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"Order, Discipline, and a few Cannon": Benjamin Franklin, the Association, and the Rhetoric and Practice of Boosterism

IN THE WINTER OF 1747-48, in the midst of a crisis in Pennsylvania's provincial government, Benjamin Franklin spearheaded the formation of a voluntary citizens' militia to provide for the colony's defense. Historians of colonial America have viewed the formation of this unprecedented extra-governmental military force, known as the Association, as one episode in the endemic factional conflict between Quakers and proprietors.[1] Placed in a longer-term perspective, the

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[1] The story of the Association is also important in the ongoing struggle of Quakers to maintain their pacifist principles at a time of endemic warfare. From the vantage point of social history, the enthusiastic response to Benjamin Franklin's call to the city's "middling sort," its artisans and shopkeepers, to assume a civic role has also been interpreted as a sign of rising class consciousness in colonial American cities. See Robert L. D. Davidson, *War Comes to Quaker Pennsylvania: 1682-1756* (New York, 1957); and Gary B. Nash, *The Urban*

Association can also be understood as a significant moment in the development of American community life. That is, Franklin's rhetoric and actions in promoting the Association helped shape patterns of community mobilization that had become a central feature of American culture by the mid-nineteenth century.

Elsewhere I have described the cluster of ideas and practices that characterize this pattern of community action as the "booster ethos." "Boosterism" is generally acknowledged as a common feature of life in nineteenth-century American towns and cities, yet it has been more widely satirized than studied. Although the term boosterism itself is often used derogatorily, I have chosen it as the most succinct and expressive way to refer to a complex of ideas about community life and economic development that was pervasive in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[2] Briefly put, the booster ethos addressed the need in American communities for both economic growth and social order. It fused economic and moral values in the belief that a town's prosperity depended upon its collective spiritual condition, particularly upon its citizens' unity and public-spiritedness. Moreover, the booster ethos offered a vision of the community as a self-contained entity in which all interests were identical and interdependent. Consequently, the fortune of each individual, whether businessman, farmer, or laborer, rested upon the health of the community as a whole, and each was expected to return a portion to the community through voluntary

Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, 1979), 231-32.

[2] *Home Town News: William Allen White and the Emporia Gazette* (New York, 1989), 6-7 and passim. Despite the ubiquity of such community-building upon American culture, surprisingly little has been done to examine the general effects. Notable exceptions are: Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York, 1965), Part Three; and Lewis Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border* (Bloomington, 1954), xvi and passim. Other works that have touched upon the influence of boosterism include: Robert R. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns* (New York, 1976); Carl Abbott, *Boosters and Businessmen: Popular Economic Thought and Urban Growth in the Antebellum Middle West* (Westport, 1981); Michael Frisch, *Town into City* (Cambridge, 1972); Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825-70* (Urbana, 1978); and most recently, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill, 1990); and Harold L. Platt, *City Building in the New South: The Growth of Public Services in Houston, Texas, 1830-1910* (Philadelphia, 1983). A recent comparative study of frontier boosterism is David Hamer, *New Towns in the New World: Images and Perceptions of the Nineteenth-Century Urban Frontier* (New York, 1990).

public service and contributions to community institutions or enterprises.[3]

The culture of boosterism as practiced in the nineteenth century was also characterized by established patterns of behavior with which local leaders promoted their projects. Whether seeking to pass a bond issue to subsidize a new railroad connection or to raise funds for a college or public library, boosters staged ambitious campaigns to rouse the citizenry, combining incessant publicity in local newspapers with frequent public rallies. When possible, a wide range of local organizations, such as churches, schools, and men's and women's clubs, were involved in the project to heighten the atmosphere of universal participation. Commonly, the central role of a few local leaders in instigating the project was hidden from public view in order to promote the impression that the movement reflected the general will of the community.

Citizens were also repeatedly warned of the urgency of the present situation: invariably it marked a turning point in which the community's future hung in the balance. Hence, the project required complete unity and commitment. Boosters also emphasized the importance of the community's image in the wider society, because to flourish a city had to attract investment, businesses, and inhabitants. Moreover, each community competed with its neighbors for these scarce goods, and each was forced therefore to suppress local dissent in order to present an attractive, unified face to the world.

By the end of the nineteenth century, such assertions were so much a part of the culture of small towns and cities alike that they were taken as self-evident. Similarly, the various steps in organizing to promote a cause were undertaken instinctively. But in the Association of 1747-48 we have an opportunity to observe this culture in an early stage of development, as Franklin tentatively pieced together a method and a rationale for voluntary action by citizens in a manner deferential to but independent from the power of the state.[4]

[3] Many of these beliefs are similar to the theory of "Christian Capitalism" as propounded by nineteenth-century economist Henry C. Carey and described by Anthony F. C. Wallace in *Rockdale* (New York, 1980), especially 394-397; and for the doctrine of the "identity of interests" proclaimed by Whigs see Daniel Walker Howe in *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago, 1979).

[4] Other communications by Franklin and others during the same period share common features with the Association. I have chosen to focus on the Association here because it

The Association was produced by a crisis of traditional authority. Alone among the major cities of British America in 1747, Philadelphia had made no provisions for defense. In part this was because the city's relatively protected location gave residents a sense of security from enemy incursions. But the question of defense was also embroiled in a continuing power struggle between the Proprietors—the sons of founder William Penn and their followers—and the Quakers who controlled the popularly-elected Assembly. The Assembly jealously guarded its sole right of appropriation, and the Quakers' pacifist doctrines provided firm principle to justify a natural disinclination to spend taxpayers' money. When some contribution was demanded toward England's recurring European wars, the Assembly reluctantly and ambiguously appropriated sums "to the King's use." But in the 1740s as the colonists were drawn inexorably into what they called "King George's War," Philadelphia possessed no fortifications, no cannon, no militia, indeed had made no plans whatever for responding in the case of invasion.[5]

During the spring and summer of 1747, Spanish and French privateers swarmed along the Atlantic coast just outside Delaware Bay, and some sailed into Philadelphia itself carrying flags of truce in order to exchange prisoners. Local newspapers were filled with accounts of the capture of the city's merchant ships, but the Assembly resisted repeated calls for action. But as long as it seemed to be only the city's trade that was endangered by privateers, most Pennsylvanians seemed to see little reason for discontent with the situation.

To further limit the colony's ability to respond to the crisis, Governor George Thomas had departed for London the first of June. The absence of the proprietor's representative left the state at a virtual standstill, since the Assembly could enact no legislation without him. In his absence, Anthony Palmer, the President of the Provincial Council, was the formal head of the colony, but neither he nor the Council had the power to appropriate funds.

On the morning of July 13, the war came to Philadelphia's doorstep when the Council received news that one hundred French or Spanish

represents the most ambitious undertaking of its kind and because of the extraordinary legal dimensions involved in the formation of an extra-governmental voluntary military force.

[5] Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 229-230; Davidson, *War Comes to Quaker Pennsylvania*, chs. 1-3.

privateers—estimates of their numbers were later reduced to around twenty—had attacked and robbed several isolated plantations on the Delaware River in New Castle County. The same day they seized Philadelphia pilot John Aris and stripped both man and boat. Aris reported that one of them "spoke good English & enquired after Mr. Allen, Mr. Turner, & Mr. Lawrence"—Philadelphia gentlemen, the latter two members of the Council. Other pilots who were captured and released a few days later reported that the privateers showed particular interest in Philadelphia; the groups's leader predicted "he should be up at Philadelphia in Six Months."[6]

In Philadelphia, rumors flourished about plots among the city's Spanish captives, "negroes, & others" to steal a ship and escape, possibly to join the privateers and provide them with the dangerous information of the city's lack of defenses. The Council immediately called in local members of the Assembly to inquire whether they thought that body would defray costs of possible actions against the invaders. The Speaker discouraged hasty action, pointing out the unlikelihood that the principles of the majority of the Assembly would allow them to approve even defensive measures. He also argued that because the attacks had not occurred within the province itself, "the Government here lay under no obligations of doing any thing unasked."[7] In other words, to support their pacifism, the Quaker leaders were forced to claim that they were not their neighbors' keepers.

The Council had no recourse but to write to the Proprietors in London pleading for speedy aid.[8] When the Assembly met in its regular session in mid-August, Palmer warned that the privateers' boldness demonstrated that they had thorough knowledge of the city's "defenceless Condition" and warned of the terrible consequences of invasion. The Assembly responded on August 25 that such "Accidents" as the plundering of isolated plantations and seizing of pilots were unavoidable. It discounted reports of threats to invade Philadel-

[6] *Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania, From the Organization to the Termination of the Proprietary Government* (Harrisburg, 1851), Dec 17, 1745-March 20, 1754, 5: 89, 112-16, 119 (hereafter, *Provincial Council*). For a detailed description of the background and the creation of the Association see Davidson, *War Comes to Quaker Pennsylvania*, ch. 4.

[7] *Provincial Council*, 5: 91-92.

[8] *Provincial Council*, 27 July 1747, 5: 93-94.

phia "as so many Bravados." Moreover, the Assembly chided the Council for needlessly creating alarm with its vivid depiction of a plundered city, and indeed for possibly encouraging invasion by publicizing the city's defenselessness:

> Besides, as this Speech from the President & Council may be sent beyond Sea, if it should fall into the Hand of our Enemies it may possibly induce them to make an Attempt they otherwise would not have thought of.

Even if they were not bound by pacifist principles, the Assembly doubted that they would approve spending money on building warships or erecting fortifications, for "The Charge which must have arisen would have been great, the Benefit uncertain and small."[9] Thereafter, the Council was reduced to vain appeals to the Assembly when frightened citizens called for action.

In this stalemate, extra-governmental action appeared to be the only way to defend the colony. Accordingly, on November 17, a pamphlet called *Plain Truth* and credited to an anonymous "Tradesman of Philadelphia" proposed a remedy: "All we want is Order, Discipline, and a few Cannon." The author promised to present his fellow citizens with "a Form of an ASSOCIATION . . . together with a practicable Scheme for raising the Money necessary for the Defence of our Trade, City, and Country, without laying a Burthen on any Man."[10] Four days later, some 150 tradesmen and mechanics met at Walton's schoolhouse to discuss a scheme for a voluntary citizens' militia, which would be organized into companies based in each ward and led by officers of their own choosing. Two days later, a gathering of the city's "principal Gentlemen, Merchants and others" at Roberts's Coffee House similarly endorsed the proposal, and the following evening 500 men met at the New Building and formally signed an agreement to "form ourselves into an ASSOCIATION." In a few days, more than one thousand signatures had been obtained.[11]

[9] *Provincial Council*, 5: 101-102.

[10] [Benjamin Franklin], *Plain Truth: or, Serious Considerations On the Present State of the City of Philadelphia, and Province of Pennsylvania*, by a Tradesman of Philadelphia, in Leonard W. Labaree et al, eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 28 vols. to date (New Haven, 1959-), 3: 180-204, quotation on 3: 203-4, (hereafter, *Papers*).

[11] *Papers* 3: 184-186.

Thus was addressed the need for a disciplined defense force; funds for procuring necessary military equipment were obtained through similarly voluntary and collectivist means. Philadelphia's merchants subscribed £1500 to buy cannon, and a lottery was organized to raise money to construct batteries on the Delaware. No means of obtaining aid was neglected, including the more traditional avenues of petitioning established authorities, as the city appealed to the proprietors for a cannon and the merchants to the Admiralty for a man-of-war to patrol the bay. A petition with some 260 signatures was presented to the Assembly at a special session on November 23, requesting that it take measures to protect the city. Predictably, the request was refused.

The emphasis, however, was upon combined initiative by "the people" themselves. On December 7 the self-styled Associators met en masse at the Court House and received the blessing of the President and Council. On New Year's Day all eleven city companies marched in review and elected their officers, who were then issued rubber-stamped commissions signed by the President and Council. The lottery sold out its 10,000 tickets with uncommon speed, and on February 8 the drawing of prizes was begun. By the end of April two batteries were completed, a smaller one near Society Hill and a Grand Battery at Wicacoa below the city, the latter holding fourteen large cannon lent by Governor George Clinton of New York. A second lottery was launched in June to pay for further defense expenses. The active phase of the Association came to a close when news of the cessation of hostilities reached Philadelphia in mid-August, although the second lottery was carried to completion in order to outfit the Grand Battery.[12]

The Association's methods are so similar to the customary methods of voluntary associations in the nineteenth century that they might seem unexceptionable. First, of course, there is a public call to action that portrays the present situation in the most urgent possible terms—for any successful rhetoric must persuade its audience of the necessity for immediate action. Next, a public meeting is called to present a practical solution, which typically combines the united action of a large number of citizens and the collection of substantial sums of money through individual contributions. Bringing such a project to successful

[12] *Papers* 3: 185-186, 288, 312.

completion typically requires sustained publicity in local media and frequent face-to-face gatherings to maintain the enthusiasm of rank and file members.[13]

A further element of similarity relates to the question of leadership, which of course underlines the absence from my preceding chronology of the central role Benjamin Franklin played in the Association. According to James Logan, Franklin was "the principal Mover and very Soul," of the enterprise. Yet he accomplished it all "without much appearing in any part of it himself."[14] This elusiveness, too, is common among the leadership of nineteenth-century voluntary campaigns, because it was found more effective to diffuse credit among a large number of citizens, and even more preferable to portray the project as the spontaneous outpouring of community spirit.[15]

If movements such as the Philadelphia Association were ubiquitous in the nineteenth century, however, it was quite uncommon, indeed in some ways unique, in its own time. Later Americans were accustomed to such large-scale combinations of private and public effort, but it was only the extremity of the situation—in which governing powers had effectively abdicated their responsibility to protect their subjects—that made the formation of an extra-governmental militia acceptable in 1747. Indeed, Proprietor Thomas Penn took an exceedingly dim view of the Association when he learned of it in the spring of 1748. "This Association is founded on a Contempt to Government, and cannot end in anything but Anarchy and Confusion," he fumed to Council Secretary Richard Peters. He saw the Association as a "a Military Common Wealth" in opposition to the established government, and its creation was "little less than Treason."[16] Nonetheless, in the midst of the governmental crisis, the Council welcomed the

[13] My descriptions of similar local improvement campaigns in small-town Kansas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in *Home Town News* trace a similar pattern. There is also a marked similarity between this reform cycle and the patterns of revivals.

[14] James Logan to Penn, Nov. 24, 1749, quoted in *Papers* 3: 185.

[15] Ormond Seavey has described a similar pattern in Franklin's standard "tactics for getting things done in the city," in particular, "Credit for the success of the project would go to no one; the credit of being benefactors was widely diffused, and the envy of the prominent few toward the initiator would be largely eliminated." Seavey, *Becoming Benjamin Franklin: The Autobiography and the Life* (University Park, 1988), 158.

[16] Thomas Penn to Richard Peters, March 30, 1748, quoted in *Papers* 3: 186.

Association as "the only Method thought on likely to preserve the Lives & Properties of their Fellow-Citizens in case of a Descent."[17] It was, in other words, a temporary expedient, perhaps made more palatable by the fact that it was also a slap in the face for the Council's Quaker opponents. But as Penn perceived, the Association might form a dangerous precedent: "The People in general are so fond of what they call Liberty as to fall into Licenciousness, and when they know they may Act . . . by Orders of their own Substitutes, in a Body, and a Military manner, and independant of this Government, why should they not Act against it." Striking a milder note in the same key, Gary Nash has interpreted the Association as a sign of rising confidence among laboring groups in colonial American cities, its success demonstrating "how effectively the artisans and shopkeepers of Philadelphia could be recruited by someone outside the established circle of political leaders."[18]

The Association's revolutionary potential eluded notice at the time not only because it responded to an emergency but also because of the skillful way in which Franklin proceeded, simultaneously drawing upon the energies of groups generally excluded from civic life while conciliating the warring proprietary and Quaker elites. In fact, it is hard to envision the Association without Franklin, so thoroughly does it bear the marks of his personality and his characteristic methods of operating. It is also, perhaps, not coincidental that these patterns are typical of nineteenth-century boosterism. Further research will be necessary to trace precise lines of descent, but the example of the Association suggests that Franklin was highly influential in establishing patterns of voluntary community action that became central to boosterism.

For too long Franklin has been categorized merely as the quintessential American individualist, and his *Autobiography* as the archetypal success story that taught personal self-improvement and acquisitiveness.[19] More recently, however, scholars have begun to replace that stereotype with a more sophisticated understanding of how intensely

[17] *Provincial Council*, 5: 158.

[18] Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 231-232.

[19] For a recent restatement of this view, see Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York, 1986), 32-33.

social was Franklin's personality. Esmond Wright has rejected an individual/society dichotomy in understanding Franklin, arguing that "the line between self-help and social service was elusive . . . because for him individual action could never occur in isolation."[20] Ormond Seavey argues insightfully that Franklin's identity must be understood as essentially public, that is, as requiring a suitable audience for its fulfillment. His famous program of personal self-improvement, for example, aimed at achieving greater facility in presenting himself to his audiences, just as his constant civic improvement projects aimed to create the appropriate environment for his self-expression.[21] One might add that by presenting his life history as exemplary, hence replicable, Franklin might well have helped to set a model for public activism that would pervade public life well into the twentieth century.

In his *Autobiography*, Franklin noted that he had learned the danger of self-assertiveness when trying to gain supporters for his plan for a subscription library. "The Objections, & Reluctances I met with in Soliciting the Subscriptions, made me soon feel the Impropriety of presenting one's self as the Proposer of any useful Project that might be suppos'd to raise one's Reputation in the smallest degree above that of one's Neighbors, when one has need of their Assistance to accomplish that Project." One who would lead, it seemed, must seem to follow, and he developed the technique of putting "myself as much as I could out of sight" and presenting the project "as a Scheme of a *Number of Friends*."[22] It was a practice that he continued in his promotion of the Association.

Print, with its simultaneously present and absent author, is a medium well suited to this demand for combining assertiveness and self-effacement. As a printer, Franklin skillfully manipulated the ambiguities of his position as both a "meer mechanic" who reproduced what others paid him to do and a writer-editor with the potential to persuade his fellow citizens to adopt his point of view.[23] Franklin did

[20] Esmond Wright, *Franklin of Philadelphia* (Cambridge, 1986), 81.

[21] Seavey, *Becoming Benjamin Franklin*, 4-5, 101-102 and passim. See also Joanne Cutting-Gray, "Franklin's *Autobiography*: Politics of the Public Self," *Prospects* 14 (1989): 31-43.

[22] Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings*, Kenneth Silverman, ed., (New York, 1986), 87.

[23] On Franklin's restraint in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, see Stephen Botein, " 'Meer Mechanics' and an Open Press: The Business and Political Strategies of Colonial American Printers," *Perspectives in American History* 9 (1975), 127-225. Michael Warner discusses the implications of Franklin's simultaneous self-abnegation and assumption of leadership through the disem-

not exploit the potential of his position as newspaper publisher in promoting his project as fully as would nineteenth-century boosters, although he did show uncharacteristic energy and assertiveness in publicizing the Association in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Most colonial newspapers, Franklin's included, avoided controversy. He steered clear of involvement in the colony's factional wrangling, in part to avoid alienating readers. He would later be slow to challenge authority openly during the Stamp Act crisis. Too, Franklin was personally uncomfortable in situations of conflict and invariably sought to act as mediator.[24]

Colonial newspapers are something of a disappointment to historians of journalism, because they typically include so little of what we now define as "news," being largely compilations of whatever information about the wider trans-Atlantic and European world came the printer's way via letters, other newspapers, and word of mouth. Yet, even though the pre-revolutionary printer very rarely went out of his way to gather local news, he did hold the power of *selection*. In this regard, Franklin could be seen as commenting obliquely upon the local situation when, for example, the *Gazette* of August 13, 1747, included an item from New York that noted that the General Assembly had contributed £130 to a privateer outfitted by Connecticut and Rhode Island "to protect their Trade."

Nevertheless, in the eighteenth century pamphlets were the common mode for carrying on local controversies, and Franklin had occasionally published his own efforts, most notably his 1729 advocacy of paper currency and his uncharacteristically vehement defenses of the Presbyterian minister Samuel Hemphill, whom the Synod censured in 1735 for unsound doctrine. An anonymous pamphlet could not be positively connected with Franklin as might a similar piece in his newspaper, but at the same time its authorship could be common knowledge among his associates. Before launching his trial balloon, *Plain Truth*, Franklin carefully prepared the ground by publishing in

bodied medium of print in Warner, "Franklin and the Letters of the Republic," *Representations* 16 (Fall 1986), 110-130.

[24] Richard Bushman, "On the Uses of Psychology: Conflict and Conciliation in Benjamin Franklin," *History and Theory*, 5 (1966), 225-240. Seavey notes Franklin's tendency to withdraw from uncomfortable situations in *Becoming Benjamin Franklin*, 128.

the *Gazette* in late October and early November items praising moderate Quakers, i.e., those who held that their doctrine was not "absolutely against Defensive War." And he carefully guarded against adverse repercussions by consulting beforehand with Tench Francis, the attorney general, William Coleman, a pro-defense Quaker and member of the Philadelphia Common Council, and Provincial Council member Thomas Hopkinson. As Richard Peters attempted to paint the project to the proprietors in the most conciliatory and acceptable terms, the group had formed a scheme

> to assume the Character of a Tradesman, to fall foul of the Quakers and their opposers equally, as People from whom no good cou'd be expected, and by this Artifice to animate all the middling Persons to undertake their own Defence in opposition to the Quakers and the Gentlemen.

Peters had in fact been expressly delegated to inform the Proprietors of the group's plans. He pointed out that the plan would free the Penns from the costs of undertaking defensive action themselves.[25]

Having thus done what he could to smooth the way with the provincial elite, Franklin sought with *Plain Truth* to rouse the mass of citizens to action. He distributed the pamphlet free, and the first edition of 2000 copies was quickly exhausted; a second edition appeared in early December. In the pamphlet Franklin left no rhetorical stone unturned, and in so doing he presented many of the arguments that would subsequently dominate booster appeals.[26]

His primary goal, of course, was to convince his readers that they were in the midst of an emergency. Because his plan required the eager participation of hundreds of ordinary Pennsylvanians, Franklin adopted a rougher persona and more hortatory tone than in his other promotional writings.[27] The self-described tradesman-author began, by

[25] Richard Peters to the Proprietaries, in *Papers* 3: 215-218.

[26] Franklin noted in his Ledger D, 1739-1747, that he charged nothing for the printing he did for the Association. The costs for the first edition of the pamphlet, Association agreements, explanations of the Lottery Scheme, and lottery tickets amounted to over £52. *Papers* 2: 233, 3: 188-204, and the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Dec. 3, 1747.

[27] As David M. Larson notes in his analysis of Franklin's writings on behalf of other benevolent projects, Franklin generally avoided identifying himself with any particular social group; he posed instead as a disinterested citizen seeking the good of the whole community. He was capable of altering his persona as necessary to accomplish his purpose, which was here principally to rouse the entire body of Philadelphia to immediate action. Larson, "Benevolent Persuasion: The Art of Benjamin Franklin's Philanthropic Papers," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 110 (1986): 195-217.

way of excuse for his boldness in speaking publicly, by saying that in the present emergency it was his "*DUTY*" to awaken those "who seem to sleep." Like the revivalist preacher who seeks through sensational images to awaken his hearers by making them *feel* the pain of damnation—and Franklin no doubt learned much from observing the revival performances of his friends George Whitefield and Gilbert Tennent—he was at pains to impress upon his readers "the Confusion, Terror, and Distress" that invasion would bring.

> You have, my dear Countrymen, and Fellow Citizens, Riches to tempt a considerable Force to unite and attack you, but are under no Ties or Engagements to unite for your Defence. Hence, on the first Alarm, *Terror* will spread over All; and as no Man can with Certainty depend that another will stand by him, beyond Doubt very many will seek Safety by a speedy Flight. Those that are reputed rich, will flee, thro' Fear of Torture, to make them produce more than they are able. The Man that has a Wife and Children, will find them hanging on his Neck, beseeching him with Tears to quit the City, and save his Life, to guide and protect them in that Time of general Desolation and Ruin. All will run into Confusion, amidst Cries and Lamentations, and the Hurry and Disorder or Departers, carrying away their Effects. The Few that remain will be unable to resist. *Sacking* the City will be the first, and *Burning* it, in all Probability, the last Act of the Enemy. This, I believe, will be the Case, if you have timely Notice. But what must be your Condition, if suddenly surprized, without previous Alarm, perhaps in the Night! Confined to your Houses, you will have nothing to trust to but the Enemy's Mercy. Your best Fortune will be, to fall under the Power of Commanders of King's Ships, able to controul the Mariners; and not into the Hands of *licentious Privateers*. Who can, with the utmost Horror, conceive the Miseries of the Latter! when your Persons, and unbridled Rage, Rapine and Lust, of *Negroes*, *Molattoes*, and others, the vilest and most abandoned of Mankind. A dreadful Scene! which some may represent as exaggerated. I think it my Duty to warn you: Judge for yourselves.

To give credence to this vision of hell on earth, Franklin pointed to the behavior of the privateers who invaded the bay the preceding summer. In all, the picture is one of Hobbesian anarchy in which the individual can hope for aid from no other human being. Exploiting other racist fears, he suggested the strong possibility that some Indians might go over to the French. "And what may we expect to be the Consequence, but deserting of Plantations, Ruin, Bloodshed and Confusion!"

Franklin insisted that his intended audience, "we, the middling People, the Tradesmen, Shopkeepers, and Farmers of this Province and City," stood to lose the most, being less able than the wealthy to flee and more likely to lose all they own; indeed, they would bear the brunt of tributes extorted by their conquerors. And yet, the pamphlet argued, the wealthy were the ones who brought them to the present emergency. The Quaker party broke the social contract that "*Protection* is as truly due from the Government to the People, as *Obedience* from the People to the Government"; while their opponents, "those Great and rich Men, Merchants and others" through resentment and disappointed ambitions refused to take up their civic "duty" to lead their community. Franklin underscored that it was the authorities' abdication of civic responsibility that made necessary the extraordinary voluntary action he was advocating. He was clearly making a calculated appeal to a nascent class consciousness, as Nash perceived. Yet this rhetoric, for Franklin uncharacteristically divisive, also channeled class resentments in the interest of unified action. Franklin suggested that because traditional elites had neglected their civic duties, it was the right and obligation of all citizens regardless of station to play a significant role in community life. In a less aristocratic but nonetheless stratified age, nineteenth-century boosters would also invoke this ideal of universal participation even as they assumed that businessmen would be the natural aristocracy of their communities.

Franklin undercut the divisiveness of his criticism of the elites by envisioning the proper social order as one of interdependence and unity. He lamented the commonly expressed view that city and country owe nothing to each other. "Is not the whole Province one Body, united by living under the same Laws, and enjoying the same Priviledges? . . . When the Feet are wounded, shall the Head say, It is not me; I will not trouble myself to contrive Relief! Or if the Head is in Danger, shall the Hands say, We are not affected, and therefore will lend no Assistance! No. For so would the Body be easily destroyed: But when all Parts join their Endeavours for its Security, it is often preserved. And such should be the Union between the Country and the Town; and such their mutual Endeavours for the Safety of the Whole."

As J. E. Crowley has pointed out, organic metaphors had long been used to justify subordination to a hierarchical order but had recently also begun to be used to depict the need for the proper distribution of

resources throughout society.[28] The image of the community as one body would also be central to later boosters' efforts to minimize class and other divisions. Daniel Defoe, himself a model for Franklin, had along with others adapted the organic image in comparing an economy to the body's circulatory system, thus highlighting the primary role of trade.[29] In the same way, Franklin rejected the notion that Pennsylvania's trade was peripheral to its well-being, and hence not worth spending money to protect. Like the Council in its appeal to the Assembly, he argued that everyone was somehow touched by trade and would suffer if matters continued as they were. Increased insurance rates would inevitably "increase the Price of all foreign Goods to the Tradesman and Farmer, who use or consume them," while conversely decreasing the profits of "the Tradesman's Work and the Farmer's Produce."

The use of such organic metaphors for a community's economy in booster rhetoric seems invariably also to be accompanied by the specter of competition with other communities. Here Franklin pointed out that theirs was the only British colony that had no provision for defense and warned darkly that if Philadelphia remained unprotected, there would be "a Turning of the Trade to Ports that can be entered with less Danger, and capable of furnishing them with the same Commodities, as New-York, &c." The other city's gain would be Philadelphia's loss:

> A Lessening of Business to every Shopkeeper, together with Multitudes of bad Debts; the high Rate of Goods discouraging the Buyers, and the low Rates of their Labour and Produce rendering them unable to pay for what they had bought: Loss of Employment to the Tradesman, and bad Pay for what little he does: And lastly, Loss of many Inhabitants, who will retire to other Provinces not subject to the like Inconveniencies; whence a Lowering of the Value of Lands, Lots, and Houses.

Elaborating upon this concept, Franklin rejected the argument that it would be cheaper for the government to insure its citizens against possible losses, "For what the Enemy takes is clear Loss to us, and

[28] J.E. Crowley, *This Sheba, Self: The Conceptualization of Economic Life in Eighteenth-Century America* (Baltimore, 1974), 36.

[29] David Trotter, *Circulation: Defoe, Dickens, and the Economies of the Novel* (London, 1988).

Gain to him . . . whereas the Money paid our own Tradesmen for Building and Fitting out a Vessel of Defence, remains in the Country, and circulates among us; what is paid to the Officers and Seamen that navigate her, is also spent ashore, and soon gets into other Hands; the Farmer receives the Money for her Provisions; and on the whole, nothing is clearly lost to the Country but her Wear and Tear . . . ." Although Franklin was no militarist, he was not above employing the argument that defense spending could stimulate an interdependent local economy.

Debate between the Council and the Assembly had already raised the issue of the community's image in the world outside, an issue that is the obsession of boosters of all periods. Franklin took up the theme that Philadelphia's reputation for wealth as well as pacifist principles made it vulnerable in wartime. Presently, he warned, all circumstances "render the Appearance of Success to the Enemy far more promising, and therefore highly encrease our DANGER." On the other hand, appearances could be turned to the city's advantage. Once the city was unified in self-defense, "The very Fame of our Strength and Readiness would be a Means of Discouraging our Enemies; for 'tis a wise and true Saying, that One Sword often keeps another in the Scabbard."

Attempting to counter the authority of the Quakers' doctrine of non-resistance, Franklin offered the alternative virtues of unity and vigilance, taken from the more militaristic Old Testament. He related the story from Judges of the people of Laish, who were destroyed by a small number of invaders, because they had been lulled into a false sense of security: "And they smote them with the Edge of the Sword, and burnt the City with FIRE; and there was no Deliverer, because it was far from Zidon." He continued darkly, "Not so far from Zidon, however, as Pennsylvania is from Britain." Above all, Franklin sought to awake in his readers a passion for unity that would enable them to transcend their peril.

> At present we are like the separate Filaments of Flax before the Thread is form'd, without Strength because without Connection; but UNION would make us strong and even formidable: Tho' the *Great* should neither help nor join us; tho' they should even oppose our Uniting, from some mean Views of their own, yet, if we resolve upon it, and it please GOD inspire us with the necessary Prudence and Vigour, it *may* be effected.

Such unity and discipline promised respite from the factional bickerings of previous years, and if it departed from the peaceable vision of Quaker Pennsylvania, Franklin's vision also invoked "that *Zeal* for the *Publick Good*, that *military Prowess*, and that *undaunted Spirit*" demonstrated by their Puritan neighbors in his birthplace of New England. Once they had done all in their power to defend themselves, they "might then, *with more Propriety*, humbly ask the Assistance of Heaven, and a Blessing on our lawful Endeavours." His conclusion of the pamphlet echoed the cadence of a traditional Christian blessing:

> May the GOD of WISDOM, STRENGTH and POWER, the Lord of the Armies of Israel, inspire us with Prudence in this Time of DANGER; take away from us all the Seeds of Contention and Division, and unite the Hearts and Counsels of all of us, of whatever SECT or NATION, in one Bond of Peace, Brotherly Love, and generous Publick Spirit; May he give us Strength and Resolution to amend our Lives, and remove from among us every Thing that is displeasing to him; afford us his most gracious Protection, confound the Designs of our Enemies, and give PEACE in all our Borders, is the sincere Prayer of
> . . . A TRADESMAN of Philadelphia

Having thus preached the virtues of union and discipline, Franklin immediately presented Philadelphians with a plan that embodied them in clear and simple terms. His mode of operation followed the pattern that he had developed through several previous civic improvement projects. In fact, he used these projects as his organizational base, beginning on November 21 with a meeting of his peers, fellow tradesmen whom he addressed, according to Peters, "as the first Movers in every useful undertaking that had been projected for the good of the City—Library Company, Fire Companys &c."[30] But the present project was far more ambitious and more potentially controversial than any of these, and Franklin proceeded cautiously. After having gained his friends' approval for his plan of Association, he suggested that before any signed it they consult the city's elites. Consequently, according to Richard Peters, secretary of the Province and clerk of the Council, "all the better sort of the People" were given an advance view of the document a day before it was unveiled to the public at a

[30] *Papers* 3: 216.

mass meeting, held in the large hall built by supporters of the Great Awakening. Franklin recalled, "The House was pretty full. I had prepared a Number of printed Copies, and provided Pens and Ink dispers'd all over the Room. I harangu'd them a little on the Subject, read the Paper & explain'd it, and then distributed the Copies."[31] Despite his knowledge of revivalist methods, Franklin was a poor public speaker, and we must assume that his "harangue" succeeded more through its arguments than its delivery.[32]

Two days after the mass meeting, Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* went into action, carrying its first explicit statements about the undertaking. In this period the paper followed strictly the standard newspaper format, established by the *London Gazette*, in which its first and second pages were filled with whatever accounts had recently arrived from abroad, beginning with items from or about cities in Europe, then London and elsewhere in England, then the capital cities of the American colonies, running north to south, and finally Philadelphia.[33] This order was occasionally pre-empted when the first page began with more literary offerings such as essays or poetry, or with government proceedings or documents. In the November 26 edition, the news of the mass meeting did not appear until the Philadelphia section, but then merited a much larger than usual amount of space. Further, after describing the various meetings, the story, quite uncharacteristically for Franklin, expressed several firm opinions, first predicting that more than a thousand men would subscribe and then urging: " 'Tis hop'd the same laudable Spirit will spread itself throughout the Province; it being certain that we have Numbers more than sufficient, to defeat (with the Blessing of God) any Enterprize our Enemies can be suppos'd to form against us: All we wanted was Union and Discipline." Such "editorializing" served both to bolster the project locally and to ensure that readers outside Philadelphia—friends and foe alike—would take note of the city's change of heart.

Franklin stepped up the use of his newspaper to promote his project in the next issue of December 3. Page one began with a letter submitted

[31] Silverman, *Autobiography*, 123.

[32] *Papers* 3: 205, 216-217.

[33] For a detailed description of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in this period, see Charles E. Clark and Charles Wetherell, "The Measure of Maturity: The *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 1728-1765," *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (April 1989), 279-303.

by an anonymous reader that reinforced "the lively Picture drawn in PLAIN TRUTH, of the *Confusion* and *Distress* of a Town *surpris'd* by lawless Privateers" with an eyewitness account of the enduring trauma suffered by the citizens of Spanish Portobello after being seized by English privateers. There the widespread incidence of rape had left psychological wounds that continued to fester: more serious than the diseases that were communicated were the "infinite *Heart-burnings* and *Discontents*" experienced by wives whose husbands had failed to defend them, husbands whose wives had not seemed too unwilling to mix with the invaders, and former virgins who once despoiled committed suicide or turned prostitutes. "Industry and Frugality may in Time *restore* our broken Fortunes," wrote the Portobellan, "our Houses may be *rebuilt*, and the Breaches in our Walls *repair'd*: But no *Time* or *Industry* can *repair* these most miserable *Breaches* in our once happy Families, or *restore* their Peace and Honour." If such was the damage wreaked by English privateers, Philadelphians might well have asked themselves, what can be expected from those undisciplined, mixed-race hordes whom the author of *Plain Truth* had described? This harrowing account, of unknown authorship, provided vivid and seemingly independent corroboration that the Association was essential to the city's collective well-being.

Franklin then reprinted the full text of the form of Association, in the position in the newspaper generally reserved for official government proclamations, thereby, without a word, imbuing the project with the authority of the state.[34] The document was a model voluntary contract, beginning with a simple statement of the reasons for the undertaking and then outlining the means by which its goals would be accomplished. Maintained throughout was an awareness that this was a voluntary union of public-spirited individuals. The document was accompanied in the *Gazette* by explanations of each article, perhaps based upon the remarks that Franklin had made at the November 24 mass meeting. These explained, for example, that companies would be grouped according to neighborhood in order to ensure that each included men from all stations of life, "for the sake of Union and Encouragement." Franklin asserted that "Where Danger and Duty

[34] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 3, 1747; in *Papers* 3: 205-212.

are equal to All, there should be no Distinction from Circumstances, but All be on the Level." He might also have hoped, perhaps, that such shared experience would counteract factionalism.

In commenting on the provisions for regular training meetings, Franklin hinted at the propaganda value of such public demonstrations: "when 'tis known that we are all prepared, well armed and disciplined, &c. there is Reason to hope such an Emergency may never happen." The most controversial aspect of the Association—that the men elected their own officers—he defended as most likely to ensure the effectiveness of a voluntary army: "What can give more Spirit and martial Vigour to an Army of FREEMEN, than to be led by those of whom they have the best Opinion?" Nonetheless, the officers would also be issued commissions from the President and Council, the compromise thus preserving "the Prerogative, at the same time that these frequent Elections secure the Liberty of the People." In all, this issue of the *Gazette* is dominated by the Association as no single topic had been before, suggesting the extent to which Franklin had committed his energies and his reputation to the cause.

As later boosters would be well aware, print and public action could be used to build upon each other in promoting their causes, the spirit of civic gatherings demonstrating general support and newspaper reports publicizing and validating them. Similarly, the *Gazette* of December 12 demonstrated the vigor of the movement in its report of the first public gathering of the Association. On the afternoon of Monday, December 7, "a great body," nearly 600 men, had gathered "with their arms" at the State House and had marched to the Court House on Market Street. Franklin spoke to the group about a few organizational questions, though not surprisingly this was not mentioned in the newspaper.[35] Instead, the story emphasized the movement's alliance with government by focusing upon the presence of "His Honour the President, and several of the Gentlemen of the Council," who had instructed Secretary Peters to inform the gathering "That their Proceedings were not disapproved by the Government" and that they would "readily" grant commissions to their chosen officers. The event thus nicely balanced off the potentially subversive spectacle of hun-

[35] *Papers* 3: 225-226.

dreds of armed men, many of them presumably members of the "laboring classes," parading through the heart of the City of Brotherly Love, with an assurance that their aggressions were being contained by both self-regulation and official sanction. The report closed with a prediction that in tone and syntax was indistinguishable from nineteenth-century booster journalism: " 'Tis not doubted but on the first of January, the Day of Election, there will be a very full Appearance of the Associated in this City, all Hands being busy in providing Arms, putting them in Order, and improving themselves in military Discipline."

Even while using his newspaper in new and more assertive ways, Franklin encouraged the use of more traditional methods to focus Philadelphia's attention upon the Association. Two days after the public meeting, the President and Council proclaimed a general fast to be held throughout the province on January 7. This was the first such occasion in Pennsylvania history, and although the council records do not mention him, Franklin claimed in his autobiography that he had proposed the idea, "calling in the Aid of Religion." He said that he also drafted the proclamation, drawing upon his memories of New England, where fasts had often been proclaimed to protect the community from external threats. They had also served as moments when members of the community repented their divisions and re-dedicated themselves to their shared covenant.[36] Consequently, Franklin's proclamation does not mention the Association by name, but supplicates God to both "still the Rage of War," and "unite our Hearts, and strengthen our Hands in every Undertaking that may be for the Publick Good, and for our Defence and Security in this Time of Danger." Franklin published it in broadside form on December 9 and in the December 12 issue of the *Gazette*; later issues would offer essays on self-examination to instruct citizens in proper use of the day. As Franklin had no doubt hoped from his experiences of fast days in New England, several ministers used the occasion to preach pro-Association sermons. Those by William Currie and Gilbert Tennent were quickly issued as pamphlets. The ministers' approbation was subsequently

[36] Franklin, *Autobiography*, 124. On fasts in seventeenth-century New England, see David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Beliefs in Early New England* (New York, 1989), 169-172.

reported in the *Gazette* as further evidence of the Association's support.[37]

And so Franklin and his colleagues endeavored to keep the Association ever in the citizens' minds. The January 5 *Gazette* contained a relatively lengthy description of the Association's New Year's Day election meeting. Drums beating and flags flying, nine companies had marched to the State House where their chosen officers were immediately issued commissions. These officers then selected the leaders for the regiment as a whole. According to his autobiography, Franklin was initially chosen as colonel, but "conceiving myself unfit, I declin'd that Station, & recommended Mr. Lawrence, a fine Person and Man of Influence, who was accordingly appointed."[38] Actually, it was Abraham Taylor, a merchant and member of the Provincial Council, who was elected colonel, thereby cementing the alliance between the Associators and the government. Thomas Lawrence, also a Council member, was elected lieutenant colonel, and Samuel McCall, a merchant and fellow Library Company member, major.[39] Then the regiment again marched through town to the Court House, separated into divisions, each firing three volleys before they separated into companies and departed, each led by its new captain. The *Gazette* commented, "The whole was performed with the greatest Order and Regularity, and without occasioning the least Disturbance." But the review no doubt occasioned a great deal of civic pride among militia members by providing further opportunity for distinguishing themselves before their neighbors.

For the officers of each company that distinction was amplified by publication of their names in the *Gazette*, providing an opportunity for public recognition uncommon in colonial America, even as it testified to their self-denying dedication to the public welfare. In coming weeks the paper would also print the names of the officers of all companies outside Philadelphia. Whether by happenstance or design, these names came in slowly, so that throughout the spring there was always a reminder of the Association's activities.[40]

[37] *Papers* 3: 226-229; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 29, 1747.

[38] Silverman, *Autobiography*, 123.

[39] *Papers* 3: 298n, 308, 428n.

[40] According to Clark and Wetherell, "Measure of Maturity," 282, Franklin turned over management of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* to David Hall by its issue of January 12, 1748. Yet, since Franklin had by this time committed himself fully to the Association, it is unlikely that he would have relinquished control over the *Gazette*'s coverage of this issue.

The January 12 *Gazette*, in the absence of other news, published a list of some of the devices and mottos on the flags that each company had displayed on January 1. Franklin later claimed that these had been provided by "the Women, by Subscriptions among themselves" and that he had suggested the devices and mottos.[41] These ran the gamut of patriotic and martial symbolism, with an emphasis upon readiness and unity, such as one depicting "Three Arms, wearing different Linnen, ruffled, plain and chequed; the Hands joined by grasping each the other's Wrist, denoting the Union of all Ranks" and another of "Three of the Associators marching with their Muskets shoulder'd, and dressed in different Clothes, intimating the Unanimity of the different Sorts of People in the Association."[42]

Meanwhile, lottery tickets were selling smartly, despite the steep price of £2 apiece. The *Gazette*, which had by now assumed an unabashedly boosterish tone, implied that this speed demonstrated the city's public spirit in contrast with its competitors. " 'Tis observable, that the late Lotteries in New-England and New-York, have taken more Months to fill than this has Weeks; it being but 7 Weeks since the first Tickets were ready to sell, tho' the Season has been so severe, as almost to cut off the Communication with the Country and neighbouring Provinces."[43] It also reported that preparation had begun for constructing batteries on the Delaware, "and such is the Zeal and Industry of all concern'd, that 'tis not doubted they will be in good Condition very early in the Spring." On April 28, the paper described the construction in two days' time of the Society Hill battery. Here civilians came in for their share of praise. "The Building of the Breastwork and Merlons, laying the Platform, &c. was done by a Number of the House-Carpenters of this City, who voluntarily and generously offered their Labour gratis, and perform'd the Work with the greatest Alacrity and surprizing Dispatch." Few mid-nineteenth-century promoters would use more glowing praise to describe their fellow citizens' dedication.

Increasingly the *Gazette* suggested that, beyond providing protection, the Association was redounding to the benefit of the city's morale

[41] Silverman, *Autobiography*, 122.
[42] *Papers* 3: 268-269.
[43] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, January 19, 1747-1748.

and reputation abroad. When the regiment next held a public review in April, the newspaper noted, "The Appearance they made, the Regularity with which they perform'd their Exercise, and the good Order observ'd throughout the whole, gave great Satisfaction to the Spectators, who were very numerous, and to the City in general." And, in May: "Strangers who were present agree, that the progress this regiment has made in military discipline in so short a time, was truly extraordinary." City and country were being drawn closer together, and everyone seemed animated by an exemplary spirit of brotherhood. Colonel Taylor announced to his men that several country regiments "had generously express'd their Readiness to come to the Defence of this City" in an emergency.

> But as no Provision was made by the Publick for their Subsistence in such Cases, and it would not be reasonable to expect they should be among us at their own Expence, therefore it was propos'd that every Householder of the City-Associators, should freely entertain three or four, or as many as his House would accommodate of his Country Brethren, till the threaten'd Danger should be over, and that their Horses should be well provided for gratis. The Proposal was universally approv'd of and agreed to, and the general Assent of the whole declar'd by three hearty and unanimous Huzza's.[44]

On May 17, when the Council addressed the Assembly on the state of the province, Pennsylvania seemed to have left behind the fear and divisiveness of the previous summer. "This Province, which very lately was in a defenceless State, is now, thro' the zeal and activity of some who have the Love of their Country sincerely at Heart, render'd capable, with the blessing of God, of defending itself against the Designs of our Enemies."[45] The success of the Association also marked a turning point in Franklin's career. He had retired from active management of his printing business at the beginning of the year, and he would henceforth devote his time to scientific studies and public service. His leadership of the Association movement undeniably demonstrated his considerable skills in getting things done. Although Thomas Penn was not happy about it, even he recognized that the

[44] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 16 and May 26, 1748.
[45] *Provincial Council*, 5: 229-230.

Association had shown Franklin to be "a Sort of Tribune of the People," who "must be treated with regard."[46]

The means by which Franklin accomplished his goals also presented a model of how independent citizens could be inspired to volunteer their energies in the public interest. The Association was undoubtedly the product of unique circumstances—political stalemate and military emergency—in a colony with an unusual level of pluralism and prosperity. Yet we might usefully see in the Association the seeds of a significant American tradition of collective, voluntary action in the pursuit of community development, in other words, of boosterism. And in Benjamin Franklin's words and actions we can see a model of effective community leadership, which he disseminated through his *Autobiography*. Working assiduously behind the scenes but eschewing the appearance of leadership, proclaiming harmony but exploiting divisions when they proved useful, Franklin demonstrated how to persuade a large number of people from all classes that they shared a common interest and should act in concert.

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[46] Thomas Penn to Richard Peters, June 9, 1748, quoted in *Papers* 3:186.