

## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

### *Solving the Mystery of the Junto's Missing Member: John Jones, Shoemaker*

EARLY AMERICANISTS HAVE LONG COUNTED THE JUNTO as one of the shaping influences of Benjamin Franklin's early life. Enumerating the club's influence on Franklin's ideas and career, they have noted that the Junto was the first of many civic organizations Franklin founded; it was his first organized outlet for forays into natural philosophy and community planning. The Junto was the locus from which Franklin and his fellows created America's first public library, first transcolonial scholarly organization, and a host of other accomplishments.<sup>1</sup>

Ironically, one of the remaining mysteries of the club's story has been a question of numbers. Writing in 1771, Franklin noted the names of ten of his fellows who joined him to form the Junto:

The first Members were Joseph Brientnal, a Copyer of Deeds for the Scriveners; a good-natur'd friendly middle-ag'd Man, a great Lover of Poetry, reading all he could meet with, and writing some that was tolerable; very ingenious in many little Nicknackeries, and of sensible Conversation. Thomas Godfrey, a self-taught Mathematician, great in his Way, and afterwards Inventor of what is now call'd Hadley's Quadrant. But he knew little out of his way, and was not a pleasing Companion, as like most Great Mathematicians I have met with, he expected unusual Precision in every

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<sup>1</sup> On the Junto, see J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 1, *Journalist, 1706–1730* (Philadelphia, 2006), 332–56; Ronald Kent Esplin, "Franklin's Colleagues and Their Club: The Junto in Philadelphia's Golden Age" (MA thesis, University of Virginia, 1970); and George W. Boudreau, "The Surest Foundation of Happiness: Education and Society in Franklin's Philadelphia" (PhD diss, Indiana University, 1998), chap. 2.

thing said, or was forever denying or distinguishing upon Trifles, to the Disturbance of all Conversation. He soon left us. Nicholas Scull, a Surveyor, afterwards Surveyor-General, Who lov'd Books, and sometimes made a few Verses. William Parsons, bred a Shoemaker, but loving Reading, had acquir'd a considerable Share of Mathematics, which he first studied with a View to Astrology that he afterwards laugh'd at. He also became Surveyor General. William Maugridge, a Joiner, a most exquisite Mechanic and a solid sensible Man. Hugh Meredith, Stephen Potts, and George Webb, I have Characteris'd before. Robert Grace, a young Gentleman of some Fortune, generous, lively and witty, a Lover of Punning and of his Friends. And William Coleman, then a Merchant's Clerk, about my Age, who had the coolest clearest Head, the best Heart, and the exactest Morals, of almost any Man I ever met with. He became afterwards a Merchant of great Note, and one of our Provincial Judges: Our Friendship continued without Interruption to his Death upwards of 40 Years.<sup>2</sup>

Yet when Franklin resumed his autobiographical account in 1788 he was careful to state that the Junto had twelve members and that he pushed his fellow members to keep their club at that number:

Our Club, the Junto, was found so useful, and afforded such Satisfaction to the Members, that several were desirous of introducing their Friends, which could not well be done without exceeding what we had settled as a convenient Number, viz. Twelve. We had from the Beginning made it a Rule to keep our Institution a Secret, which was pretty well observ'd. The Intention was, to avoid Applications of improper Persons for Admittance, some of whom perhaps we might find it difficult to refuse. I was one of those who were against any Addition to our Number, but instead of it made in writing a Proposal, that every Member separately should endeavour to form a subordinate Club, with the same Rules respecting Queries, &c. and without informing them of the Connexion with the Junto.<sup>3</sup>

Was it a mathematical error overlooked in a document famous for its oversights? Or did a twelfth man join the artisans and shopkeepers who gathered each Friday night to discuss local events and personal careers in early eighteenth-century Philadelphia? If so, who was the Junto's mystery member?

<sup>2</sup> *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree (New Haven, CT, 1964), 117–18.

<sup>3</sup> *Autobiography*, 170–71.

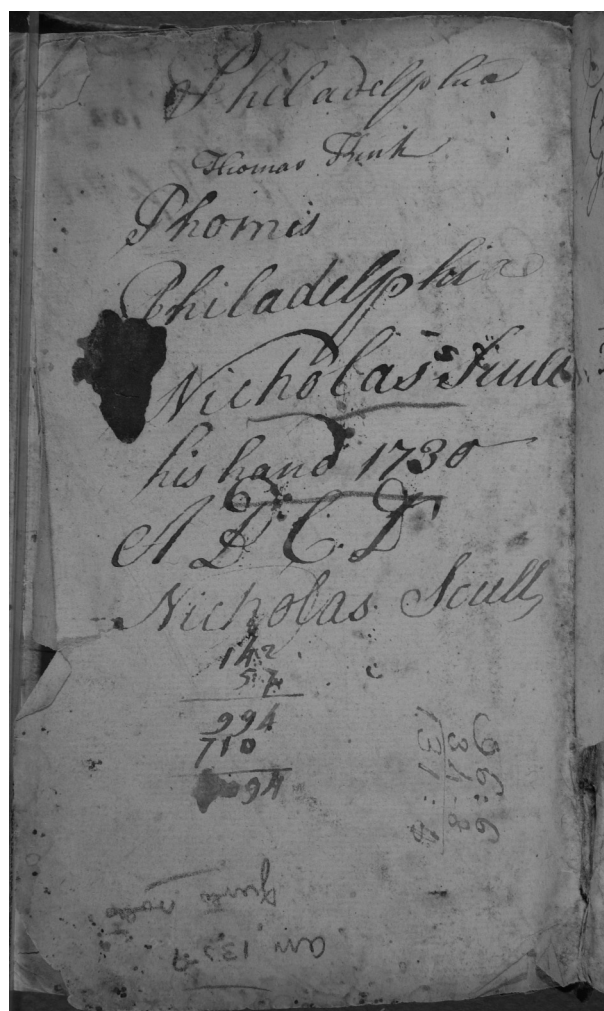


Fig. 1. Nicholas Scull Field Notes, 1737–38, which contains Junto accounts, and was used in 1730 as noted by Scull's inscription. Nicholas Scull Notebooks, 1728–39 (six volumes), Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

The answer to that mystery lies in the archives of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. The Historical Society owns six small notebooks kept by Nicholas Scull, the surveyor most famous for *An East Prospect of the City of Philadelphia, in the Province of Pennsylvania*, which he and George Heap created in 1754. Scull was a multifaceted career man, including stints as a sheriff and longtime surveyor general of the colony.

One can imagine that his meticulously recorded surveys were the primary reason later generations held onto the small books, wherein Scull noted land boundaries. Scull's commonplace book was obviously used in two different periods of time and followed the common practice of the period of reusing partially used notebooks by turning the volume over and beginning again with the upside-down former final page becoming the fresh page one of the revitalized book. Scull's volume shows just such usage, with numerous inscriptions intimating that Scull and members of his family used the pages later for penmanship practice (figure 1).

For Franklin scholars, the notebooks hold a far more valuable find. Scull was also a tavern keeper, and it was in his Indian Head Tavern that the Junto first met in the fall of 1727.<sup>4</sup> From 1728, Scull kept the Bear Tavern, located at what is now 246 Market Street (formerly High Street).<sup>5</sup> In January 1728/29 he began to record the accounts of Junto members at their weekly meetings in his commonplace book. His first entries include:

M <sup>r</sup> franklin	£0:0:8
Hugh Meridith	0:8
Robert Grace	0 : 8
George Weeb	8
31	
M <sup>r</sup> franklin to Club	5
Hugh Meridith to Club	5
Jo <sup>n</sup> Jones Shomaker <sup>6</sup>	5

The first names are familiar to anyone who has read Franklin's autobiography, but who was John Jones?

John Jones was a Junto member hidden in plain sight. Like Franklin, he was a Philadelphia artisan who plied his trade in the market area on High Street, a few blocks from the Delaware River. The commonness of Jones's name complicates the search for biographical information on the man. Indeed, Philadelphians acknowledged the confusion of keeping track of the Joneses by often adding their crafts to last names, a practice

<sup>4</sup> Lemay, *Life of Benjamin Franklin*, 1:334.

<sup>5</sup> An advertisement in the *American Weekly Mercury* of September 19, 1734, lists "The House commonly known by the Name of the Sign of the Bear, where Nicholas Scull now lives, with a bake house, an Oven, and other Buildings" for sale.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Scull Notebooks, 1728–39 (six volumes), Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Nicholas Scull adopted when he recorded Jones as "Shomaker" in his 1729 tavern account. Other John Joneses in Philadelphia piloted ships on the Delaware, cut hair and shaved customers, ran away from their indentured masters, and constructed houses.

The Junto's John Jones Jr. followed his father into the cordwainer's trade and used that term interchangeably with "shoemaker" for the rest of his life. His name appears in the records of the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting in 1728, when he acknowledged a "breach of our Discipline" by marrying Rebecca Finney, a non-Friend. While the meeting's records are filled with notices of young Quakers being read out for marrying out of meeting, Jones remained a devout Friend for the rest of his life. His 1761 will left bequests to a variety of Quaker charities and asked that he be "decently interred in Friends Burying Ground near my dear deceased wife."<sup>7</sup>

The shoemaker was involved in Franklin's circle in a variety of ways. He patronized Franklin's shop, purchasing advertisements and ink in July 1730 and a quire of paper that December. In addition to the Junto, Jones followed Franklin into membership in the St. John's Lodge of the Freemasons, the Philadelphia Contributionship, and in 1731 he was a founding member of the Library Company of Philadelphia, where he signed his name surrounded by fellow Junto members that November and served as a director intermittently until 1746, when the Library Company's minutes record the departure of "J. Jones, on Account of his ill State of Health" from membership.<sup>8</sup>

Jones's 1760 will provides a rare glimpse into the mental world of a member of Franklin's cohort. Spiritually, he remained a devout Quaker,

<sup>7</sup> Minutes of the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, July 27, 1728, 162, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College. On Rebecca Finney Jones, see 1750 will of Charles Finney in F. Edward Wright, *Abstracts of Philadelphia County Wills, 1748–1763* (Westminster, MD, 1999), 31. Rebecca Jones's burial is recorded in the Records of Deceased Friends, Oct. 1, 1758, Friends Historical Library. John Jones's will, dated December 26, 1760, and proved July 13, 1761, is located in record book M, 82, 141–49, microfilm, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>8</sup> Jones appears a few times in Franklin's papers, signing as a witness to Franklin's real estate transactions in 1734. See Leonard W. Labaree, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, CT, 1959–), 1:365, 367, 369–70; J. A. Leo Lemay, "Franklin's Accounts, 1730, Calendar 5," <http://dspace.udel.edu:8080/dspace/handle/19716/2357>; Minutes of the Library Company of Philadelphia, May 5, 1746, Library Company of Philadelphia Archives. Jones's involvement in the Library Company proved to be the critical factor in locating other materials about his life. While many John Joneses left wills, only this one could leave "my Rights and Interest in the Library Company in one of the west Wings of the Statehouse" to John Learson. The transfer of the share, on January 29, 1762, is located in the Shareholders' Records of the Library Company of Philadelphia. My thanks to Phil Lapsansky for his help in finding this information.

resigning his soul “to its great Creator in humble hope of its eternal Happiness,” and leaving a variety of religious books to members of his extended kin network and to Quaker schoolmaster and abolitionist Anthony Benezet, “my Friend and Executor.” Materially, Jones carefully noted which friends and relatives were to receive his holdings of glass and china, silver items including spoons, tea equipage, salvers, and tankards, as well as the finest furnishing in his house’s parlor. Jones’s will revealed his life as a bookman by noting gifts of specific volumes to relatives and then leaving “the Remainder of all my Books pamphlets and all my Maps” to John Jones, bricklayer, and Nathaniel Evans. Perhaps most intriguing was Jones’s disposal of his slaves. A great deal has been written about the ways in which Junto members experienced the Enlightenment, but Jones’s last will offers a unique glimpse into that circle’s beliefs about human freedom and potential as well as the manumission of enslaved African Americans. “I have Four Negro Slaves not yet manumitted for whom I have tender Regard and think it my duty as their Master to do by them as I should be willing was ye Circumstanced as they are should be done unto me, That is to free them from their Bondage or Slavery and make such Provision for them as I think their situation in life when free will require,” Jones wrote. He carefully noted that he had already manumitted two men and confirmed that Cesar and John were free. Affia, “near Fifty Years old has lived in my Family about twenty one Years,” received household goods including feather beds, bedsteads, bedding and linens, and furniture. Affia, the previously freed John, and “a Molotto Woman Named Phebe who formerly belonged to my late Father in Law Charles Finney” each received one-third of Jones’s kitchen furniture in equal shares. Jones carefully noted the birth dates of James, Cato, and Phillis, each serving apprenticeships away from his home at the time he wrote his will. James and Phillis were to receive an education and manumission when they reached the age of twenty-one. Jones provided an annuity for each of his former bondspeople for the remainder of their lives.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Jones will, 141–46. On the views of Franklin and his contemporaries regarding slavery, see David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York, 2004); Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton, NJ, 1985); and George S. Brookes, *Friend Anthony Benezet* (Philadelphia, 1937).

### *The Junto Accounts*

Scull's account book offers a rare glimpse into the earliest days of the Junto. In addition to Jones, the accounts name ten of the eleven men recorded in Franklin's autobiography. Thomas Godfrey is missing. Godfrey was "a self-taught Mathematician, great in his Way, and afterwards Inventor of what is now call'd Hadley's Quadrant. But he knew little out of his way, and was not a pleasing Companion," Franklin recalled, noting elsewhere that a feud had developed between himself and the Godfrey family over a prospective marriage to Godfrey's kinswoman. "He soon left us," Franklin said. But that argument did not develop until the spring of 1730. Perhaps Godfrey was out of town on the meeting dates Scull recorded. Perhaps his name appeared on the accounts pages that were subsequently torn from the commonplace book. He may have paid cash for his pints and quarts, and therefore Scull might not have needed to keep an account for him. Or perhaps his contentious nature kept him from staying to join his neighbors for drinks and entertainment.<sup>10</sup>

The drinks the account book records do show an integral part of the socialization and fellowship that were central to the Junto—if perhaps downplayed by Franklin in his autobiography. Elsewhere in Scull's commonplace books, he recorded a poem relating a meeting of the Junto. After the heavy work of mutual study was over, the members turned to the fellowship of the glass to inspire their poetical recitations:

Business once ore a Diferent Scene appears  
The Glass goes round heavenly Musik cheers  
The Generous Juice the witty Bards Inspire  
With Bright Ideas and Poetic fire<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 2, *Printer and Publisher, 1730–1747* (Philadelphia, 2006), 171–72.

<sup>11</sup> The Junto verses are found in Scull's 1732 commonplace book, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



*Nicholas Scull's Junto Accounts*

January the 27 172[8/9] [ <i>page damaged</i> ] <sup>12</sup>	
M <sup>r</sup> franklin	£0:0:8
Hugh Meridith	0:8
Robert Grace	0:8
George Weeb	8
31	
M <sup>r</sup> franklin to Club	5
Hugh Meridith to Club	5
Jo <sup>n</sup> Jones Shomaker	5
Febr	6 <sup>th</sup>
Jos Brinknall	
M <sup>r</sup> franklin	
Hugh Meridith	3:0
Robert Grace	
George Weeb	
M <sup>r</sup> Coleman	
14	
Will <sup>m</sup> Parsons	2:5
Feb 14 <sup>th</sup>	
Benj <sup>n</sup> franklin	0:5
Georg Weeb	5
Jo <sup>n</sup> Jones	5
Huge Meridith	5
Stephen Potts	5
21	
Jos Beinall	4
Hugh Meredith	4

<sup>12</sup> January 27, 1728/9 was a Monday; the second date mentioned is Friday, January 31. The Junto's regular meeting day of Friday continues on the dates that follow. In July 1731, Philadelphia set the following prices for alcohol in public houses: wine per quart, 2 shillings; rum per jill, 2 pence; "Rum Punch made of Double Refined Sugar p Quart," 1 shilling 4 pence; tiff or flipp per quart, 8 pence; "Rum punch made with Single refined Sugar," 1 shilling; "Arrack one Quart made into Punch," 8 shillings; beer per quart, 3 pence; "Best Beer p Quart," 5 pence. John William Wallace *Collection of Ancient Records of Philadelphia*, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. On drinking laws and costs, see Mary Emma Boggs and Benjamin Randolph Boggs, "Inns and Taverns of Old Philadelphia" (typescript, 1917), Historical Society of Pennsylvania; and Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch and Revolution: Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1999).



Jo <sup>n</sup> Jones		4
M <sup>r</sup> franklin		4
Robert Grace		4
	28	
Jos brinknall		5
Robert Grace		5
Stephen Potts		5
Jo <sup>n</sup> Jones		5
Hugh Meridith		5
M <sup>r</sup> franklin		5
<i>[new page, top of page heavily damaged]</i>		
		6½
[Hugh Merid]ith		6½
[Joseph Breit]nall		6½
[Robert] Grace		6½
Jo[h <sup>n</sup> J]ones		6½
	21	
M <sup>r</sup> franklin		1/4
Huge Meridith		1:4
Robert Grace		1:4
	28	
Hugh Meridith		6
<i>[new page, top of page heavily damaged]</i>		
W.[illiam Parsons]		
Robe[rt Grace]		
John J[ones]		
	4	
W <sup>m</sup> Pars[ons]		:11
B. Franklin		:11
H. Meridith		:11
R. Grace		:11
<del>J. Brintnall</del>		
B. Frank. & H. M. <sup>13</sup>		9

<sup>13</sup> The accounts for Franklin and Hugh Meredith, which start at this date, show that their partnership extended into personal financial accounts as well as their printing business.

John Jones jun <sup>r</sup>		4½
	August 8	
William Parsons		6
H. Merideth		6
R. Grace		6
B. Franklin		6

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		:7
JJ		:7
WP		:7
BF		:7
HM		:7

21

HM & BF		0,,0,,10,,
R.G.		0,,0,,5,,
WP		0,,0,,5,,

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Stephen [Potts]		
W <sup>m</sup> Par[sons]		
BF		1:0

12

Rob <sup>t</sup> Grace		6
BF HM		1:0
S. pott		6
W. parsons		6

19

W <sup>m</sup> Parsons		7½
H & Benj <sup>a</sup>		1:2
JJ		7½
RG		7½
<del>WP</del>		7

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B.F		[?]
J.J		,,0,,10
Stephen [Potts]		0-10

17

R. Grace	10 <sup>d</sup>
BF. & H.M	1 8
WM paid	0 10
SP	0=10
W. Parsons	10

[*At least twelve pages of commonplace book torn out at this point*]

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