writing. The last scene of the piece was laid at Cambridge and introduced Washington, which seems to be his first appearance in dramatic literature. Also interesting is the fact that *The Fall of British Tyranny* marked the introduction into American drama of the Negro as a comic character.

Because of the civil regulations and the play's anti-British humor, *The Fall of British Tyranny* seems never to have had a public presentation upon the stage in Philadelphia. In the winter of 1777–1778 the British army occupied the city, the officers opening the theater in Southwark to accommodate a company they had organized under the leadership of Major André and Captain Delancey. Thirteen performances, all with distinct Tory appeal, were put on between January 19 and May 19, 1778. This burst of dramatic activity culminated in a famous theatrical pageant, the Meschianza, the costume ball given in farewell to General Howe on May 18, 1778, at the Wharton country mansion.

The spring of 1778 brought relief to the American army which had suffered through a hard winter at Valley Forge, and as Howe's


49 Cudjo was the first Negro character on the American stage in a play of native origin. As *The Fall of British Tyranny* was performed early in 1776 (cf. text and note 44, correcting Quinn, 124), Cudjo preceded by many years the West Indian Negroes who appeared in J. Robison's *The Yorker's Stratagem, or, Banana's Wedding*, produced in 1792 (Quinn, 132), and Sambo, an American Negro, in James Murdock's *Triumphs of Love*, which appeared in Philadelphia in 1795 (Quinn, 331).

*The Candidates* (1770), written before *The Fall of British Tyranny*, introduces Ralpho, a Negro (Quinn, 54–55), but this play was not known to American drama until its publication in Petersburg, Va., in 1798.

50 Pollock, 35.
thespians played in Philadelphia, the bakehouse at Valley Forge was the scene of several plays, presented to a crowded house of American soldiers and officers, including Washington and Lord Stirling. With *Cato*, a piece with "strong republican sentiment," known to have been given on May 11, how very likely it seems that *The Fall of British Tyranny* also shared the spring playbill.

When M. l'Abbé Claude C. Robin published his *Nouveau Voyage dans L'Amérique Septentrionale En l'Année 1781* in Philadelphia in 1782, he wrote that the professors at Harvard College had their students act tragedies, the subjects of which were always national: the Battle of Bunker Hill, the burning of Charlestown, the capture of Burgoyne and the treason of Benedict Arnold. In 1783 a second edition of this work was published, as well as an English edition printed by Robert Bell of Philadelphia. Either Robin or Bell had appended to the original statement the fact that *The Fall of British Tyranny* was produced at Harvard, and had commented further that

in such a new nation as this, these pieces must fall infinitely short of that perfection to which our European literary productions of this kind are wrought up; but still, they have a greater effect upon the mind than the best of ours would have among them, because those manners and customs are delineated which are peculiar to themselves, and the events are such as interest them above all others: The drama is here reduced to its true and ancient origin.

*The Battle of Bunker's Hill* (Philadelphia, 1776) and *Death of General Montgomery* (Philadelphia, 1777), both written by Hugh Henry Brackenridge, were acted by students in the Academy at Frederick, Maryland, where Brackenridge was master. It has been suggested as likely by Paul Leicester Ford that *The Fall of British Tyranny* was performed at the same time. It was admirably suited, having a scarcity of female roles. It seems that to a great extent "the

51 Ibid., 36-37.
52 Ibid., 37.
forces of youth and college education broke down the prejudices and laws against the theatre."\(^{55}\)

The first printed attribution of the authorship of *The Fall of British Tyranny* to John Leacock was made by John Fanning Watson, the Philadelphia historian, in the 1850 edition of his *Annals of Philadelphia, and Pennsylvania, in the Olden Time*. Watson quotes a certain "J.H.J., of Cheviot, Ohio," who "had been a youth at Philadelphia in the period of the Revolution," and who had written to Watson in Philadelphia (sometime between 1823 and 1849): "'The Medley' was written, I was told, by Joseph Lacock, Coroner. He wrote also a play, with good humour, called 'British Tyranny.' I have several American plays."\(^{56}\)

Watson thus quoted a former resident of the city and regarded the information as authoritative. The statement, despite an obvious error in the name (John Leacock was the coroner, not his brother Joseph), constitutes the first descriptive note in any printed book about two little-known eighteenth-century plays. Neither William Dunlap, writing in 1832,\(^{57}\) nor James Rees, in 1845,\(^{58}\) had cited either title, although both men, our earliest dramatic historians, had known of the dramatic reputation of John Leacock and had ascribed to him the authorship of *Disappointed* (*The Disappointment*).\(^{59}\) Dunlap's

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\(^{59}\) The disappointment; or, The forces of credulity. *A new American comic-opera of two acts.*


Why Dunlap and Rees both captioned the play erroneously, and why they did not give credit to Col. Thomas Forrest (c. 1742-1829), commonly accepted in Philadelphia as the author, is hard to explain. For fuller treatment, see Moses, I, 280; Oscar George Theodore Sonneck, *A Bibliography of Early Secular American Music*, revised and enlarged by William Treat Upton (Washington, 1945), 109; Joseph Jackson, *Market Street, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1918), 49. See also an 1823 manuscript statement by John Fanning Watson, which Durang did not see, in the manuscript *Annals of Philadelphia, or Facts illustrative of the History of the City of Philad* and the changes of ye manners & Customs of its inhabitants, from its origin to the present time, by John F. Watson, 1823 ("A Gift from John F. Watson to the Library Comp of Philad* June 1830"), 73-74, in the possession of the Library Company of Philadel-
statement is the first printed citation of Leacock's name in connection with any example of eighteenth-century playwriting, and the mention of Leacock's name just thirty years after his death indicates that knowledge of his writing was still current.

The next bibliographer to mention John Leacock was Joseph Sabin, who, in 1878, recorded positively that he was the author of The Fall of British Tyranny. Sabin's source was Watson, but he had ascertained from another authority that John Leacock, not Joseph, was the dramatist. He may have assumed this from seeing Leacock's name in Dunlap, Rees, or Durang, but it is probable that he acquired his information elsewhere or he would have mentioned The Disappointment in the Leacock catalogue. Curious indeed is Sabin's further note on Leacock: "See also a large copperplate caricature in the same vein entitled: 'Liberty Triumphant,' and Robin's 'New Travels,' p. 18. Also: The Medley: or Harlequin have at all. . . . Acted at Covent Garden, 1778. See Wilson's [Watson's] 'Philadelphia,' I, 104."

Sabin had seen a copperplate after the theme of the play, which may have been engraved by Leacock himself, or by his son Samuel, the copperplate printer. He had also read in Watson that Leacock wrote The Medley and had endowed this orphan production with a full title and real identity. The only eighteenth-century piece by this name was a pantomime with the fuller title, which, as he noted, was acted at Covent Garden in 1778. He probably found this reference in

Philadelphia. Compare Watson's statement with flyleaf entries in several copies of the first edition of The Disappointment owned by the Library Company of Philadelphia, said incorrectly by Moses to be in themselves the chief source of the Forrest claim to authorship. The problem of authorship is treated extensively by Sonneck in his book on Early Opera in America (New York, 1915), as well as in Sammelbände der Internationale Musikgesellschaft für 1914-1915. Sonneck felt that Leacock, known to have written at this period, should not, for lack of evidence, be discarded in favor of Forrest, and considered that internal similarities existed between The Disappointment and The Fall of British Tyranny. For additional material on the life of Forrest, see Mary W. Shoemaker, "Pomona Grove," in Papers of the Site and Relic Society of Germantown (Philadelphia, 1909), 127.

60 Dunlap's source may be a certain "J. F. Foote," to whom he acknowledges indebtedness for material compiled by him for a "new and improved Biographia Dramatica." John Forester Foote was an English actor who first appeared in New York at the Park Theatre in 1822, and who was said to be still living in London in 1852. Francis C. Wemyss, Wemyss' Chronology of the American Stage, from 1752 to 1852 (New York, 1852), 56.

61 Joseph Sabin, A Dictionary of Books Relating to America (New York, 1878), X, 141.
Baker, Reed and Jones’s work on British theatrical production which appeared in 1812. A later catalogue which attributed this play to Leacock added one word to the title and gave it as The Medley; or Harlequin Have at Ye All, “a pantomime acted at Covent Garden, 8vo, 1778.” Here is an indication that the pantomime may have been extant in a printed version in the nineteenth century. Montrose J. Moses, indeed, seems to have been certain that it was. No contemporary mention of the pantomime can be found, and if the piece was indeed Leacock’s The Medley, it must have been an earlier effort than The Fall of British Tyranny and written in a quite different vein or it would not have appeared at Covent Garden during the Revolutionary years.

Opinion on the subject of Leacock’s authorship was varied for many years. Charles R. Hildeburn wrote in 1886 that The Fall of British Tyranny was “said to have been written by ‘Mr. Laycock of Philadelphia.’ ” Seilhamer in 1889 stated that “The authorship of the dramatic satire, the ‘Fall of British Tyranny,’ is unknown.” Paul Leicester Ford, as indicated above, gave full credit to John Leacock, as did Wegelin and Moses.

Examining the matter with the support of biographical evidence, heretofore uncollected and unknown, it becomes reasonably certain that John Leacock achieved definite though amateur literary rank in giving to American dramatic literature The Fall of British Tyranny and probably other works. Indeed, The Fall of British Tyranny contains internal indications of John Leacock’s hand. Roger, a shepherd, says to his companion after the defeat and flight of the Regulars: “This is the First of May; our shepherds and nymphs are celebrating our glorious St. Tammany’s day; we’ll hear the song out, and then join in the frolic, and chorus it o’er and o’er again. This day

63 Oscar Wegelin, Early American Plays, 1714–1830 (New York, 1900), 66. Wegelin’s consideration of Disappointed as distinct from The Disappointment is undoubtedly mistaken.
64 Montrose J. Moses, ed., Representative Plays by American Dramatists (New York, 1918), I, 279.
67 Wegelin, 54; Montrose J. Moses, The American Dramatist (Boston, 1917), 291.
shall be devoted to joy and festivity.' "68 The shepherds’ song is a patriotic paean:

SONG.
Tune.—‘The Hounds are all out.’

I.
Of St. George, or St. Bute, let the poet laureat sing,
Of Pharaoh or Pluto old,
While he rhymes forth their praise, in false glittering lays,
I'll sing of St. Tamm'ny the bold, my brave boys.

II.
Let Hibernia's sons boast, make Patrick their toast,
And Scots Andrew's fame spread abroad;
Potatoes and oats, and Welch leeks for Welch goats,
Was never St. Tammany's food, my brave boys.

III.
In freedom's bright cause, Tamm'ny pled with applause,
And reason'd most justly from nature;
For this was his song, all, all the day long:
Liberty's the right of each creature, brave boys.

This passage rings strongly of John Leacock, who traditionally sang the St. Tammany song at the May first celebrations of the Philadelphian Sons of Liberty.

J. Bennett Nolan, in saying that Leacock "wrote incredibly bad poetry,"69 gave credit, despite the criticism, to Leacock for a literary output, and this without knowledge of the claims for Leacock as a patriotic playwright. A surviving piece of patriotic verse inscribed in Leacock's commonplace book is undoubtedly original. The impression of John Leacock as a writer is strengthened.

Most significant of all is the following memorandum, written under date of July 20, 1781, in the commonplace book: "Left with Mr. Walter to Sell 24 dozens of Plays at 8 dollars per Piece 1 Copper plate Sam' Leacock has it Left with Mr. Bernard some plays to Sell

68 Evert A. Duyckinck, Cyclopaedia of American Literature, I, 463.
69 Nolan recalled reading the manuscript poetry many years ago when it was part of the Montgomery Collection, now owned by the Library of Lebanon Valley College, Annville, Pa. The manuscript items cannot now be located by the librarian, and it is assumed they were disposed of by the late owner before the collection was bequeathed to the college.
12 dozen.” Evidently John Leacock sought to realize some return on excess copies of his play or plays by leaving them with booksellers to be sold.\textsuperscript{70} The back cover of the same ledger recorded payment on nine music books which he had sold to William Caman, and on December 29, 1781, Leacock listed the contents of his library in a memorandum. The last item was “A Bundle of Plays & Pamphlets.”

From all the evidence, John Leacock was not a man of special literary talents, but one who possessed the ability to put into words the feeling and behavior of his time. As a man of many interests and accomplishments, which stemmed from an energetic and complex nature, he was a true son of the eighteenth century.

The last decade of his life witnessed a literary and cultural renaissance in Philadelphia. Interest revived in the theater, and the stage was sanctioned by the presence of the President of the United States in his box at the first Chestnut Street Theater. It may be that John Leacock devoted some of his time during his final years to literary activity and contributed verses or perhaps a play to the patriotic literature in vogue in the Federal city.

On May 14, 1800, while yet city coroner, he purchased for $2,000 the house at Number 10 South Fifth Street, which had been his home since 1793.\textsuperscript{71} Here, John Leacock died, “at 5 o’clock in the Morning” of November 16, 1802, being in the seventy-third year of his age. He was buried on the day following in Christ Church cemetery,\textsuperscript{72} as other members of his family had been, in the corner near his cousins, Deborah and Benjamin Franklin.

Letters of administration were granted to Martha Leacock, his widow, and to William Davis, his son-in-law, on November 23, 1802, with Joseph Ogilby, a carpenter-architect brother-in-law,\textsuperscript{73} and Charles Whitebread, both of Southwark, standing as sureties for the

\textsuperscript{70} “Mr. Walter” cannot be traced unless he was of “Walters and Norman,” engravers, 1779. Brown, 121. “Mr. Bernard” is surely Daniel Boinod, bookseller, corner of Arch and Fourth streets. Philadelphia Directory (1785).

\textsuperscript{71} Philadelphia Deed Book EF-4, 278, City Hall.

\textsuperscript{72} Leacock family Bible record.

\textsuperscript{73} Joseph Ogilby was a member of the Carpenters’ Company of Philadelphia in 1786 and worked on the construction of the Library Hall in 1789, being granted two shares in the Library Company of Philadelphia for his work. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, XLIII (1953), Pt. I, 126, 135.
In December these two gentlemen appraised the estate of the decedent, and their inventory includes:

1 Lot of Books $3.00
18 Old Prints $3.00

Only in these two simple items, perhaps the product of his own mind and hand, can we see a faint reflection of the interests of a restless, creative Philadelphian—John Leacock, craftsman, playwright.

Wayne

Francis James Dallett, Jr.

74 Philadelphia Administration Book K-1, 120, City Hall.
75 Original estate papers, No. 251 of 1802, City Hall.