The existence of an aristocracy within a democracy is not necessarily in conflict with democratic environment. A responsible social elite can set standards of excellence, establish a model for the good life, and perform a valuable public service in an egalitarian society. However, in the United States the perpetuity of an aristocracy depends upon its ability to adapt itself successfully to changing circumstances. That a portion of American society was able to do this throughout the colonial period as well as into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been ably demonstrated.¹ Yet, in the young republic, the lesson was a harsh one, learned during unstable political and economic conditions, conditions which reminded would-be aristocrats that an elite position could be maintained only by mastering the art of adaptation. Nowhere in the 1790’s were the challenges to the elite more dramatically apparent than in Philadelphia.

¹ Louis B. Wright, First Gentlemen of Virginia (San Marino, 1940); Charles S. Sydnor, Gentlemen Freeholders (Chapel Hill, 1952); Bernard Bailyn, The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century (Cambridge, 1955); Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh, Rebels and Gentlemen (New York, 1942); Edward Digby Baltzell, Philadelphia Gentlemen (Glencoe, Ill., 1958).
During that decade Philadelphia was the political, economic, and social center of the country, a place peculiarly sensitive to the disrupting effects of change. In 1790, Philadelphia was still the largest metropolitan area in the United States, and, until 1800, it was a dual capital, the center of both state and federal governments. Hence, the effort of the aristocracy to maintain its leadership was made in an atmosphere pervaded by ever-growing democratic tendencies.

The political aspects of this struggle have been dealt with elsewhere. It is the social aspect which challenges closer examination. A study of Philadelphia's upper class in the 1790's reveals a dichotomy; the existence of two aristocratic groups, interwoven to be sure, but nevertheless distinct from one another. One of these groups, which for convenience may be called Provincial Society, was largely local in nature and background. Having achieved eminence in the colonial period, this group by the 1790's was undergoing modifications which in the long run strengthened its position. The other group, while it included some members of Provincial Society, was broader in scope for it embraced not only Philadelphians but other upper-class Americans as well, particularly those associated with the federal and state governments. It may be termed National Society, an elite which owed its social ascendancy to its political and economic power. When these supports collapsed, National Society, lacking additional buttresses, went down. Few tears were shed, for the values and way of life of this elite demonstrated that it had forgotten the major social obligations conferred by privilege.

Politically, National Society was closely identified with the faction which came to be called Federalist and which, during the last decade of the century, represented the conservative element in American political life. But if the political leadership of this group was conservative, determined to make the new national government one of "the rich, the well-born, and the good," its social leadership was quite the contrary. In 1797, a French observer of the American scene, the
Due de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, took a somewhat jaundiced view of the social liberalism he found at the capital when he remarked: "The real state of society at Philadelphia is included in invitations to great dinners, and tea, to all who arrive from Europe—English, French, inhabitants of every country, men of every class and of every kind of character, philosophers, priests, literati, princes, dentists, wits, and idiots." In fact, the staid and proper city was to see in this decade a social license never quite equalled by it before or since. Late eighteenth-century National Society in Philadelphia may best be described as "fast."

As early as 1782, the Virginian, Arthur Lee, was disgusted at Philadelphia's apparent abandonment of Quaker simplicity; he felt that most people were "intoxicated with a sudden change of manners and unexpected elevation." In 1784, Joseph Swift, a conservative Philadelphian, expressed concern about the city's extravagant mode of living, and in the early nineties a friend of America's Lisbon agent, David Humphreys, wrote him that ever since their city had become the capital Philadelphians seemed to have been seized by a frenzy, and that there was no limit to their prodigality and profligacy. The Englishman Isaac Weld, visiting the city in 1795, remarked on the conspicuous haughtiness and ostentation in the upper circles of society, and expressed the opinion that they would be happy with an order of nobility "by which they might be exalted above their fellow citizens, as much as they are in their own conceit." The secretary to the British minister, Edward Thornton, also noted the aristocratic tone in upper echelons, while Mrs. Robert Liston, the wife of the British minister, commented on the city's taste for show, its increasingly splendid entertainment and dress. The Duc de la Roche-

4 François Alexandre Frédéric due de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, Travels through the United States of North America (London, 1800), IV, 103.
6 Joseph Swift to John Swift, July 20, 1784, Swift Family Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP); Rufus Griswold, The Republican Court (New York, 1867), 328.
foucauld-Liancourt said that the extreme profusion of luxury in Philadelphia was sheer exhibitionism. Mrs. John Adams flatly declared that Philadelphia had become "as vile and debauched as the city of London."

Such comments indicate the effects of postwar moral degeneration on the sober Quaker city, and the tendency of National Society to dominate Philadelphia's social scene. This domination was flaunted through its wealth, its show of possessions, and its code of conduct, and was founded on the personal prestige of its members.

In the early years of the decade, power and prestige focused in the persons of President and Mrs. Washington. Their social eminence attracted a large assortment of upper-class individuals—colonial aristocrats, who found the new order acceptable because of its conservative leaders; new aristocrats born of the Revolution, who wished to proclaim their position and good fortune; and aspiring aristocrats, the socially ambitious who had not quite "arrived" but who hoped that some of the surrounding lustre of the so-called "Republican Court" would rub off on them.

When the Washingtons came to Philadelphia on November 27, 1790, they took up residence in the Robert Morris house on the south side of Market near Sixth Street. For more than a month, members of Congress and the executive branch of the government had been assembling, and by mid-December enough of them were on hand for the business of the government to begin. These men soon found that the gay whirl of social life in New York had been a mere preparation for the much more strenuous round of pleasure in Philadelphia, for by 1790 Philadelphia society had developed a number of leaders, each anxious to outdo the other in sumptuous entertainment.

Society's richest and most powerful member, Robert Morris, merchant, financier, and speculator, was willing and eager to assume the role of social arbiter. His natural gregariousness, his pride in his city, and his wealth combined to produce in him Philadelphia's outstanding civic host. An introduction to Morris had come to be routine for all strangers of standing, and Morris, in turn, did the honors

9 Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, Travels, IV, 107, 103-104, 590.
11 General Advertiser, Nov. 29, 1790; Pennsylvania Journal, Dec. 1, 1790.
of the city through a constant and fulsome show of hospitality. Because of her husband's wealth as well as through her own grace and dignity, Mrs. Morris had generally taken the female precedence in most social gatherings of the 1780's. However, the social hegemony of the Morrises had not remained unchallenged. Returning from three years in Europe in 1786, Mrs. William Bingham had "blaz'd upon a large party at Mr Morris's in a dress which eclips'd any that has yet been seen." 

Ann Willing Bingham was amply endowed to assume the role of social arbiter; in her, natural charm and beauty united with wealth and family prestige. The Willings, new aristocracy in the mid-eighteenth century, had become an "old family" by the end of the century. Her father, Thomas Willing, was one of the city's most prosperous merchants and was so prudent and esteemed a man that even in the heat of recriminations over Jay's Treaty democrats were cautious in their attacks upon him. In 1772, he was not only enrolled in Pennsylvania's Battle Abbey—Du Simitière's list of the exalted eighty-four who kept four-wheeled equipages—but he was one of the exclusive eight who owned a coach. Mrs. Bingham's mother, Ann McCall Willing, was of a prosperous and socially correct mercantile family allied to its like numbers in the Inglis, Coxe, Plumstead, Swift, and Cadwalader families. In addition to this excellent consanguinity, the lovely Mrs. Bingham possessed amiability and social adroitness. Her ability to keep several conversations going at once, while still giving attention to everyone, and to flatter politely and subtly—a quality she admired in French women—assured

12 Mary Morris to Catherine Livingston, July 21 [1784], Ridley Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS); Recollections of Samuel Breck, 28, American Philosophical Society; Griswold, 309.
13 François Jean Chastellux, Travels in North America in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782 (New York, 1827), I, 278; Charles H. Hart, "Mary White—Mrs. Robert Morris," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (PMHB), II (1878), 182-183; Harrison Gray Otis to Mrs. Otis, Feb. 16, 1798, Otis Papers, MHS.
14 Molly Tilghman to Polly Pearce, Feb. 18, 1787, J. Hall Pleasants, ed., "Letters of Molly and Hetty Tilghman," Maryland Historical Magazine, XXI (1926), 146.
15 Cf. for example, Timothy Tickler (pseud.), The Philadelphia Jockey Club; or Mercantile Influence Weighed (Philadelphia, 1795), 15-16.
16 American Historical Record, II, 54-55. The similar list in John T. Scharf and Thompson Westcott, History of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1884), II, 880-881, apparently lost two names in the transposition from the American Historical Record.
the social precedence her family and wealth had helped her to attain. By 1790, as Mrs. John Adams noted, Mrs. Bingham had "certainly given laws to the ladies ... in fashion and elegance." The historian of American high society has noted that the wit, taste, and brilliant worldliness of Mrs. Bingham's social leadership has never been surpassed, not even in the palmiest days of Newport's marble "cottages."

By 1790, the Morrises and the Binghams were the major nuclei of Philadelphia society; the Morrises represented the older generation, the Binghams, the younger. Within this sphere revolved smaller social units clustered about individuals such as widower Henry Hill, bachelor William Hamilton, British Consul General Phineas Bond, Jr., or about families—Colonel Walter Stewart and his vivacious wife Deborah, newly rich Mr. and Mrs. John Ross, former Bostonian Samuel Breck, Sr., former Governor John Penn, and the recent President of Pennsylvania, Thomas Lloyd Moore. In their houses, and in the houses of other Philadelphians holding official positions—Judge Benjamin Chew, Mayor Samuel Powel (uncle-in-law to Mrs. Bingham), Samuel Meredith (Treasurer of the United States)—entertainment was often lavish and hospitality warm. Here had emerged a distinct upper-class society of established families and newcomers, Whigs and former Tories. Mrs. Adams remarked on this when she wrote her daughter in January, 1791, that in Philadelphia "there is an agreeable society of friendliness kept up with all the principal families, who appear to live in great harmony, and we meet at all the parties nearly the same company."

With the coming of the central government to Philadelphia, there were superimposed on this native society the social eddies created by the federal officers. Chief of these, of course, was the President and

21 Adams, 354.
his lady. During Washington’s term of office, he and his wife were the official heads of society, and they attempted to fulfill this role with elaborate protocol. Levees, drawing rooms, and state dinners for cabinet officers and members of Congress were held with the regularity of clockwork. All were formal, often stilted affairs, reflecting the host’s aloof reticence. A critic described the levees as cold enough to chill every idea worth communicating and pervaded by an uneasy and awkward atmosphere. In addition to these functions there were the official entertainments of the diplomatic corps and of government officers, certain of whom—Secretary of War Henry Knox and Senator Pierce Butler of South Carolina—were especially noted for their hospitality.

Here, then, were some of the leading members of National Society. The basis for entree into their circle, in fact into upper-class society as a whole, was the possession of substantial wealth, or at least sufficient reputation for having it to establish one’s credit. While older, inherited wealth had a greater aura of respectability, wealth, old or new, was essential to secure a place in this milieu. It created the opening and made the original distinction. Such observers of the American scene as the French visitors the Comte de Chastellux and the Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, and the Scots president of Dickinson College, the Rev. Charles Nisbet, pointed to wealth as the chief element which set men apart in America.

Older wealth played an active role in financing war and postwar enterprises, and a substantial number of well-to-do colonials had triumphantly survived the war with their fortunes intact. In Philadelphia, such colonial plutocrats as Samuel Powel, Thomas Willing, Benjamin Chew, and Samuel Morris had come through relatively unscathed. Even Robert Morris, who so greatly augmented his fortune during the war, was not one of the nouveau riche. He had begun

22 “Sidney” in the General Advertiser, Jan. 26, 1793.
23 Cf. Mrs. Adams’ grueling social schedule, 1797–1798, Mitchell, 91, 98–99, 100, 134, and her lament that the Washingtons had set the precedent, ibid., 99. Henrietta Liston to James Jackson, Jan. 15, 1797, Feb. 24, 1797, Liston Papers; Recollections of Samuel Breck, 36; Francis S. Drake, Life and Correspondence of Henry Knox (Boston, 1873), 101.
25 For a clarification of this once controversial subject see Robert East, Business Enterprise in the American Revolutionary Era (New York, 1938), 219–223.
his mercantile career before the Revolution with a comfortable nest egg and had married well.\textsuperscript{26}

To the substantial group of men of older wealth was added a respectable number of newer men of wealth who acquired their fortunes during or immediately after the war. Association with Philadelphia's Robert Morris seemed to have been the lodestone to increased fortune for a number of men. Among Morris' associates, John Ross, Blair McClanachan, William Bingham, John Swanwick, Jonathan Williams, and George Harrison had prospered.\textsuperscript{27} In addition, war and postwar conditions resulted in much litigation over land speculation and loyalist claims, as well as disputes over state and federal laws and international wrangles arising out of the wars of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. As a consequence, the legal profession flourished and the abler lawyers grew rich. Jared Ingersoll, Jr., William Bradford, Alexander Wilcocks, James Wilson, William Rawle, William Lewis, Alexander James Dallas, and Peter S. Du Ponceau made the most of their opportunities.\textsuperscript{28}

In fact, the ascendancy of National Society, while based upon its political power, was supported by the wealth and prestige of its leading members. This marriage of wealth and political influence was particularly notable among leading Federalists.

Of these, Robert Morris was recognized as one of the country's wealthiest men. His position and his record of active political service since 1775 had been responsible for his selection as Superintendent of Finance in 1781. This role had enhanced Morris' already formidable prestige. In 1784, Joseph Reed, soldier, politician, and former President of Pennsylvania, complained that Morris "has had all the effective powers of government in his own hands. . . ."\textsuperscript{29} After the formation of the federal government under the Constitution, Morris served a term as Senator, and, when he finally retired from political

\textsuperscript{26} William G. Sumner, \textit{The Financier and Finances of the American Revolution} (New York, 1892), II, 271.


\textsuperscript{28} East, 231; Raymond Walters, Jr., \textit{Alexander James Dallas} (Philadelphia, 1943), 164-165.

\textsuperscript{29} Reed to William Bradford, May 2, 1784, W. B. Reed, ed., \textit{Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed} (Philadelphia, 1847), II, 413.
life in 1795, it was for the purpose of concentrating his time and energy on the expansion of his business activities.

William Bingham, whose opulence became almost legendary, was reputed to be one of the wealthiest men of his time. Although his major interests lay in commerce, finance, and land speculation, he served in political office for twenty-five years.\(^{30}\) Beginning in 1776 as a commercial agent for Congress in Martinique, Bingham held various public offices, including positions in the Old Congress, in the Pennsylvania Assembly, and, finally, as United States Senator. He was a Federalist, both in his advocacy of stronger powers for the central government and as a good party man when the Federalist party took political shape.\(^{31}\) So closely identified was he with the Washington administration and its Hamiltonian policies that his house was one of those damaged by the mob at the time of public indignation over Jay's Treaty.\(^{32}\) Bingham not only approved of Hamilton's fiscal policies but may even have had some influence in shaping them. His letter to Hamilton of November, 1789, made suggestions for funding, an excise, and a national bank, all of which were included in Hamilton's reports of January and December, 1790.\(^{33}\) Bingham remained Hamiltonian almost all the way. When the schism developed in the Federal party in the late nineties, he sided with the Hamiltonian faction against President John Adams, and several times his home was the meeting ground for those planning their strategy against Adams. Later, he joined those of the party who finally realized that party survival depended upon support of Adams and who subsequently blocked Aaron Burr's presidential chances by their support of Jefferson.

Like Bingham, Thomas Fitzsimons had made his fortune during the Revolution.\(^{34}\) By 1780, he was sufficiently wealthy to contribute,

\(^{30}\) PMHB, LXI (1937), 387-388.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 392-394.

\(^{32}\) Scharf and Westcott, I, 481.


in the name of his firm, £5,000 towards a subscription for necessities for the army. In 1781, he became a founder and director of the Bank of North America, and later a director of the Insurance Company of North America and of the First Bank of the United States. His active political life of twenty-one years had started in 1774 with his membership on the Philadelphia Committee of Correspondence. Subsequently, he was a member of the Continental Congress, of the Pennsylvania Council of Censors, of the state house of representatives, and in 1787 he was named a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, thus becoming a signer of the federal Constitution. From 1789 to 1795 he served in Congress, early identifying himself with Hamilton's nationalistic measures. Although he retired from public life in 1794, he continued to be consulted on public questions by officers of both the state and federal governments.

Providing as it did superior position in a fluid class society, wealth was eagerly sought. The consequent importance placed upon it was regarded with distaste by the Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt. In Philadelphia more than in any other part of the world, he said, incessant attention was paid to the accumulation of money, and the passion was not diminished by the possession of the greatest fortune. "The rich man loves to shew the stranger his splendid furniture, his fine English glass, and exquisite china. But when the stranger has once viewed the parade in a ceremonious dinner, he is dismissed for some other newcomer, who has not yet seen the magnificence of the house nor tasted the old Madeira that has been twice or thrice to the East Indies. And then, a new face is always more welcome than an old one to him who has little to say to either." 35

Even Friends were not immune. When Quaker aristocrat James Smith's daughter, Sarah, became engaged to Hugh Roberts, Mrs. Henry Drinker confided to her diary that "He is worth a handsome fortune, which will suit to a T." 36

Postwar wealth made possible extravagance in expenditure and display. "As the wealth of the city has increased," wrote Benjamin Davies in his Account of 1794, "splendid carriages, as well as most other articles of luxury and refinement have been multiplied. It is not

35 Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, Travels, IV, 103-104.
36 Diary of Elizabeth S. Drinker, Dec. 7, 1802, HSP.
much above thirty years, since the acquisition of a single-horse chair bounded the ambition of the independant merchant and shopkeeper and four-wheeled carriages were confined to a very few opulent gentry, and the principal officers of the provincial government. The latter kind are now rolling through every street, and almost in every form that convenience or fancy can desire.” The ownership of one or more carriages continued to be an index to one’s social status. The French liberal, Moreau de St. Méry, regarded the carriage-keeping of aspiring parvenues as a kind of mania: “to the minds of Americans, that which without exception denotes the greatest superiority is the possession of a carriage. Women especially desire them to a degree that approaches delirium; and a woman who owns one is very certain that no other woman who lacks a carriage will ever be considered, or become her equal.” The number of carriages in Philadelphia had multiplied to 860 by 1794, and of these 307 were four-wheeled. In fact, they had become so numerous that between 1796 and 1801 pleasure vehicles were taxed. With so many of them on the streets, one could distinguish those of the “better sort” by their showy equipage or by the cyphers or coats of arms emblazoned on them. Four-wheeled carriages were status symbols of the highest order in a hierarchy descending from the coach through the chariot and phaeton to the coachee and coach-wagon.

Many residences also displayed their owner’s wealth, although in the appearance of their homes Philadelphians were often thwarted in this ambition. Most Philadelphia houses of the colonial period were essentially Georgian in spirit and not ostentatious on the exterior. They might be large and well kept with some handsome detail around doorways and windows, such as the William Shippen house on South Fourth Street, the Stamper-Blackwell house on Pine Street, or the house of the Reverend Jacob Duché at Third and Pine, occupied in the 1790’s by Thomas McKean. Many places had carefully

40 Ibid.; Pennsylvania Gazette, Sept. 14, 1796. A great many of these were vehicles kept for hire.
41 Weld, 15. See also the extracts from the daybooks of carriage makers Quarrier, Hunter, and Henderson in “The Carriages our Ancestors Rode In,” PMHB, XXVII (1903), 373–374.
tended yards, and a few, like the Charles Norrises' and the Benjamin Chews', could boast exceptionally beautiful gardens. Houses built after the war continued to be conservative and new features were introduced but slowly. The best of the new houses, such as that of Samuel Pancoast, purchased in 1796 by William Bingham's former partner Mordecai Lewis, achieved a happy blending of the new Adam simplicity in windows and doorway with the Philadelphia brick and marble tradition. They were, on the whole, quietly elegant rather than ostentatious. Thus it was that both Morris and Bingham felt compelled to build something more grandiose to proclaim their position in society. Thus it was, too, that the results were out of harmony with their surroundings, virtually excrescences on the landscape. Morris' sumptuous brick and marble mansion, begun in 1793 under the direction of the architect L'Enfant, bid "defiance to simplicity and elegance . . . [and stood] as a monument of the increasing luxury of the city of Philadelphia." The great Bingham house, modeled after the Duke of Manchester's London mansion, was completed in 1788. Covering almost an entire city square with its landscaped and ornamented grounds, it boasted great iron gates, a wide carriage drive, large octagonal bays, and a conservatory and greenhouse filled with exotic plants. Inside, it was designed for entertaining, with a tesselated marble hall, walls hung with replicas of old masters, a wide marble staircase, and an upstairs drawing room decorated with large mirrors, French wallpaper, the whole set off with furniture, draperies, and carpets in the latest London fashion. There the most lavish entertainment in the city took place. All the national and state officials and most of Philadelphia's first families could be found at Bingham's at one time or another, hobnobbing with foreign celebrities such as Volney, the Duc d'Orleans, Comte Noailles, and members of the English bank-

42 Both Ann Warder in her Journal, Oct. 18, 1786, HSP, and Susanna Dillwyn to William Dillwyn, May 21, 1790, Dillwyn Correspondence, I, Library Company of Philadelphia, remark on the beauty of the Chew garden, and Mrs. Warder also exclaims over the Norris garden. A nostalgic description of the latter may be found in Deborah Logan’s Reminiscences, HSP.
43 Weld, 5.
ing family of Baring.\textsuperscript{45} Guests seem to have left with a feeling of satisfaction and well-being. Even grumpy Judge Samuel Chase and sour Senator William Maclay were pleased with the hospitality at Bingham’s.\textsuperscript{46} Nevertheless, the Binghams’ house and mode of living were out of harmony with their environment. Quakeress Ann Warder might be expected to consider the place ungenteeel, but even the gentleman architect Charles Bulfinch remarked that the mansion was much too rich a house for anyone in the United States.\textsuperscript{47} Samuel Breck considered Bingham’s style of living as “not suited to our manners.”\textsuperscript{48}

Such luxury and display furnished the background for a worldly and sophisticated little oligarchy whose standards flaunted propriety. The excessively heavy eating indulged in during the eighteenth century was accompanied by heavy drinking. Yet drunkenness had a fashionable aura about it, as in Boston where it often prevailed “at the tables of good and Honorable gentlemen,” or in Charleston where it was sometimes fashionable for all the gentlemen at a dinner to get thoroughly drunk before being allowed to leave.\textsuperscript{49} Inevitably, this heavy indulgence in liquor encouraged alcoholism. In Philadelphia, several young women of good family found themselves tied to habitual drunkards. Sometimes it worked the other way. At least one aristocratic Philadelphian’s pretty young wife became intemperate.

Freedom at the table also manifested itself in loose and licentious conversation. Mrs. Bingham punctuated her conversation with oaths and facetious anecdotes, and the after-dinner conversation at the Morrices was reputed to degenerate sometimes into vulgarity.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{45} Thomas Twining, \textit{Travels in America 100 Years Ago. Being Notes and Reminiscences by Thomas Twining} (New York, 1894), 30, 40; Recollections of Samuel Breck, 19; François Alexandre Frédéric duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, \textit{Journal de voyage en Amerique} (Baltimore, 1940), 60–121, \textit{passim}.


\textsuperscript{47} Journal of Ann Warder, Sept. 26, 1786; Charles Bulfinch to Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Bulfinch, Apr. 2, 1789, Susan E. Bulfinch, ed., \textit{The Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch} (Boston, 1896), 75–76.

\textsuperscript{48} Recollections of Samuel Breck, 25.


\textsuperscript{50} Fisher, “Biography of George Harrison,” 24.
Even the socially liberal Massachusetts Senator Harrison Gray Otis was startled at the candour and broad raillery indulged in at Philadelphia tables.\(^\text{51}\)

Older standards of propriety also suffered. In the matter of women's modesty, they were flaunted. During the late 1780's, Brissot de Warville, a Frenchman of Puritanical ideals, was scandalized by the extravagance and indecent decolletage he observed in the dress of American ladies.\(^\text{52}\) Some ten years later, this became an even greater scandal with the introduction of the Greek style in women's dress. Society was rocked by the resultant pulling and hauling between conservatives and fashionables. Mrs. John Penn, sending some material and directions regarding the style to Mrs. John F. Mifflin, put her finger on one of the major points at issue: "Neither the gown or petticoat should have any trimming, & the handkerchief should be worn inside, tho' your very fashionable young ladies wear none."\(^\text{53}\) They also frequently discarded the petticoat. Mrs. Adams' shocked reaction to the fashion well reflects the conservative view.

The stile of dress which the preacher attacks [in the *Gazette of the United States*, March 15, 1800] is really an outrage upon all decency. . . . A sattin peticoat of certainly not more than three breadths gored at the top, nothing beneath but a chemise. Over this thin coat, a Muslin sometimes a crape made so strait before as perfectly to show the whole form. The arm naked almost to the shoulder and without stays or Bodice. A tight girdle round the waist and the "rich Luxurience of natur's Charms" without a handkerchief fully displayd. The face, a la mode de Paris, Red as a Brick hearth. When this Lady has been led up to make her curtzy [at the drawing room] . . . every Eye in the Room has been fixed upon her . . . , and you might literally see through her. . . . The Mother of the Lady described & sister, being fine women and in the first Rank, are leaders of the fashion, but they show more of the [bosom] than the decent Matron, or the modest woman.\(^\text{54}\)

The George Harrisons, too, were shocked at this natural and artificial display, and Otis admits that at first it did "make me wink," but he

\(^{51}\) Harrison Gray Otis to Mrs. Otis, Nov. 29, 1797, Otis Papers.


\(^{53}\) Ann Penn to John F. Mifflin, July 17, 1798, Shippen Family Papers, XXXIII, HSP.

\(^{54}\) Mrs. Adams to Mrs. Cranch, Mar. 15-18, 1800, Mitchell, 241-242. The ladies referred to were Mrs. Bingham and her daughters, Anne Baring and Maria Matilda.
soon got used to it. At least two Philadelphia women were brave enough to have themselves preserved for posterity by Stuart in this dress.

Possibly such competitive license was related to the shortage of mature men which prevailed in upper-class ranks in the eighties and nineties. In 1785, Hannah Thomson, wife of Congressional Secretary Charles Thomson, noted that in fashionable circles ladies outnumbered gentlemen ten to one. In the same year, Matthew Ridley, who had heard in London the New York gossip, wrote in jocular tone to Catherine Livingston: “From the various Accounts received from America I am led to think you Ladies dare not but behave with great condesention [sic] to the Gentlemen. . . . They are scarce, and of course become more valuable. . . .” In 1786, Mrs. Warder noted in her diary that “girls run so thick and lads so thin that if two are seen together several times people will talk.”

This male shortage undoubtedly accounted for some of the irregularities in marriages, particularly the increase in the mating between age and youth. Although not new, this practice was sufficiently anomalous to elicit disapproval or criticism. Instances of older women marrying younger men produced expressions of shock or disgust, while alliances of young women with much older men, some of whom had grown children, were regarded with disapproval.

“Evident it is here,” Mrs. Warder observed, “that girls feel the scarcity of men or they would not sacrifice themselves.”

55 Harrison Gray Otis to Mrs. Otis, Jan. 18, Feb. 16, 1800, Otis Papers.
56 Lawrence Park, Gilbert Stuart; an illustrated descriptive list of his works (New York, 1926), III, 163, 211; the Marchioness d’Yrujo (Sally McKean) and Mrs. James Greenleaf (Anne Penn Allen) are the ladies referred to.
57 Wecter, 301.
58 Matthew Ridley to Catherine Livingston, Mar. 1, 1785, Ridley Papers.
59 Journal of Ann Warder, June 18, 1786. In 1790 there were in the United States some 11,000 more free white males over sixteen than there were free white females in the same age group. The shortage, therefore, seems to have been in the upper social ranks. See U.S. Census Office, A Century of Population Growth (Washington, 1909), 93–94.
61 Journal of Ann Warder, Nov. 27, 1786.
At the same time, a defiance of parental strictures and a disregard of the community’s standards by some young women was indicative of the weakening of the ability to enforce an older code of conduct. Serious transgressions were committed in the Bache, Allen, and Bingham families. Benjamin Bache had already brought his family into disrepute by his adoption of “low democratic principles” and the use of his newspaper to print “smutty pieces” against the President and the government. His sister’s romantic liaison with an actor, a man of “degraded” profession, completed the social damage and the Bache family “lost all their former consequence.”

The Allen-Greenleaf affair, in which the notorious speculator, James Greenleaf, obtained a divorce in order to marry Anne Penn Allen, and the midnight elopement of William Bingham’s fifteen-year-old daughter Maria with a forty-year-old French count of bad reputation—a marriage that ended in divorce and a £5,500 settlement on the count—seem to have owed their defiance of convention in part to the degenerating influence of money in a materialistic society.

Of course, wealth and leisure provided greater opportunity to indulge in vice, while at the same time sophistication winked at it. The standards of the time permitted a wide latitude of freedom to men in their relations with women below their class, and there seems to have been an increase in professional procuresses and houses of ill fame.

Moreover, strictly within upper-class circles there was much license. Otis is testimony to the “lineal descendants of Potiphar’s wife” among Philadelphia matrons of his acquaintance, as well as the almost complete extinction of “poor Joseph’s posterity.” One handsome young matron, estranged from her husband, encouraged the visits of gentlemen acquaintances only to “discipline” them with a horsewhip when they misunderstood her motives. But probably most notorious was the private life of one of Pennsylvania’s leading politicians. He is alleged to have indulged in a variety of vices—swearing, obscene conversation, drunkenness, and marital infidelity. His alcoholism is reputed to have become so acute that in time much
of his public business had to be handled by his assistant, fortunately a very able man. His numerous illegitimate children were raised and educated in his family and one of them married extremely well. Yet all his sins, mitigated by his benevolence, amiability, magnetic personality, and political adroitness disturbed the electorate hardly at all, and his political popularity remained high until the times outmoded his style of politics.°

Avid pursuit of money, obscenity, drunkenness, and infidelity were present in varying degrees in all levels of society and were part of the general coarseness which characterized eighteenth-century life. These traits were probably aggravated by the crumbling of an older pattern of living. As exhibited by the upper class, however, particularly by those who fancied themselves aristocrats, they ill became a group whose traditional role called for the establishment of a model for the good life.

The social flux, of which extravagance and loose living were in part symptoms, also manifested itself in the increased tempo of social life. A competition developed among hosts and hostesses whose avid efforts suggest the importance of entertaining as a method of achieving status.

Philadelphia's social season traditionally reflected the return of its gentry from their country seats, where they took refuge from the summer heat. During the nineties, these seasons were further regulated by the sittings of Congress and the state Assembly, and by the mid-winter mercantile lull. So governed, the "strenuous idleness," as lawyer William Bradford designated the winter rounds of pleasure, did not get under way until late in the year, usually about the middle or end of December, although the official opening of the season was heralded a month earlier by the holding of the first of the fortnightly balls of the City Dancing Assembly.


°° Susanna D. Emlen to William Dillwyn, Nov. 11, 1797, Dillwyn Correspondence, II; Mrs. Adams to Mrs. Cranch, Nov. 15, 1799, Mitchell, 214; Weld, 14, 59; Harrison Gray Otis to Mrs. Otis, Nov. 17, 20, 1797, Otis Papers.

The pace increased steadily once the season got started. Popular "Polly" Shippen of Lancaster, visiting her relatives in Philadelphia, wrote her mother in the winter of 1790 that during the course of a week she had attended a card party at Mrs. Mifflin's, the Assembly ball, Mrs. Washington's drawing room, dinner at Mr. Edward Burd's, a party at Mrs. Henry Livingston's, a play, the City Concert, and, according to custom, in her free moments she engaged in the time-consuming ceremony of morning visits. Sarah Logan Smith was not only "very remote in her appearance from the simplicity of a quaker" but became "engaged in such a round of company, as will be likely to make her . . . a mere fine Lady." Mrs. Adams was struck with Philadelphia's sociability as contrasted with New York, and exclaimed over the number of routs, tea and card parties, suppers and dances, entertainment equal to that of any European city. Charlotte Chambers sighed over the "perpetual rotation of what is termed pleasure," Eliza Meredith referred to the city as "a little world of dissipation whose inhabitants make pleasure a mere study" and Harrison Gray Otis termed one social season the "annual fatigue."

Entertainment became a grim, grueling business. Hostesses set determinedly about discharging their debts, and many of them, especially those in official positions, complained bitterly over the pace. William Bradford wryly recognized this when he wrote his sister regarding a party for which his wife was preparing: "where the fashionable folks are to squeeze one another, look very civil, yawn over their Cards, and go home delighted with spending so charming an Evening. She took the field last week & this night closes the campaign. In that short time she has kept up so brisk a fire that at least one hundred & fifty shot have been discharged with effect: & she is

68 Mary Shippen to [Mrs. Joseph Shippen], 1790, Shippen and Swift Family Papers, Balch Collection, HSP.
69 Mary Shippen to Miss Yeates, Jan. 22, 1791, ibid.
70 Susanna D. Emlen to William Dillwyn, Nov. 11, 1797, May 21, 1798, Dillwyn Correspondence, II.
72 Charlotte Chambers to her mother, Mar. 11, 1795, Lewis H. Garrard, Memoir of Charlotte Chambers (Philadelphia, 1856), 16; Eliza Meredith to David Meredith, Apr. 14 [1796], Meredith Correspondence; Harrison Gray Otis to Mrs. Otis, Mar. 10, 1800, Otis Papers.
no longer threatened by an army of unreturned Civilities.” Mrs. Liston who finally “got into the Vortex” did not have time to be sick but felt obliged to enter into the round of visiting, of drawing rooms, dinners, and balls despite a bad cold. She considered the schedule troublesome and laborious and was exhausted by spring. At one time she even looked forward to a long and grueling excursion to Niagara Falls as a blessed relief from her social fatigue. “What we principally want in this country,” she wrote her uncle, “is quiet and retirement.” Mrs. Adams, wearied by the social strain and political harassment, likewise sighed for retirement at Braintree. Her entertaining was an increasing chore and, suffering from poor health, she at times was obliged to give over her duties as hostess to her niece Louisa Smith. Even the gregarious Harrison Gray Otis, who at first embraced the social round warmly, eventually wearied of it, yet found one could not escape because invitations came dated a week to ten days in advance of the event, so one had no excuse of a prior engagement. In late March or April, many looked forward with relief to the winding up of the sessions of Congress and the onset of the warm season which would terminate the hectic pace.

However, in the summer, entertainment was not altogether abandoned but went on at a more leisurely tempo in country homes. The Robert Morises at The Hills on the Schuylkill River above Fairmount, the John Rosses at The Grange west of the Schuylkill, the John Craigs at Andalusia on the Delaware, the Bingham at Lansdowne, all continued to see their friends in their more sylvan settings. When William Bingham built his new country home, Bellevue on the Shrewsbury River near Black Point, and Mrs.

76 Ibid., Aug. 4, 1799.
77 Mrs. Adams to Mrs. Cranch, Mar. 27, 1798, Mitchell, 148.
79 Harrison Gray Otis to Mrs. Otis, Mar. 10, 1800, Otis Papers.
Bingham transferred her summer entertaining there, the Jersey seashore became fashionable. At the Woodlands near Gray's Ferry, William Hamilton dispensed hospitality the year round. In the late eighties, he had rebuilt this house in the newest style, with a circular entrance hall, oval drawing and dining rooms, and a long ballroom. As he was an accomplished horticulturist, its grounds and greenhouses were renowned. With its gracious mansion, romantic setting, and lovely view, the Woodlands was considered by many to be one of the most beautiful country seats in America.

During the nineties, country estates became refuges from terror. Like Boccaccio's Florentines, well-to-do Philadelphians fled into the country from the plague which ravaged the city almost annually after 1793. The threat of the yellow fever and the fear of it lurked constantly on the fringes of society. The horror of contact with one's fellows while the yellow fever raged and the consequent feeling of exile heightened the sweets of society once social intercourse could be resumed. In some disgust, Elizabeth Bordley described to her cousin the crowded social schedule which had begun later than usual after the great epidemic of 1793. People, she said, had been so long deprived of company that they were ravenous for it and began their parties almost an hour earlier than they had in the past. Even those who had lost near relations "seem not to feel the extent of their loss, and the delightful thought that they have saved their precious selves, appears to engross all their other feelings." As the party grew wilder while the Red Death stalked the corridors of Poe's fantasy, so Philadelphia's social seasons seemed to grow more hectic with the passage of time and the recurrence of the fever. Financial debacle and political disaster increased the impression of living on borrowed time.

Until about the middle of the 1790's, Philadelphia's National Society had been relatively broad, encompassing a variety of pros-

82 Sarah P. Stetson, "William Hamilton and His Woodlands," PMHB, LXXIII (1949), 26-33; Eberlein and Hubbard, 447-454; Kimball, 147, 196, 214, 225; Fisher, "Recollections." Hamilton is credited with the introduction into America of the Lombardy Poplar and the Ginko tree.
83 Susanna Dillwyn to William Dillwyn, Dec. 10, 1793, Dillwyn Correspondence, I; Harrison Gray Otis to Mrs. Otis, Nov. 17, 1797, Otis Papers; Henrietta Liston to James Jackson, Nov. 18, 1798, Liston Papers.
84 Jan. 23, 1794, Shippen-Swift Papers, Balch Collection.
perous persons ranging in political cast from liberal Whig to reactionary Tory. Focus and cohesion was given this rather diverse group by the imposing figure of President Washington, “...and all would have gone well but for that Democratic serpent, Jefferson, who, like his prototype, the one in the garden of Eden, whispered his devilish lies about human equality into the ear of our people, and aspersed the noble President with his venom, and scattered every falsehood, which could stimulate envy and suspicion among those who should have been contented in their own appropriate sphere, and thus planted and fostered the deadly tree of Party. . . .”

The new aristocracy was shaken to its foundations. Between 1792 and 1796 a series of political issues arose which heightened partisan feeling throughout the nation, and divided the upper class into Federalist and Republican groupings.

Social and political opinion tended to divide over the growing extremism of the French Revolution, Hamilton’s financial program, centralizing tendencies of the federal government, and neutrality in the Anglo-French conflict. Specific issues and events underscored the principles involved in this divided opinion—the high-handed course of Citizen Edmund Charles Genêt, the growth of Democratic societies, the Whiskey Insurrection, and the treaty of commerce with Great Britain. Federalists, holding the reins of power and joined to England by economic ties, tended to be pro-English and nationalistic in their ideas regarding the character of the Union. Republicans, seeking political power and seeing in the French Revolution an echo of America’s struggle for liberty, tended to be anti-English, often pro-French, and placed their emphasis on states rights. They also thought they saw in federalism the attempt to reimpose the rule of an aristocratic minority at the expense of the general population, to establish a monarchy, and to gain these ends by a slavish subservience to the former mother country. Federalists, for their part, resented the usurpation of the title Republican by their opponents for they considered themselves the true republicans—the group of the wise and the good who ruled in the name of and for the good of society as a whole. They regarded their opponents as irresponsible democrats, and democracy they equated with demagogu-
ery, mob rule, and, after 1792, the rolling of the heads of men of property into the guillotine’s basket. As a consequence, partisanship became extreme and intolerance the rule of the day. As Old friendships were broken, tradesmen were dismissed for political reasons, and the heads of the Republican party “as objects of the most injurious suspicion, were recommended to be closely watched, and Committees of the Foedralists [sic] appointed for that purpose. Many Gentlemen went armed, that they might be ready to resent personal aggression.” There were numerous attempts to ostracize Republicans in society. Vice-President Jefferson was not only shadowed by spies but was avoided by many people, some of whom would cross to the other side of the street so as not to have to bow to him in deference to his office.

Federalist disapproval fell upon many outstanding Pennsylvanians. At one time or another, Federalist animus was directed at the able and talented secretary of the commonwealth and ultimate head of Pennsylvania’s Republican party, Alexander James Dallas; Chief Justice Thomas McKean; Congressman and Revolutionary hero, Peter Muhlenberg; wealthy merchants Blair McClenachan, Charles Pettit, and John Swanwick; printer Benjamin F. Bache; scientist David Rittenhouse and his lawyer son-in-law, Jonathan D. Sergeant, and his lawyer nephew, William Barton; lawyers Peter S. Du Ponceau and Jared Ingersoll, Jr.; Dr. William Shippen and his son Thomas Lee Shippen; future Republican party whip, Dr. Michael Leib; Dr. James Hutchinson; that limb of an illustrious Quaker tree, Dr. George Logan; and the mercurial Dr. Benjamin Rush, a Signer of the Declaration of Independence.

McKean came under merciless attack from arch-Federalist William Cobbett, and was accused of everything from partiality on the bench to drunkenness and sadism. Benjamin F. Bache, who grew

87 Biographical Sketches of the Life and Character of Dr. George Logan by Deborah N. Logan (Stenton, 1821–1822), 22–23, Maria Dickinson Logan Papers.
increasingly Francophile and intemperate in the conduct of his newspaper, lost many subscribers, and, as a consequence, the whole Bache family partook of his unpopularity. In 1794, John Swanwick ousted Federalist Thomas Fitzsimons from his Congressional seat. Swanwick was a member of the Pennsylvania Democratic Society, a strong opponent of the expedition against the western insurgents and of Jay’s Treaty. He was held in contempt by Federalists, a great many of whom “threaten to kick him if he says a word in favor of Democracy.”

As party passions reached intensity in the late nineties, Republican leaders found themselves increasingly excluded from social functions, with the exception of certain official ones where it was all but mandatory that those holding high office be included. So that he could distinguish his true from his fair-weather friends, Jefferson determined to make no visits until called upon first. Thus, it developed that Republicans tended to keep to themselves. When they wanted good conversation and warm hospitality, they visited Dr. George Logan and his charming wife at Stenton. When they wanted the more sensuous pleasures of “society,” they attended the sumptuous dinners and balls at the Alexander James Dallases. Federalist Harrison Gray Otis, in discussing the current social calendar wrote his wife that “there is no such thing as a party even talked of, except at Mr. Dallas’s where I suppose there will be a democratic assemblage on tuesday evening, in which I have no concern.”

By the end of the decade, National Society was breaking up. Depending largely for its social cohesion upon the personality of one man, it had been weakened by the political fracturing that began in the middle of the decade when the Washington administration came

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00 Elizabeth Meredith to David Meredith, July 12, Nov. 8, 1795, Mar. 10, 1796, Meredith Collection. The pages of the *Aurora and General Advertiser* indirectly reveal this by their gradual omission after 1795 of the activities of Federalist dominated nonpolitical organizations.

01 Mary Meredith to David Meredith, Dec. 6 [1794], also Elizabeth Meredith to David Meredith, Nov. 8, Dec. 16, 1795, Apr. 14, 1796, Meredith Collection; William Bradford to Elias Boudinot, Oct. 17, 1794, Wallace Collection, II, 101, refers to Swanwick as “that contemptible creature.”


04 Walters, 15, 112–113.

05 Harrison Gray Otis to Mrs. Otis, Jan. 7, 1798, Otis Papers.
under attack, and, finally, by the retirement of its leader to Mount Vernon. It was then further embarrassed and divided by an internal struggle for political power between its moderate (Adamite) and extremist (Hamiltonian) wings, the latter of which identified itself with the policies of the retired president and entrenched itself behind his prestige. In pruning away its Republican members, National Society had not only weakened itself through reduction in numbers but had deprived itself of the abilities of many intelligent and able men. Now, it had further reduced its strength and prestige as a consequence of the Hamilton-Adams schism.

The political folly of the Hamiltonian Federalists ultimately caused the party to be turned out of national office in 1800. Locally, it had lost ground earlier. In 1799, the state went Republican; in 1800, Republicans won Philadelphia County offices; and in 1801 they made substantial gains in the city administration. Two other props to National Society were also removed. In November, 1799, the state legislature, whose presence had added to Philadelphia's importance and to society's glitter, removed to Lancaster. Then, in December, came the death of General Washington. Federalists were sadly depressed. "Things are going against us," old Dr. John Redman gloomily told William Drinker.

Finally, in 1800 an important buttress to local Federalist political influence was lost when the federal government departed for the swamps of the Potomac. It was almost as if the prestige of National Society went up in the fire and smoke which consumed Ricketts' Circus, O'Ellers City Hotel, and the glittering Assembly Room in December, 1799.

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96 The Adams-Hamilton conflict is ably discussed by Kurtz.

97 Cf. Kurtz, especially chapters 14-17, and Tinkcom, chapters 7-13; Thompson Westcott, Civil Officers of Philadelphia & Pennsylvania (ca. 1890), HSP. The election returns may be found in Minutes of the Select Council, May 2, 1799-May [25], 1803, under date of Oct. 17, 1801, and Minutes of the Common Council, Feb. 14 [18] 1799-Jan. 13, 1803, under date of Oct. 16, 1801, City Archives, Department of Records, City of Philadelphia. In 1800 in the city the Republicans captured only two of the twenty seats up for election on the Common Council and none of the five vacant Select Council seats. Aurora, Oct. 16, 1800. In 1801 there was a complete turnover of personnel in the Common Council; none of the previous members were re-elected.

98 Diary of Elizabeth S. Drinker, Dec. 18, 1799.

Political vicissitudes were not the only reverses which beset Philadelphia's National Society. It also suffered from the effects of financial troubles. The American economy, which had been on an upward trend for some years, took a downward turn in 1796 and by 1797 had entered a recession.  

Mercantile losses, contraction of credit, and scarcity of money brought on the failure of large numbers of business houses and ruined many speculators. The crisis came in the winter of 1796–1797. "Our City has Exhibited Such Scenes of distress this Winter as you Never Witness'd! Stoppage after Stoppage!" exclaimed Mrs. Jonathan Meredith, who was burdened with the responsibility of keeping her ill husband's business afloat. Some one hundred and fifty business houses are supposed to have failed within six weeks in 1796, and, by 1798, one hundred and thirty to two hundred persons are believed to have been sent to jail for debt.  

"There never was such a clamitous Period as the present," William Bingham wrote his partner. "We experience at present a Crisis of the most distressing Kind arising from the extravagant Speculations of certain Individuals, which have rendered them incapable of paying their Debts." Even he could not pay his obligations, for he could not transform his capital into cash. In January, 1798, Mrs. Drinker commented on the number of bankruptcies and imprisonments of "those who call themselves Gentlemen," and in truth the financial debacle of the latter nineties brought down some of the city's most prominent men.  

The collapse which rocked the city and spread such widespread local havoc was that of Robert Morris. At first there was belief that he would be able to extricate himself, but, upon his failure to do so, his credit melted away. When Morris went to jail, Otis philoso-


101 Elizabeth Meredith to David Meredith, Apr. 23, 1797, Meredith Collection; Corner, 236; Samuel Emlen, Jr. to William Dillwyn, Jan. 22, 1798, Dillwyn Correspondence, II; Mrs. Adams to Mrs. Cranch, Feb. [1–5], 1798, Mitchell, 129.


104 Diary of Elizabeth S. Drinker, Jan. 1, 1798.

105 Rachel Bradford to Samuel Bayard, Nov. 26, 1795, Boudinot, II, 113; Elizabeth Meredith to David Meredith, Nov. 27, 1796, Meredith Collection; Samuel Emlen, Jr. to William Dillwyn, Mar. 20, 1797, Dillwyn Correspondence, II; Sumner, II, 298.
phized, "What an example of the folly and vanity of human grandeur. But a few years since he was in wealth and honor, the most considerable man in the United States...." Social disgrace attended economic fiasco, for after Morris' incarceration many of his friends and associates were conspicuously absent from public functions. The Morrices never regained their social eminence. "Their minds subject to the infirmity of our nature, have not been callous to misfortune," commented a sympathetic friend. "Adversity has soured them and they view men and things through a partial medium, and weigh every thing by their own sufferings."

Besides Morris' partners John Nicholson and James Greenleaf, whose fortunes went with his, there were numerous others, involved with him, who experienced economic ruin or financial difficulty at this time. William Bingham rode out the storm only because of the financial assistance of the Barings of London. It was surely true that by 1797 there was no longer "such Confidence in men of reputed fortunes and prudence as used to exist."

As if in final judgment upon their follies, death took a severe toll of the upper class. The yellow fever carried off Samuel Powel in 1793, Henry Hill in 1798. The hurried burial of the latter in a make-shift coffin provided an occasion for moralizing on the equalizing effect of death. After the epidemic of 1799, Mrs. Liston remarked on the change it made "in Society, from the number of our acquaintances that died. . . ." Other deaths also thinned the ranks. The brilliant William Bradford, Jr., died in 1795 at the age of forty, and

106 Harrison Gray Otis to Mrs. Otis, Feb. 16 [1798], Otis Papers.
107 Ibid., Feb. 24, 1798.
108 Gertrude Gouvernor Ogden Meredith to William Meredith, Aug. 26, 1802, Meredith Collection.
110 Edward Shippen to Margaret S. Arnold, Apr. 6, 1797, "Life of Margaret Shippen," PMHB, XXVI (1902), 229.
111 Susanna D. Emlen to William Dillwyn, Burlington, Sept. 16, 1798, Dillwyn Correspondence, II; Elizabeth Meredith to William Meredith, Sept. 20, 1798, Meredith Collection.
112 Henrietta Liston to James Jackson, Jan. 17, 1799, Liston Papers.
one of society’s favorite sons, Walter Stewart, died the following year, leaving his wife and children in straitened financial circumstances. The same was the case when John Ross died suddenly in 1800. His family was obliged to sell both their town and country houses and drastically change their mode of life. Then, in 1801, Mrs. Bingham went sleighing too soon after the birth of her son, contracted pneumonia, and died at Bermuda during a trip which it was hoped would restore her health. She was only thirty-seven. Her husband, who felt his loss severely, left America and died three years later in Bath, England.

Others of equal prominence vanished from the scene at about the same time. The disappearance from fashionable circles of so many important people within such a short period of time was remarkable. Not since Revolutionary days and the exile of the Allens, Penns, and Hamiltons, or the almost wholesale exodus of Tory society from Boston, had such a gap appeared in an upper-class society. Contemporaries remarked upon it. Thomas Jefferson felt the change a salutary one: “The arrogancy of the proud hath ceased,” he quoted with satisfaction. However, many Philadelphians thought it a change for the worse. Phineas Bond, Jr., aptly summed up their viewpoint when he wrote Robert Liston in January, 1802: “By the Removal of the Congress, it was to be expected that a considerable Change would take Place, but it has been, equally aggravated, by a sudden & most lamentable Change in the Condition of Individuals, who contributed, in no small Degree, to the Festivity of the City of Brotherly Love.”

The attempt in Philadelphia to re-establish an aristocracy along the old pre-Revolutionary political lines was a failure. The very basis of its ascendency, political power, proved unreliable in a new era in

113 Fisher, “Recollections.”
114 PMHB, XXIII (1899), 84; A History of the Schuylkill Fishing Company (Philadelphia, 1889), I, 412.
117 Mary Norris to [Mary Dickinson], Mar. 26, 1799, Maria Dickinson Logan Papers; Fisher, “Recollections”; Anne Penn to John F. Mifflin, May 19, 1801, Shippen Family Papers, XXXIII.
118 Phineas Bond to Robert Liston, Jan. 2, 1802, Liston Papers; cf. also Henrietta Liston to James Jackson, Jan 17, 1799, ibid.
which political fortunes shifted and fluctuated. Its buttress—money—was but a weak reed in times of financial stress. Its way of life, at least as most frequently seen by the public, seemed degenerate. Foreigners might be struck by the simplicity of the operations of the federal government, the ease of access to men in public office, and the plain republican style of President Washington and other officials, but many Americans, unfamiliar with the pomp and glitter of European courts, held diametrically opposite views. The splendor of the presidential entourage, the stiff formalities of the levees and drawing rooms, the display of the Republican Court, the ostentation of such objects as the Bingham or Morris houses, the scandals associated with fast living—all of these and more, heightened in their impression by their simple Quakerly background, roused deep popular suspicion. The formula employed by National Society for creating an aristocracy was the wrong one for the time and place. The employment of the right formula and the successful construction of an aristocracy was to be the achievement of Provincial Society.

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