

Two Chips off the Same Block: Benjamin Franklin's Library Company and Philosophical Society and the Saga of Their 275-Year Relationship¹

JOHN C. VAN HORNE

Director Emeritus
Library Company of Philadelphia

One frequently hears the phrase “sister institutions” used to refer to a pair or group of institutions that share many attributes. Colleges of a certain type can be sister institutions; the Seven Sisters come readily to mind. Likewise, libraries of a certain type can be sister institutions; both the American Philosophical Society (APS) and the Library Company of Philadelphia (LCP) are members of the Independent Research Libraries Association (IRLA), and we consider all of the 19 member libraries to be our sister institutions. But when it comes to speaking of just these two institutions—the APS and LCP—we can be more precise and indeed more literal, for the APS and LCP are sister institutions genetically as well as metaphorically. That is to say, both institutions sprang from the fertile mind of the same father—Benjamin Franklin. For 275 years these two institutions have grown, evolved, and achieved eminence in their respective fields. They have followed what might be thought of as parallel trajectories, yet there have been periods throughout this long span of years when those paths have touched, or crossed, and it is those intersections I want to illuminate here. This paper will therefore be about the dual histories (one might

1 This paper originated as a talk to the Friends of the American Philosophical Society (APS) and the members of the Library Company of Philadelphia (LCP) on April 21, 2006. Given that rather informal origin, it does not include footnotes providing citations for every statement or quotation. Sources for the history of the LCP include: Gray, *Benjamin Franklin's Library*; LCP, “*At the Instance of Benjamin Franklin*”; Peterson, “Library Hall”; and LCP Directors’ Minutes. Sources for the history of the APS include: Franklin, *Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge*; Carter, “*One Grand Pursuit*”; Lingelbach, “Philosophical Hall”; Bell, *Patriot-Improvers*; Smith, *Oak from an Acorn*; Minutes of APS Meetings; various volumes of the *APS Yearbook*; and conversations with Whitfield J. Bell, Jr. Sources for the discovery of Franklin’s shelf mark and the story of the reconstruction of his library include: Wolf, “Key to the Identification of Franklin’s Books”; Wolf, “Reconstruction of Benjamin Franklin’s Library”; Green, *Poor Richard’s Books*, 5; and Hayes, “Introduction.” I thank outside readers James N. Green and Richard Worley for their helpful suggestions and comments.



FIGURE 1. Robert Feke portrait of Benjamin Franklin about 1748. Courtesy of Harvard University Portrait Collection. Bequest of Dr. John Collins Warren, 1856.

even say the dueling histories) of these two Franklin-founded institutions, and about their sisterly affection and occasional sibling rivalry.

The Library Company was the outgrowth of Benjamin Franklin's Junto, which he formed in 1727 at the age of 21 for the mutual improvement of its members, who were for the most part aspiring artisans and mechanics and tradesmen like Franklin himself (Figure 1). The Junto met weekly to discuss the issues of the day and concoct schemes of civic improvement. In his *Autobiography*, Franklin wrote that "there was not a good Bookseller's Shop in any of the Colonies to the Southward of Boston. . . . Those who lov'd Reading were oblig'd to send for their Books from England." He related that, during meetings of the Junto, books were frequently needed for reference in order to shed light on a subject or resolve a point of dispute. Junto members thought it would be convenient to have a library to which they could turn, so at first they pooled their books into a common library, or at least "such books as we could best spare." But the number was not great, and there were other inconveniences as well, owing to "want of due care of them," so after about a year the collection was broken up and returned to its original owners. Franklin then came up with another, better idea: they formed a joint stock company so that they could pool their financial resources, rather than their books, making it

possible to create a larger and finer library than any one of them could have amassed individually. That brilliant bit of Franklinian pragmatism and ingenuity was the genesis of the Library Company.

By the fall of 1731 they had gathered the requisite 50 subscribers willing to purchase shares for 40 shillings each, and pay 10 shillings per year thereafter to buy books to maintain the library, a fairly substantial sum at the time. They signed the Articles of Association, and early in 1732 the first book order was sent to England, with James Logan, who was called “the best judge of books in these parts,” assisting with the selection. The first shipment arrived in the fall of 1732, and the collection has been growing ever since. The Library Company continues to flourish today, not many years shy of 300 years later. Benjamin Franklin served as Director from 1731 until 1756, as Secretary from 1746 to 1757, and as Librarian for a brief period from December 1733 to March 1734. Were one to draw up a list of the works most commonly found in colonial American (and probably provincial English) libraries, the early selection of the Library Company could serve as a pattern. In the only American libraries that antedated the Library Company (such as a few New England community libraries, small collections sent to Anglican parishes, and the libraries at the only three colleges—Harvard, Yale, and William & Mary) the choice of books was for the most part superimposed from above for theological or educational purposes and reflected the formal learning of the donor or teacher. For the Library Company, the desire for the book stemmed from the prospective reader. Franklin printed broadside catalogs in the 1730s, but they did not survive; the earliest existing catalog is his 1741 pamphlet, a small pamphlet of 56 pages (Figure 2). The catalog listed 374 titles, of which 85 were gifts. This catalog makes clear just what kinds of books the members were requesting—more practical than theoretical, with an emphasis on historical works, including geographical books and accounts of voyages and travels, literature, and the sciences. Theology accounted for only a tenth of the titles.

At the end of the catalog, to fill up what would have been left as a final blank page, Franklin added “A Short Account of the Library” (Figure 3). Had he not done this act of typically Franklinian thrift we would not know as much as we do about just how the library functioned. Franklin noted that the library was open Saturday afternoons from four until eight o’clock. Members could borrow books freely and without charge. Nonmembers could borrow books by depositing their value as security (in later years double the value) “and paying a small Acknowledgment for the Reading.” In the early days this fee was apparently either never collected or discontinued; it does not appear as income in the first financial reports. So it can be said that the Library

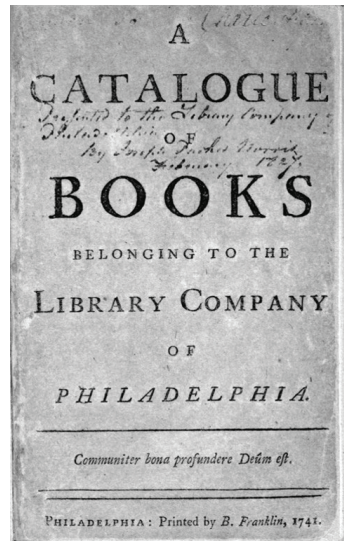


FIGURE 2. The first surviving catalog, printed by Franklin in 1741. Library Company of Philadelphia.

Company, though a subscription library for the benefit of its shareholders, was also a public library for the use of any Philadelphian.

Franklin had truly hit upon an idea whose time had come. The Library Company's example was copied up and down the Atlantic seaboard from Salem, Massachusetts to Charleston, South Carolina. Franklin was proud of that fact; his aim, he said, was to make "the common tradesmen and farmers as intelligent as most gentlemen from other countries." Franklin also thought that the Library Company (and subscription libraries elsewhere) had helped educate the colonists to fight for their rights. As he put it in his *Autobiography*, they "perhaps contributed in some degree to the stand so generally made throughout the colonies in defense of their privileges."²

Twelve years after the Library Company got up and running Franklin turned to another major enterprise—the founding of America's first learned society on the model of the Royal Society of London. This was several years before his electrical experiments would make Franklin a scientist of international reputation and one of the most influential members of the Royal Society, to which he was elected in 1756.

The first inkling of a learned society is to be found in a letter of 1738 or 1739 from the botanist John Bartram to Peter Collinson, his

2 This is the concluding passage of the first part of Franklin's *Autobiography*, which was written in 1771, so Franklin alludes here to the Stamp Act and other pre-Revolutionary controversies rather than to the Revolution itself.

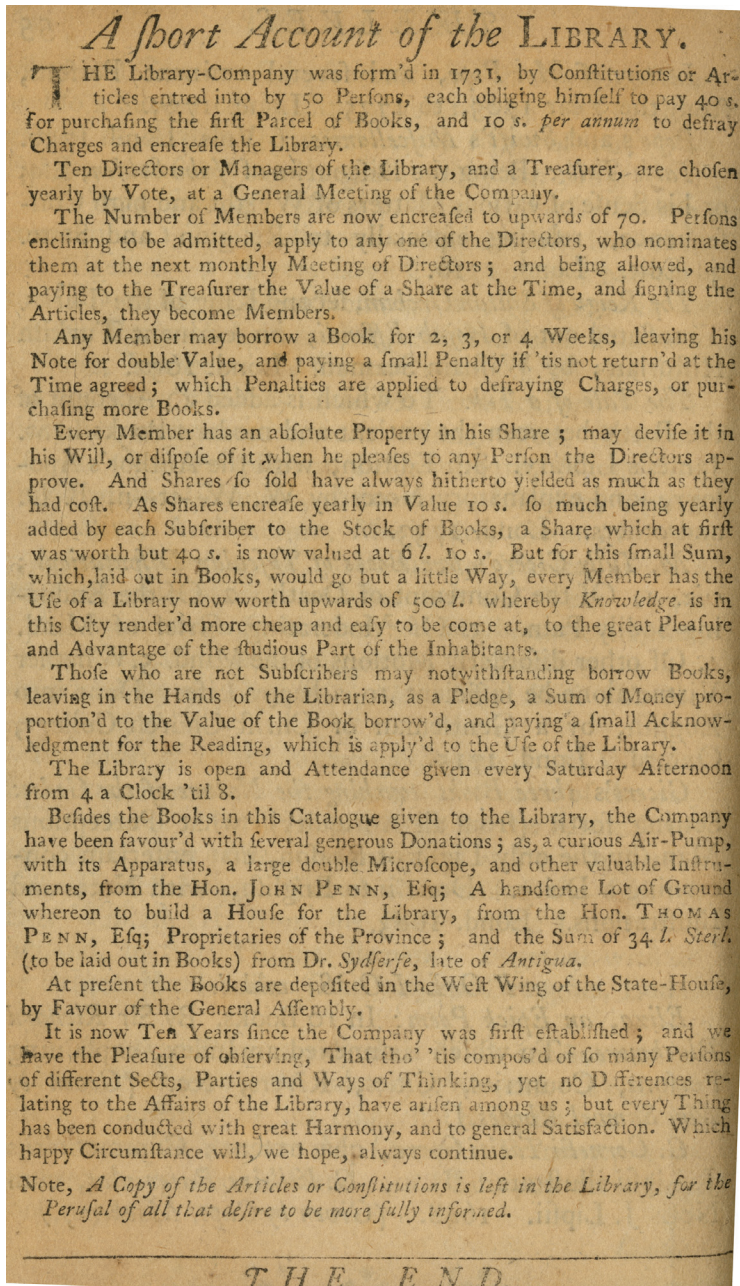


FIGURE 3. Franklin's "A short Account of the Library," appended to the 1741 *Catalogue*. Library Company of Philadelphia.

London correspondent. Collinson was a merchant as well as a naturalist, and he also happened to be the Library Company's book agent, filling orders for the titles requested, sending other books he believed should be in the collection, and even making gifts of books. Bartram's letter suggested the creation of an academy or society of the "most ingenious & Curious men" to study "naturale secrets[,] arts & scyances." The society would have a meeting place where discoveries would be freely shared, and there would be regular lectures as well. Collinson's response to Bartram is interesting for a couple of reasons. One is that he threw some cold water on this idea, suggesting that Philadelphia lacked "a Sett of Learned Well Qualified" men to join such a group, which he did not find surprising, "Considering the Infancy of your Colony." And the second is that Collinson suggested that Philadelphia already had the germ of such a society in the Library Company, which he called "an Essay towards such a Society." (Collinson in 1745 provided the Library Company with some of the scientific equipment—glass tubes—that Franklin and other early members used in their electrical experiments.) So here we have evidence that before the APS was even a glimmer in the eye of Benjamin Franklin, the mere existence of the Library Company was almost enough to nip it in the bud. Fortunately for the rest of my story (and for the APS), Bartram was not deterred, although he did let the idea languish for several years.

Then in 1743 Bartram and his friend Franklin took up that original idea again and tried to make it practicable. Franklin printed the broadside *Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge among the British Plantations in America*, and he and Bartram circulated it among their friends and correspondents (Figure 4). This document lays out the goals and operating method for such a learned society. It was a very comprehensive, well-thought-out proposal that mentions the activities that the APS would engage in and that still define its mission today—that is, Meetings, publications, and communication with foreign learned societies. Before the end of March 1744 the Society had come into being and held three Meetings. Of the nine Philadelphians whom Whitfield J. Bell, Jr. identified as comprising the core of the Society, all were Library Company shareholders.

Word of the new society for promoting useful knowledge quickly spread to other American colonies and throughout Europe, but it proved difficult for the organization to take hold. In 1745 Franklin reported to Cadwallader Colden of New York that the Members "are very idle gentlemen, and will take no pains," and Bartram told the same correspondent that the Society could be successful if the Members would spend more time on science and less "in the Club, [playing] chess, and [in the] coffee house." The Society was at that point

A P R O P O S A L for Promoting USEFUL KNOWLEDGE among the *British Plantations in America.*

THE *English* are possess'd of a long Tract of Continent, from *Nova Scotia* to *Georgia*, extending North and South thro' different Climates, having different Soils, producing different Plants, Mines and Minerals, and capable of different Improvements, Manufactures, &c.

The first Drudgery of Settling new Colonies, which confines the Attention of People to mere Necessaries, is now pretty well over; and there are many in every Province in Circumstances that set them at Ease, and afford Leisure to cultivate the finer Arts, and improve the common Stock of Knowledge. To such of these who are Men of Speculation, many Hints must from time to time arise, many Observations occur, which if well-examined, pursued and improved, might produce Discoveries to the Advantage of some or all of the *British* Plantations, or to the Benefit of Mankind in general.

But as from the Extent of the Country, such Persons are widely separated, and seldom can see and converse, or be acquainted with each other, so that many useful Particulars remain uncommunicated, die with the Discoverers, and are lost to Mankind; it is, to remedy this Inconvenience for the future, proposed,

That One Society be formed of Virtuosi or ingenious Men residing in the several Colonies, to be called *The American Philosophical Society*, who are to maintain a constant Correspondence.

That *Philadelphia* being the City nearest the Centre of the Continent-Colonies, communicating with all of them northward and southward by Post, and with all the Islands by Sea, and having the Advantage of a good growing Library, be the Centre of the Society.

That at *Philadelphia* there be always at least seven Members, viz. a Physician, a Botanist, a Mathematician, a Chemist, a Mechanician, a Geographer, and a general Natural Philosopher, besides a President, Treasurer and Secretary.

That these Members meet once a Month, or oftner, at their own Expence, to communicate to each other their Observations, Experiments, &c. to receive, read and consider such Letters, Communications, or Queries as shall be sent from distant Members; to direct the Dispersing of Copies of such Communications as are valuable, to other distant Members, in order to procure their Sentiments thereupon, &c.

That the Subjects of the Correspondence be, All new-discovered Plants, Herbs, Trees, Roots, &c. their Virtues, Uses, &c.; Methods of Propagating them, and making such as are useful, but particular to some Plantations, more general, Improvements of vegetable Juices, as Cyders, Wines, &c.; New Methods of Curing or Preventing Diseases. All new-discovered Fossils in different Countries, as Mines, Minerals, Quarries; &c. New and useful Improvements in any Branch of Mathematicks; New Discoveries in Chemistry, such as Improvements in Distillation, Brewing, Assaying of Ores; &c. New Mechanical Inventions for saving Labour; as Mills, Carriages, &c. and for Raising and Conveying of Water, Draining of Meadows, &c.; All

new

FIGURE 4. Franklin's *Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge among the British Plantations in America*. Courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

effectively dead—although Franklin preferred to think of it as dormant—and nothing more was heard of it for more than 20 years.

Another organization—the so-called Young Junto—had been established in 1750 on the model of Franklin's original Junto; 12 men gathered weekly for the purpose of "mutual improvement in useful knowledge." This group went through periods of decline and renewal (at one point its membership had declined to five), and in 1766 changed its name to "The American Society Held at Philadelphia for Promoting and Propagating Useful Knowledge." Under its new name—and in response to the imperial crisis then brewing following the passage of the Stamp Act—the American Society increased its membership and began to address issues of national importance such as agriculture and husbandry, manufacturing, and the mechanical arts, all with a view to making the American colonies more self-sufficient. By 1768, then, this revived and enlarged American Society was far more robust than the APS, moribund since 1743. In the fall of 1768 the American Society absorbed the Philadelphia Medical Society, and in November it elected officers, including the recently admitted Benjamin Franklin as President. That prepared the way for another merger, and in this fashion all four of these groups—the APS, Young Junto, American Society, and Philadelphia Medical Society—fused together in 1768 as the organization we know today as the American Philosophical Society, held at Philadelphia, for Promoting Useful Knowledge. Given this welter of organizations that coalesced into the modern APS, the confusion about just when the APS was founded is understandable. In 1914 a special committee on the date of its founding recommended adopting 1727, the year Franklin created the Junto (four years *before* the founding of the Library Company). Another special committee was appointed in 1951, and that committee rejected the rather specious logic of 1727 and instead decided on the more defensible 1743, a dozen years after the founding of the Library Company.³

The impetus behind the founding of the two organizations was similar in one respect, and that is Franklin's belief that libraries and learned societies were not luxuries, but were rather ornaments of society that should be established as soon as practicable after the necessities of life had been provided. Compare the words he used in both cases. Regarding the Library Company, Franklin wrote an address to

3 A similar proliferation and subsequent consolidation of Franklin-inspired voluntary associations took place among subscription libraries at about the same time. In 1765 the Union Library Company merged with the Amicable Library Company and in 1766 absorbed the Association Library Company. The enlarged Union Library in turn merged with the Library Company in 1769.

the Proprietor Thomas Penn, one of the sons of William Penn, seeking patronage for the new institution:

... when Colonies are in their Infancy, the Refinements of Life, it seems, cannot be much attended to. To encourage Agriculture, promote Trade, and establish good Laws must be the principal Care of the first Founders; while other Arts and Sciences, less immediately necessary, how excellent and useful soever, are left to the Care and Cultivation of Posterity.

He and his fellow Library Company Directors were persuaded that Penn would surely support “an Endeavour, however small, to propagate Knowledge, and improve the Minds of Men, by rendring useful Science more cheap and easy of Access.” And in his *Proposal* for the APS he wrote, almost 10 years to the day later:

The first Drudgery of Settling new Colonies, which confines the Attention of People to mere Necessaries, is now pretty well over; and there are many in every Province in Circumstances that set them at Ease, and afford Leisure to cultivate the finer Arts, and improve the common Stock of Knowledge. To such of these who are Men of Speculation, many Hints must from time to time arise, many Observations occur, which if well-examined, pursued, and improved, might produce Discoveries to the Advantage of some or all of the *British* Plantations, or to the Benefit of Mankind in general.

The words Franklin uses are “necessary,” to describe the initial preoccupations of settlers in a new land; “cultivating” the arts and sciences once the “necessaries” have been attended to; and propagating and improving “knowledge,” the motive behind the establishment of both institutions. And there is another key phrase in Franklin’s *Proposal*. In itemizing the reasons why the only learned society in America should be located in Philadelphia, he mentioned its central location along the seaboard, its easy communication by post with colonies to the north and to the south, and by sea with the Caribbean islands, and finally its “having the Advantage of a good growing Library.” In Franklin’s mind, his Library Company helped pave the way for his Philosophical Society.

Both institutions were intended to promote useful knowledge, but it was the APS that was to be the more national, scientific institution. Franklin’s *Proposals* were aimed at creating a society composed of “Men of Speculation,” of “Virtuosi or ingenious Men residing in the several Colonies,” who would constitute an *American* Philosophical Society. The Library Company, on the other hand, was intended to serve the needs of those living close enough to the books to be able to

use them; it was the Library Company of *Philadelphia*. Prior to the building of the first separate structure to house the Library Company, in 1790, the group met and the collection was stored in various locations: initially in space rented from Robert Grace in what is now part of Church Street; next in the home of one of the early librarians, William Parsons; then from 1740 to 1773 on the second floor of the west wing of the State House. The Library Company in 1772 petitioned the state legislature for a building site on State House Square, but nothing came of that petition. So in 1773 the Library Company began renting the second floor of Carpenters' Hall. Likewise, the APS also met in various locations, including Carpenters' Hall, the College of Philadelphia, Christ Church's school, and even the home of Franklin.

Prior to the 1768 merger of the four learned organizations, the APS had virtually no collections, of books or anything else. Only in 1772 did the Society receive volumes 59 and 60 of the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society, in exchange for the first volume of the APS *Transactions*. By December 1774 the collection had grown to the point that a Member proposed "that a librarian be appointed to take charge of the books . . . with power to lend them to Members, under the same Regulations as those of the" Library Company. David Rittenhouse was appointed the first Librarian, but because the early collections of the APS were primarily natural curiosities rather than books, the post of Librarian, when it was filled at all, was subordinate to the post of Curator.

As the temporary and rented quarters that served as the homes of LCP and the APS became inadequate for meetings and collections, both institutions began to think about more permanent facilities. In 1784, the APS asked LCP to join it in putting up balancing structures on opposite sides of State House Square, and a joint petition to the state legislature was drafted. But it turned out that both institutions wanted the eastern-most side of the square. The city was growing slowly westward from its beginnings on the banks of the Delaware, and hard as it is to believe, Sixth Street was considered practically a howling wilderness compared to the settled and civilized Fifth Street. The APS won this little tug-of-war over who got Fifth Street, and LCP rather petulantly withdrew from the project. The APS then petitioned on its own behalf. In May 1785, the APS received the lot on which Philosophical Hall now stands, while the Library Company remained sulking in its rented space in Carpenters' Hall. The APS then broke ground almost immediately, well before the requisite funds had been raised, perhaps fearing that the Assembly might change its mind (it had earlier resolved that no buildings should ever be erected on the land south of the State House, but rather that State House Yard be forever enclosed and



FIGURE 5. Philosophical Hall. American Philosophical Society.

remain a public garden). Thus, the APS ran into financial difficulties and by the summer of 1787 could not pay its bills. Once again, the Society looked to the Library Company to partner with it. The APS proposed that LCP either jointly finish and occupy the building “on terms of equality and mutual convenience,” or take over the lot and reimburse the APS for what it had expended to date preparing and constructing the cellars. The Library Company apparently preferred the latter option, but then just before such a sale was consummated, the APS held a climactic Meeting at Franklin’s home on September 18, 1787, the very day after the Constitution was signed in the State House. The motion to sell to LCP was defeated, and a motion to proceed with the construction with all due speed passed. The minutes are silent as to why this sudden change happened, but soon thereafter, Franklin subscribed for his second £100 contribution to the building fund and made a loan of £500. Franklin’s leadership inspired others to give, and soon subscriptions started to come in again. Philosophical Hall was completed, and the first Meeting of the Society took place there in November 1789 (Figure 5).

Meanwhile LCP was hatching its own plans for a new building, and at the same time angling for Franklin’s own personal library. In February 1786, five months after Franklin returned from France (and two years before he drew up his final will), a Library Company delegation called upon him. The committee reported back to the Directors that Franklin:

wished some steps could be taken to procure a convenient Lot to build on, and intimated that he had a valuable Number of Books which he intended for the Library whenever there should be a safe place to deposit them in, which he did not think was the case at present [at Carpenters' Hall]. . . . They thanked the Doctor . . . and informed him . . . that an Attempt had been made to gain Permission to build on the State House Square, but that the Philosophical Society had supplanted them therein.

It's hard to believe that the committee would have put such an interpretation on that incident of the Fifth Street and Sixth Street lots, given Franklin's certain knowledge that the plans didn't go forward because the Library Company was unhappy with the location assigned for its building.

The Directors did apparently entertain the hope of receiving Franklin's library, or at least the "valuable Number of Books" he intimated might be coming to them, so they responded to his concern about safe housing conditions, but not quickly enough, as it turned out. They did not begin scouting for property until the summer of 1788 and were finally ready to buy a lot and move forward with a building by May 1789. (Interestingly, at about this time—when LCP needed space and the APS needed money—Franklin, as President of the APS, wrote to the Library Company Directors offering to rent them space in the APS's new building, but the Directors turned it down on the grounds that it was not fireproof!) The Directors announced a design competition in July, and they purchased property opposite Philosophical Hall in August 1789. The design competition was won by amateur architect Dr. William Thornton with plans for a handsome Palladian red-brick structure with white pilasters and a balustrade surmounted by urns (Figure 6). A curving double flight of steps led up to the entrance over which was an arched niche filled by a gift from merchant William Bingham, a statue of Franklin classically garbed in a toga—with his permission—carved out of marble in Italy by Francesco Lazzarini (Figure 7). Thornton was later architect of the U.S. Capitol. The cornerstone, composed by Franklin except for a flattering reference to him, was laid on August 31, 1789 (Figure 8). But these gestures by the Library Company—the statue and the inscription on the cornerstone—were too late. Franklin died in April 1790, and the new building did not open until New Year's Day, 1791, more than eight months later.

The Library Company was disappointed in any hopes it might have had of receiving Franklin's library, and that is understandable, given the actions (or more accurately inactions) of the Directors when it came to putting up a building that met their high standards for fire resistance, either in conjunction with the APS or on its own. But the APS



FIGURE 6. William Russell Birch (1755–1834), engraving, “Library and Surgeons Hall” in *The City of Philadelphia in the State of Pennsylvania North America; As It Appeared in the Year 1800* (Philadelphia, 1800). American Philosophical Society.



FIGURE 7. Francesco Lazzarini (1748–1808), marble statue of Franklin, Philadelphia’s first public monument. Library Company of Philadelphia.

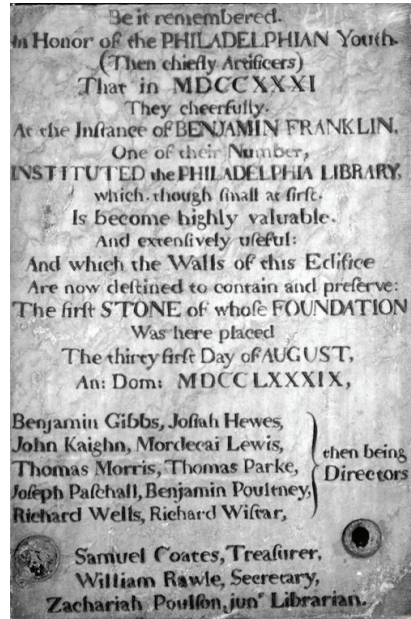


FIGURE 8. Cornerstone of the Library Company's first building, 1789. Library Company of Philadelphia.

was disappointed as well. Franklin's last will left most of his books to family members. He left bequests of certain books to his grandsons Benjamin Franklin Bache (Figure 9) and William Bache and to his grand-nephew Jonathan Williams, and one set of books published by the French Royal Academy of Sciences to each of three institutions. Then he gave the "residue and remainder of all my books, manuscripts, and papers" to his grandson William Temple Franklin. What did the three institutions get? The APS got the most valuable set: 82 quarto volumes of the *Histoire de l'Académie Royale des Sciences avec les Mémoires de Mathématique et Physique* (Paris, 1714–1784; Figure 10). The American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS), which had been founded in Boston in 1780 somewhat on the model of the APS, got the second-most valuable set: his 32-volume folio edition of *Descriptions des Arts et Métiers, faite ou approuvées* (Paris, 1761–1788). And the Library Company got the least valuable set: Franklin's quarto edition in 18 volumes of the *Arts et Metiers* (Neuchatel, 1771–1781; Figure 11). In making these bequests, Franklin in his will identified himself as President of the APS and as a member of AAAS, but he made no reference to his relationship to the Library Company. It is hard not to read into this bequest a sort of pecking order of the esteem in which he held these three institutions. (We will return later to the subject of Franklin's library.)

List of Books for B. F. Bache
manuscript Catalogue Booklet

Con.	No.	Con.		
67	16	A	Acta Academiae Historiae Palatinae.	1
115	16	I	Ephemerides du Ciel, ou Bill des Jours.	1
90	28	D	Calendrier Philanthropique.	1
17	30	F	Elements d'Agriculture par De Harmel.	2
50	10	C	Manuel des Jardinages.	1
70	14	I	On Harmony by G. Kellie.	1
39	10	H	Evole des de Esprit.	1
68	12	A	Artem Omnium Imagines.	1
70	16	D	Anecdotes des Beaux-arts.	1
38	7	H	Natural Short hand.	1
60	6	D	Description of all Trades.	1
39	12	H	Every Man his own Book.	1
144	19	E	The manual Arts.	1
58	3	H	Theatrum Machinarum universale.	1
70	33	I	Origine de l'Imprimerie.	1
50	18	C	Voyage de Jovaro en Espagne.	1
45	32	I	Anecdotes Anglaises.	1
39	20	H	L'Esprit d'Heure qu'on.	1
31	29	D	Adressements from Protopus.	1
21	39	C	Anecdotes Françoises.	1
68	47	A	Esprit de traduction Littéraire.	1
105	16	C	Opuscules de Lully.	1
107	26		Tables de la Fontaine.	1
46	31	I	La Rhétorique ou l'Art de parler.	2
44	30	E	The Examen.	1
29	10	H	Astronomical Tables and Geography.	1
41	17	B	Mode de promotion - Dict. de.	8
60	39	D	Catalogue of Books in English Libraries.	1
20	22	E	Johnson's English Dictionary.	1

FIGURE 9. List of books for B. F. Bache. Library Company of Philadelphia.

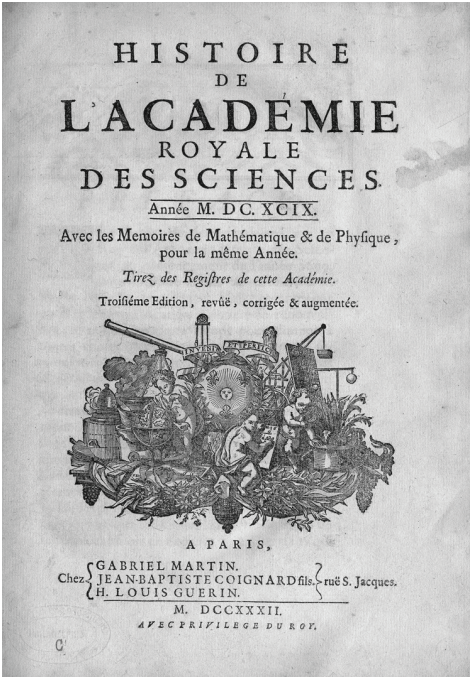


FIGURE 10. Franklin's bequest to the APS. American Philosophical Society.

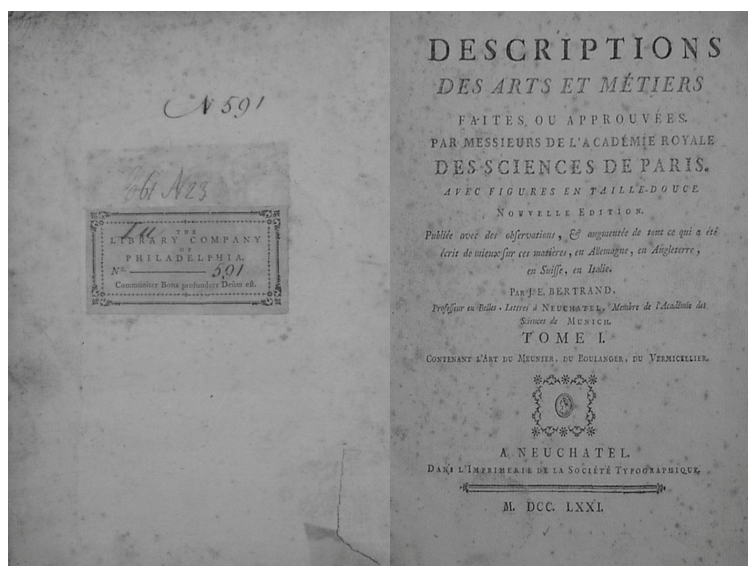


FIGURE 11. Franklin's bequest to LCP. Library Company of Philadelphia.

Another aspect of the curious relationship between the APS and LCP throughout the 18th century was the Library Company's role as a scientific institution. For the first almost 60 years of its existence, before the APS had its own building, the Library Company seemed to be the repository of choice for all manner of scientific equipment and objects. When the proprietor John Penn sent an air-pump in 1738, the Directors had to take a major step to house it properly. The instrument arrived early in 1739, and a handsome cabinet was commissioned for it. This glass-fronted case survives as the earliest extant example of American-made Palladian architectural furniture. This acquisition was one of the reasons LCP took up quarters on the second floor of the newly finished west wing of the State House. It was there that Franklin and his associates performed their first experiments in electricity. These early experiments in electricity occurred while the APS was in its moribund phase, so it was LCP that had the closest relationship to the experiments and the experimenters. In the Library Company's quarters in the State House the members used glass tubes sent by Peter Collinson, "a complete electrical apparatus" sent by the proprietor Thomas Penn, and Franklin's own electrostatic machine.

Franklin made extensive reports in a series of letters to Peter Collinson that were then published in London in 1751 as *Experiments and Observations on Electricity, Made at Philadelphia in America*. This is the publication that secured Franklin's reputation as a scientist of

international renown and doubtless contributed to his later success as a diplomat, following a hero's reception in the salons of Paris. In addition to the so-called "philosophical apparatus" that was used to conduct scientific experiments, the Library Company's minutes are replete with mentions of the receipt of Indian artifacts, natural history specimens, coins, medals, fossils, and much else besides. You might think that with the creation of the APS, Philadelphia's first truly scientific institution, such gifts to LCP would have ceased, especially after the APS built Philosophical Hall, and that LCP would have focused its efforts on acquiring books. Indeed, in later years the APS did become the principal repository in Philadelphia for scientific instruments, patent models, natural history specimens, and the sorts of things that constituted the 18th-century cabinet of curiosities. But such gifts continued to flow into LCP as well, which accepted them with thanks. 1789 brought bottles of tarantulas and scorpions, a tarantula nest, and a fish head with an uncommon jaw from the Ohio Country. 1790 brought a piece of Tahitian cloth, a Chinese woman's shoe, a bunch of feathers from a bird of paradise, an Indian apron, some porcupine quills, and a barnacle. At the time these gifts were made, the APS had already moved into its new building, and LCP was still on the second floor of Carpenters' Hall getting ready to pack up for the move to Library Hall, then under construction. What else besides a sense of competitiveness can explain why a library would accession such things at such a time?

So by the turn of the 19th century, these two proud institutions, founded a few decades apart by the same man, and existing for not altogether dissimilar purposes, had built separate homes for themselves directly opposite each other across Fifth Street. That separateness continued throughout much of the 19th century, as they both grew into their respective and distinct roles without much need to collaborate or compete. The APS became a much more national and scientific organization, while LCP became the most important book resource for the city.

Toward the end of the 19th century both institutions went through major changes, and their paths began to converge once again. The Library Company's fortunes changed with the receipt of a bequest from James Rush, son of Revolutionary War physician and patriot Dr. Benjamin Rush. James, who died in 1869, wanted to honor the memory of his father-in-law, Jacob Ridgway, and his late wife Phoebe Anne Ridgway Rush. (He had derived his vast wealth from his wife's family.) Rush left his estate of almost \$1 million to build a new home for the Library Company, but he left his brother-in-law and sole executor to determine where it would be built. The executor believed that the

future of Philadelphia lay in a north-south axis along Broad Street rather than in an east-west axis along Market Street, and so he insisted that the Ridgway Library be built at Broad and Christian Streets, an out-of-the-way location for an institution whose members resorted to the library daily for the latest books and newspapers. This was a classic white elephant, rarely visited, impossible to heat or cool, and leaky. Shortly after the Ridgway Library went up, LCP built a so-called “uptown branch” at Juniper and Locust Streets, a beautiful building designed by Frank Furness. Its façade featured the statue of Franklin in a niche above the door, transplanted from Library Hall.

The move to South Broad Street in 1880 of course necessitated vacating Library Hall and moving away from the APS. The question then became, what to do with Library Hall? LCP contracted to sell the building for \$50,000 to the Apprentices Library, which had been using, rent-free, a building that had been the Free Quaker Meeting House at Fifth and Arch Streets. That deal fell through when the Apprentices Library could not raise the needed funds, and the building was again put on the market. The Directors received only one or two inquiries, so in 1880 LCP leased the building to the American News Company, headquartered in New York. Then in 1884 the building was sold to Anthony Drexel, who demolished it and in 1887 put up the Drexel Building, a modern high-rise office.

At this very time, the APS was running out of room for its growing library collections, and just a few years later, in 1890, it added a third floor to Philosophical Hall to accommodate those growing collections. This was called “the folly of the third story” because it was a windowless, poorly ventilated addition that played havoc with the architectural integrity of Philosophical Hall. The question that needs asking is why, when LCP announced its plans to move to South Broad Street and put its building on the market, the APS did not move to take over Library Hall? Here was a structure purpose-built for housing collections that was directly across the street from Philosophical Hall. Why didn’t the APS jump at the chance to acquire it for its own library? It remains a mystery, with no answer to be found in the records of the Society. And it is not the case that the two organizations had completely different groups of men responsible for their decision-making, who may have been less than compatible; at this time half of the Directors and officers of LCP were Members of the APS.

The APS’s space situation remained acute even after adding the third story in 1890. Beginning in 1910, rare books were moved to a bank vault for safe-keeping and so were pretty much inaccessible, and the least-used books were consigned to warehouse storage. In 1934 the library moved across the street to a suite of rooms in the Drexel

Building, where it would remain for more than 20 years. Around 1940, the APS began to think about the future of its library and appointed a special committee to analyze the library's holdings and make recommendations. The special committee "approached the subject with an open mind, even to the extent of considering the possibility of dispersing the collections among other libraries in the Philadelphia area, or depositing parts of them on loan in other institutions." But it concluded, in its 1941 report, with an endorsement of the library and the recommendation that the library select fields and subjects for cultivation that were "capable of development to a point of superiority, so that the material when gathered may be used by advanced students in productive research." These fields of particular strength were *Frankliniana* (because APS had the largest collection of Franklin manuscripts), early American history, Native American languages, archaeology, and ethnology.

That decision about the APS library's focus came just a decade before a similar effort got underway at LCP. The institution had fallen on hard times during the Depression. During the Second World War some of the Library Company's most valuable treasures had been placed in the custody of the Free Library, and informal thought was given to the possibility that the old institution might become the Free Library's rare book department. Indeed, the Free Library actually took over the administration of LCP for the dozen years from 1943 to 1955. However, beginning in 1952 things began to look up financially, and the Directors found themselves in a position to plan for the future and do something about it. They sought the advice and guidance of a number of experts. First, Edwin Wolf 2nd, with the Rosenbach Company rare book firm, was brought in to survey the collections and assess their scope, size, and importance, and suggest ways to improve their physical condition and make them more useful. Then, four eminent librarians—Lloyd A. Brown of the Peabody Institute, William A. Jackson of Harvard, Paul North Rice of the New York Public Library, and Clifford K. Shipton of the American Antiquarian Society—were invited to inspect the Library Company and consult with the Directors about its future. Unanimously the experts agreed that the Library Company should cease circulating current books to its members, dispose of duplicates and modern works, and recognize that its greatest strength lay in its rare books and manuscripts, and that its greatest contribution would be as a scholarly research library with special emphasis on American history and culture. They also recommended a move out of the Ridgway building, which everyone recognized was a troublesome building with a leaky roof, a damp basement, and an unfortunate location.

The consensus was that the Library Company should move to modern quarters in or adjacent to another compatible library. Several possible sites for the new home for LCP were explored. One was on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania, near where the new Van Pelt Library was going to be built. The offer by the university of free land on which to build was tempting, but the fear was of course that the Library Company would be assimilated into Penn and would become merely the university's rare book department. A second possibility was an affiliation with the Free Library, which had actually been administering LCP for more than 10 years. Another possibility was to return to a site on Independence Mall in proximity to the APS. And finally, one possibility was to move to Locust Street, next door to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), which in the end was the option selected.

There matters stood when in the mid-1950s things heated up for the APS, which since the 1930s had been talking about its need to erect a new building near Philosophical Hall to house its library. Coincidentally, the APS turned seriously to this subject just at the time that LCP was deciding how to implement its newly redefined mission as a research library. The 1950s were shaping up to be like the 1780s all over again! One idea that was bruited about would have created a Philadelphia rare book and research center combining the collections of the APS, LCP, the Rosenbach—just then setting up as an independent institution following the death of the second of the two Rosenbach brothers—and perhaps other institutions. In this scenario, LCP would return to its former Independence Hall-area site by becoming a constituent member of this center in the new building the APS planned. Nothing came of that scheme. Another idea would be for LCP to put up its own building on the site the federal government was going to give to the APS, but APS President Owen Roberts told LCP President Nicholas Wainwright that the federal authorizing legislation did not allow for what would in a sense be “separate libraries under separate managements.” He continued:

We are still as anxious as ever to bring your books, which would supplement our own collection, into our Library, for it would be of great benefit to scholars to have those collections under one roof. We feel, however, that this can be done only if your Company will place these books on deposit with us, to be administered by the Society. Your books would be housed as a unit, and all of them would bear your plates or other evidence of ownership. Adequate space would also be provided for appropriate additions from time to time. You would, of course, have the right to withdraw your books at any time.

The Library Company's Directors were understandably not amused. At a meeting held just two days after the date of Roberts's letter, the Directors ordered their President to "regretfully" decline the proposal, because accepting it "would seem to result in a loss of identity and autonomy." However, they were still willing to discuss other ways "to further the cultural development of Philadelphia" in the Independence Mall area if the APS could propose "a plan which would preserve the integrity of the Company."

At about this same time LCP entered into extended negotiations with the National Park Service about retrofitting the Second Bank of the United States for its use, but these talks did not bear fruit. In the end, of course, the APS built its Library Hall in 1959 on the site of the old Library Company building of the same name, replicating the façade of the earlier building—even down to having a reproduction of the Lazzarini statue made by New York sculptor Lewis Iselin, Jr.—and LCP moved into a new building on Locust Street in 1966 (Figures 12 and 13).

Once the Library Company was ensconced in its new facilities on Locust Street new kinds of enterprises became possible and, given the new and close relationship with the Historical Society, these enterprises were frequently undertaken not just by the APS and LCP, but by this new three-headed creature. In the early 1970s these three helped launch the Independent Research Libraries Association with a dozen members; the group has since grown to 19 member institutions. It was the approaching Bicentennial of the American Revolution that provided another opportunity for collaboration. The joint exhibition was "A Rising People: The Founding of the United States, 1765–1789." It was Whitfield Bell's idea; several years before the Bicentennial he thought some plans should be made for an exhibition before other institutions requested the loan of all the "good stuff," as he put it. Nicholas Biddle Wainwright (who at the time was both the Director of HSP *and* the Board chair of LCP), Edwin Wolf, and Whitfield Bell met in Wolf's office several years before the Bicentennial and concocted the scheme; Bell told me what I had heard many years ago from Wolf—that there was never even an initialed memo of understanding exchanged among the three parties, just a tacit agreement to share the labor and the costs and the fund-raising responsibilities. Bell described to me how there was a sort of "pony express" from Philadelphia to the Meriden Gravure Company, which prepared the illustrations in Connecticut for the printing of the catalog by the Stinehour Press. There were weekly trips from 30th Street Station to Penn Station in New York, where couriers would deliver batches of material to someone from Meriden, who at



FIGURE 12. Library Hall. American Philosophical Society.



FIGURE 13. LCP's Ridgway Building, 1314 Locust Street. Library Company of Philadelphia.

the same time returned the previous week's batch; this process continued for some months.

Jack Sawyer, president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, was so impressed by the mutual cooperation and trust of this ambitious project that shortly thereafter Mellon made the first of what would be a long series of grants to the three institutions, in some cases for additional collaborative projects. One of those Mellon-funded projects was the completion of four bibliographies of the combined holdings of the three institutions of works printed in America before 1860 in the fields of American Education, Philanthropy, Natural History, and Agriculture. In 1982 all the IRLA libraries received special grants of \$100,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities, back in the days when NEH sometimes found itself with extra funds at the end of a fiscal year that had to be disbursed (on the "use it or lose it" principle), and the three principals at the time (Bell from the APS, Wolf from LCP, and James Mooney from HSP) received their checks from President Ronald Reagan during a special ceremony at the White House.

Not too long after that White House ceremony the three organizations played a major role in the founding of the Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries (pacscl.org), which has mounted exhibitions and undertaken large-scale cataloging projects.

Following up on the success of PACSCL, many local institutions, including LCP, came together under the leadership of APS Librarian Martin Levitt to create the Philadelphia Area Center for the History of Science. Headquartered at the APS, the organization has become a national one—indeed there are several international members—and is now the Center for History of Science, Technology and Medicine, which offers research fellowships, public and scholarly programs, working groups in various fields, and numerous online resources (chstm.org). The founding Executive Director is APS Member Babak Ashrafi.

Another major anniversary that provided an opportunity for the APS and LCP to collaborate was the Tercentenary of Benjamin Franklin's birth in 2006. Several years before that, the two joined with the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Franklin Institute to plan the celebration. APS Librarian Edward C. Carter II was the APS representative in that effort, and he was extremely influential in getting the Tercentenary off the ground and in establishing the framework of the major exhibition planned. Executive Officer Richard S. Dunn took over following Carter's untimely death in 2002. Dunn, our colleagues from the other three institutions, and I headed the effort that culminated in an international traveling exhibition ("Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World"); an exhibition

catalog published by Yale University Press; a great many public and scholarly programs; and a comprehensive website (benfranklin300.org).⁴

A bilateral collaboration in the year of Franklin was the joint publication of a catalog of Franklin's personal library, which had been in the works for well over 50 years. By the time of his death in 1790 Franklin had what was surely among the largest and best, if not *the* largest and best, private library in America, numbering 4,276 volumes. As we have seen, contrary to what one might have expected Franklin did not leave his library to either of the two institutions that he had founded to promote useful knowledge. Other than a very few specific bequests of particular books, mentioned previously, he bequeathed this vast collection to his grandson, William Temple Franklin, who unfortunately thought of it as an asset to be converted into cash rather than as a monument to the intellectual stature of his grandfather that should be kept intact and treasured. Temple sold it piecemeal between 1801 and 1803, and then, tragically, the remaining books were scattered everywhere. The manuscript catalog that Franklin mentioned in his will has not been found, nor have any copies of the several printed auction catalogs that list the books to be sold at particular auctions. Nor does the list the bookseller sent to President Jefferson to entice him into acquiring the books for the nascent Library of Congress. There seemed to be no way to reconstruct the contents of Franklin's massive library—which had eluded both LCP and the APS in 1790—until well into the 20th century.

In about 1935, William E. Lingelbach and Gertrude Hess, respectively the Librarian and the Assistant Librarian of the APS, noticed that many of the books that were bought at the sales of 1801 and 1803 by APS Librarian John Vaughan and had found their way into the APS Library bore in the front a distinctive pencil cypher—a C followed by a number and an N followed by a number. This cypher they provisionally called a "Dufief mark," after the French bookseller through whose hands the collection passed after those early auctions. At the sale of the books from the estate of the late Nannie T. Bache (the widow of a descendant) at Freeman's in 1947, the APS Librarians brought the mark to the attention of Edwin Wolf (then still with the Rosenbach Company). Curiously enough, although most of the books had been said by their former owner, the late Franklin Bache, a direct descendant of Franklin, to have been in Franklin's library, and were so described in the auction catalog, the book world felt this statement was more sentimental than factual. So in spite of the fact that some of the volumes

⁴ The project was led by Executive Director Rosalind Remer and Chief Curator Page Talbott.

even bore presentation inscriptions to Franklin or had his name on the title page, the lots sold for ridiculously low prices.

Believing that the “Dufief mark” was somehow significant, Wolf bid successfully for the APS on a number of books at the Bache sale, but he bought nothing for his firm. Despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that he had missed a great opportunity, Wolf began to get interested in Franklin’s library. He followed up many leads and struggled for many years with what he called “the unorthodox jigsaw puzzle” that was Franklin’s library, and in the 1950s he proved convincingly that the shelf marks were inscribed in the books during the last few years of Franklin’s life, as he sought to organize his collection at Franklin Court. (The *C* denotes case and the *N* denotes the position of each book within the case; see the number just above the bookplate in Figure 11.)

Once having deciphered the code, Wolf searched many institutional collections and identified approximately 2,700 titles in 1,000 volumes that Franklin actually owned, now on the shelves of the Library Company, HSP (on LCP’s shelves), and the APS, and in a score of other libraries. From other documents, such as references in Franklin’s writings, he identified a further 700 titles owned by Franklin, though the actual copies have not yet been located.

Wolf did not complete his project of reconstructing Franklin’s library before he died in 1991, leaving four cardboard file boxes full of note cards. The upcoming Tercentenary provided the impetus to finish the job. I commissioned Kevin J. Hayes, a professor of English at the University of Central Oklahoma and a former doctoral student of the great Franklin scholar Leo Lemay, to undertake the project, and he completed his work right on schedule. Hayes entered all of the information on Wolf’s cards into a computer. He filled in missing bibliographical information and provided subject headings for all the books. He read through all of Franklin’s correspondence, both published in the *Franklin Papers* and unpublished, and extracted any relevant passages. And he wrote a substantive Introduction that tells the complete story of Franklin’s library, its dispersal, and reconstruction. Finally, with the manuscript nearly complete, we approached APS about publishing it jointly, and the Society readily agreed. So the institutions Franklin had founded together published the most comprehensive work possible about his personal library. No doubt the coming years will see many other opportunities for these two fast friends to work together for the common good, and to promote useful knowledge, in the spirit of their founder.

Oh, and one final affinity: both institutions share the practice of interring the remains of their benefactors: LCP has James and Phoebe Rush in a crypt and Edwin Wolf's ashes in a wall; the APS has ashes of Dr. Judson Daland in a wall of Philosophical Hall.

Let me conclude with a story about Franklin and libraries. Franklin related to his English friend Richard Price in 1785 that a new town in Massachusetts would be named for him, and that a steeple would be erected on the meeting house if Franklin would give them a bell. He told Price, "I have advis'd the sparing themselves the expense of a steeple at present, and that they would accept books instead of a bell, sense being preferable to sound."

REFERENCES

- Bell, Whitfield J., Jr. *Patriot-Improvers: Biographical Sketches of Members of the American Philosophical Society* (2 vols.). Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1997, 1999.
- Carter, Edward C., II. "One Grand Pursuit": *A Brief History of the American Philosophical Society's First 250 Years, 1743–1993*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1993.
- Franklin, Benjamin. *A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge among the British Plantations in America*, May 14, 1743. Philadelphia, 1743.
- Gray, Austin K. *Benjamin Franklin's Library: A Short Account of the Library Company of Philadelphia*. New York: Macmillan, 1936.
- Green, James. *Poor Richard's Books: An Exhibition of Books Owned by Benjamin Franklin Now on the Shelves of the Library Company of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1990.
- Hayes, Kevin J. "Introduction." In *The Library of Benjamin Franklin*, edited by Edwin Wolf 2nd and Kevin J. Hayes. Philadelphia: APS and LCP, 2006.
- Library Company of Philadelphia. "At the Instance of Benjamin Franklin": *A Brief History of the Library Company of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1995.
- Lingelbach, William E. "Philosophical Hall." In *Historic Philadelphia: From the Founding until the Early Nineteenth Century*, edited by Luther P. Eisenhart, 43–69. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953.
- Peterson, Charles E. "Library Hall: Home of the Library Company of Philadelphia, 1790–1880." In *Historic Philadelphia: From the Founding until the Early Nineteenth Century*, edited by Luther P. Eisenhart, 129–47. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953.
- Smith, Murphy D. *Oak from an Acorn: A History of the American Philosophical Society Library, 1770–1803*. Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1976.
- Wolf, Edwin, 2nd. "A Key to the Identification of Franklin's Books." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 80 (1956): 407–409.
- . "The Reconstruction of Benjamin Franklin's Library: An Unorthodox Jigsaw Puzzle." *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 56 (1962): 1–16.