

University of Pennsylvania

**“The Schemes of Public Parties”:
Benjamin Franklin, William Smith, and the Struggle for
Control of the University of Pennsylvania**

A senior thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Honors in History

by

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In memory of Sidney Reiss, Stuart Holz and Gertrude Holz, with eternal love

You can be a scholar in the great tradition of the funny bald man who played with kites. Yay
Jen!

Jordana Hausman, April 2003

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INTRODUCTION

THE FORGOTTEN TALE

Upon opening their application, prospective applicants immediately discover that the University of Pennsylvania owes its existence to Benjamin Franklin, who “first defined and implemented Penn’s fundamental educational philosophy in 1740.”¹ As “Franklin’s university,” the institution portrays itself as a modern embodiment of “the intellectual curiosity that sustained and nourished” the “hardworking and bookish” Founding Father.² Arriving on campus, freshmen assemble around one of three prominent bronzes of Franklin – all within the seven-block length of campus – for Convocation where they are praised as (and warned to be) the living embodiment of “Dr. Franklin’s ideals.”³ Once settled in West Philadelphia, Penn students cannot escape the Franklin name and image, from Van Pelt Library’s Franklin electronic catalogue and the Benjamin Franklin Scholars honors program to the distribution of “Air Franklin” t-shirts at basketball games and the neon Franklin silhouette in Logan Hall.⁴ With such an introduction, the average undergraduate must be forgiven for believing the good Doctor to have single-handedly created the University of Pennsylvania.

¹ University of Pennsylvania, Undergraduate application and admissions catalogue for the freshman class of 1991-2, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center [hereinafter cited as UARC], 1.

² [Penn President] Amy Gutmann, “The Power of Values,” in Benjamin Franklin [hereinafter cited as BF], *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Peter Conn, Penn Reading Project Special Edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), xi; University of Pennsylvania, Undergraduate academic bulletin for 2001-2, UARC, 1; Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 238.

³ [Former Penn President] Judith Rodin, “The Tipping Points,” 2000 University of Pennsylvania Baccalaureate ceremony speech, *University of Pennsylvania Almanac* 46, no. 34 (2000), <http://www.upenn.edu/almanac/v46/n34/grad-speeches2K.html> (1 July 2005).

⁴ Several examples of what I will describe later as Franklin “kitsch” are included among the images in the appendix, figures 1-11.

Along with the nation at large, Penn has accepted as fact the reigning myth of Franklin: the picture of the ingenious, self-made, quintessential American embodying both the “rugged individualism” and Protestant work ethic that have become central to the American identity. In *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* Gordon Wood points out that Franklin himself constructed much of this myth through his writings, such as the *Autobiography*, and the carefully fashioned appearance he projected during his Revolutionary-era diplomatic travels (particularly in France). He consciously sought to personify the dignity of the working class, advancing middling values as uniquely American virtues, and in the successive centuries historians have been loath to criticize the man hailed as a “democratic hero” and the “first great American” for fear of deconstructing the myth of America itself.⁵

As students of history are well aware however, myths *must* be challenged and constantly re-appraised if one is to glean anything more meaningful than mere platitudes from the past. Here at Penn, the University’s internalization of the Franklin myth threatens to suppress the significant lessons that a more open interrogation offers. When unobscured by clichés, Benjamin Franklin’s truly troubled history with the University of Pennsylvania and its actual leader, Provost William Smith, is a case study in the blatant politicization of public institutions in the colonial era and the exceedingly personal depths to which ideological animosities were allowed to sink. Nearly forgotten, remembering Smith and his conflict with Franklin leads not only to a fairer representation of the University and a fuller portrait of Franklin, but it is also instructive to those who may still naively cling to demigod-like

⁵ Wood, *Americanization*, 2, 238-9; Frederick Jackson Turner quoted in *Ibid.*, 3; Wood, *Americanization*, 244. See also Richard R. Beeman, “Benjamin Franklin and the American Enlightenment” in BF, *Autobiography*, 147-8.

notions of the Founding Fathers. The account which follows should make it clear that the “politics of personal destruction” are not unique to present-day politics.

The Kitschification of Benjamin Franklin

Gordon Wood’s text emphasizes that a national reverence for Franklin blossomed along with America’s industrial development in the nineteenth century and this generalization holds true within his own University of Pennsylvania.⁶ A historical survey of University publications indicates that by the end of the nineteenth century, Penn transformed its image as a relatively minor, regional, liberal arts school (though noted nationally for its Medical School) and increasingly portrayed itself as at the vanguard of a new, modern education which would reap the fruits of the Industrial Revolution. Accordingly, the period saw the advent of what would become the Schools of Engineering and Applied Sciences (1852), Design (1869), Dental Medicine (1878), and the Wharton School (1881). Buttressing the self-perception was an increasing emphasis on University history to which Franklin became a central figure. One measure of this is the appearance in 1879 of the first general statement on Penn’s history in the *University Catalogue*. Printed annually from 1825 to 1946, the *University Catalogue* – which laid out academic departments, policies, faculty and enrollment – was available for perusal by prospective students, functioning for much of the school’s history as the public face of Penn.⁷ In both the historical sketch and the supplementary chronological table (added in 1905), Franklin figured prominently, each

⁶ Wood, *Americanization*, x.

⁷ After World War II, the single University-wide catalogue was broken up into school-specific bulletins which were more detailed and thus better narrow-casted their sales pitch; unsurprisingly, history figures little in these pamphlets.

recognizing his publication of *Proposals for the Education of Youth in Pensilvania* as the impetus for Penn's creation.⁸

Moreover, when the publishers of the University alumni magazine *Old Penn* decided in 1918 to change the name of the publication, they chose *The Pennsylvania Gazette* – thereby “reviving” the flagship newspaper of Franklin’s colonial press. After insisting that the new name was more symbolic of the school, the editors of the new *Gazette* hyperbolically insisted that, “Pennsylvania should overlook no opportunity to do honor to Franklin... not only did he found the University, but he started about everything worth while in the early days of this city.” Noting “the halo” which surrounded the memory of the old *Gazette*, the editors even suggested that the “memorial character of [the] restoration might be emphasized if the typography of the title as Franklin used it was also restored.” The typeset of the title duly included the long-defunct lower case “long” S used in colonial era, making the allusion to Franklin unmistakably clear.⁹ And while University yearbooks are generally devoid of historical content it should be noted that the earliest Record of 1863 metamorphosized into *Poor Richard’s Record*, echoing Franklin’s famous almanacs – to which the school has no historical connection but through the Franklin name.¹⁰ More accessible than publications of

⁸ University of Pennsylvania, *Catalogue of the Trustees, Officers and Students of the University of Pennsylvania, 1879-80* (Philadelphia: Collins, Printer, 1879), 11. An example of both the chronology and an early expanded version of the historical sketch is Idem, *Catalogue of the University of Pennsylvania, 1918-1919* (Philadelphia, 1919), 14-23.

⁹ It is unclear why *Old Penn* was deemed less identifiable with Penn than *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. *The Pennsylvania Gazette: Weekly Magazine of the University of Pennsylvania* 16, no. 17 (1 February 1918): 424; Herbert S. Houston, “Approve Restoration of Franklin’s Newspaper” in Ibid., 425. The title thus appeared on the page as “The Pennfylvania Gazette. Published 1729 to 1748 by BEN^J FRANKLIN. Founder of the UNIVERSITY. Revived February 1, 1918 as the official Weekly Magazine of the UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.”

¹⁰ Although the University Archives maintains that the undergraduate yearbook is still called simply “The Record” [UARC, “The Record: Penn’s Undergraduate Yearbook,” *UARC Website*, http://www.archives.upenn.edu/primdocs/upm/upm7100/record_entry.html (11 February 2007).], the website of the yearbook committee clearly states that the name is now officially “Poor Richard’s Record” [Poor Richard’s Record (Yearbook Committee), “Poor Richard’s Record: The Official Undergraduate Yearbook of the University of Pennsylvania,” <http://dolphin.upenn.edu/~yearbook/> (11 February 2007).].

course, is the brick and mortar tribute of Franklin Field, constructed in 1922 and followed later by the Franklin Building on Walnut Street in 1967.¹¹

By linking itself to an undoubtedly successful and nearly universally admired man, the University – often the least independently identifiable Ivy League school – can assert deep roots along the lines of its peer institutions and claim historical legitimacy through an illustrious patronage rivaled only perhaps by the University of Virginia.¹² As ancient and celebrated as its Ivy cousins are, none but Penn may claim to be brainchild of a Founding Father. Today more than ever before, Penn actively appropriates the Franklin image and legend by stressing his influence on its vocational flavor and scientific emphasis.¹³ No major speech by an administration official fails to attempt to add to the Franklin hagiography. In 2006 Penn President Amy Gutmann asserted in lofty tones that his “socially responsible and creative living” finds modern expression in Penn students who “embody and express the values and ideas to which [Franklin] was committed” including the “Enlightenment values of Reason and individual self-determination.”¹⁴ Whatever the promotional value, this veneration of “Saint Ben” has clearly reached the level of kitsch.

Admittedly, kitsch is an amorphous concept. In common parlance it denotes something close to art (or other material) in bad taste. In the case of Penn and Franklin however, I use the term to evoke a connotation akin to the definition of political kitsch advanced by theorist Catherine A. Lugg. Lugg defines political kitsch as “something readily

¹¹ See appendix, figure 12.

¹² The University of Virginia was, of course, the brainchild Thomas Jefferson. The clearest evidence of Penn’s particular “branding” problem and its psychological effect on the school are the wildly popular “Not Penn State” tee shirts, originally sold by an independent bookstore on campus, and then as a novelty by Wharton students on Locust Walk. The tee shirts have now seemingly been endorsed by the University, as they are now sold in the official Penn bookstore.

¹³ Office of the University [of Pennsylvania] Secretary, *250th Commencement Program: Monday, May 15, 2006* (Philadelphia, 2006), 1.

¹⁴ Gutmann, x, xi.

accessible in everyday life – a condensation symbol or referent that draws on a given history and culture and carries both information and emotional significance.” This symbol then becomes available for “propaganda... to shape the direction of public policy.” At Penn, that symbol is Franklin and that policy is to further the school’s reputation and identity. The key to the effectiveness of political kitsch is that it “limit[s] analysis.”¹⁵ Instead of appealing to an audience’s sagacity, political kitsch speaks instead to deep-seated desires and fears. The novelist Milan Kundera also discusses the concept of political kitsch in his modern classic of Communist Czechoslovakia, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, adding that it is defined by “fantasies, images, words, and archetypes” – rather than “rational attitudes.”¹⁶ Producers of such kitsch, Lugg clarifies, are generally,

Aware of a given audience’s cultural biases and deliberately exploit them, engaging the emotions and deliberately ignoring the intellect. As such, it is a form of cultural anesthesia. This ability to build and exploit cultural myths – and to easily manipulate conflicted history – makes Kitsch a powerful political construction.... Kitsch can simultaneously provide psychological comfort and reinforce a host of national mythologies.... What makes Kitsch “Kitsch” is its simplicity and predictability.¹⁷

Political kitsch serves to erase the past, omitting points of tension and troubling episodes which do not align with “the [comforting] basic images people have engraved in their memories” – effecting what Kundera calls “absolute denial” – but which are, nevertheless, critical for a full comprehension of history.¹⁸ Ironically for an institution of higher education, the University’s veneration – its kitschification – of Franklin blatantly exploits the myths of

¹⁵ Catherine A. Lugg, *Kitsch: From Education to Public Policy* (New York: Falmer Press, 1999), 3, 7.

¹⁶ Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper & Row, 1984; Harper Perennial Classic, 1999), 257.

¹⁷ Lugg, 4.

¹⁸ Kundera, 248, 251.

Americana surrounding him, privileging, as Lugg describes, the “teaching [of] one ‘heroic’ history” where “moral uplift [and] political consensus” rule over accuracy.¹⁹

Political kitsch like the University’s treatment of Franklin also belongs to a broader concept, what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have called “invented traditions.”

Hobsbawm defines an invented tradition as:

A set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with the past.²⁰

Hobsbawm and Ranger offer examples such as the “traditional” Scottish Highlander kilt and clan tartans, which became apparently ancient symbols of Scottish nationalism in the eighteenth-century – the same century they were invented by enterprising English businessmen. In other words, invented traditions can operate like Kundera’s political kitsch of “fantasies, images, words, and archetypes” which allow a belief system to exercise effective psychological hegemony over a people. Like the Communist kitsch of orchestrated May Day parades legitimized the totalitarian regime and the kilt legitimized Scottish nationalism by evoking pride in an imaginary history of Scottish cultural independence, the image of Franklin as Penn’s benevolent founding father is an invented tradition “establishing and legitimizing [the] institution [and its] status.”²¹ Franklin is inescapable on Penn’s campus because the constant repetition of the “invented tradition” of his vast influence on the school increases his potency as a symbol to establish the University’s connection to a glorious era of America’s past.

¹⁹ Lugg, 9-10.

²⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983; Canto, 1992), 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

The Wharton Marketing Department may applaud the kitschification of Franklin as good business practice, but the Department of History must acknowledge the pernicious effects that the prevailing mythology has on the production of accurate historiography on the University of Pennsylvania. As modern historians are gradually peeling back the layers of America's mythological Franklin, revealing previously glossed over aspects of his character (for example, the troubled, but illuminating relationships with his wife and son), Penn must also begin to admit that its deification of Franklin has obscured much of the University's history – that the advertised history is only a selective one.

Mother or Midwife?

For the average Penn student 1740 would seem to be both the beginning and the end of the story. After the stroke of genius which led to the foundation of the Academy of Philadelphia – the precursor to Penn – Franklin surely oversaw his school, admonishing the children in a jolly voice to study hard, better themselves, and be useful and ingenious – quite like himself. Maybe he even taught some classes or tutored an especially promising young man, and *surely* he gave of himself to see this dream of quality instruction come to fruition. But, as Penn historian Richard Beeman has pointed out, such imaginings informed by the mythology of Franklin often reduce the man to “a set of caricatures,” or as his colleague Michael Zuckerman puts it: “The myths have always threatened to swallow the man. The legends have always bid to absorb the life. But the myths have always been a bit ambiguous, and the legends a little elusive.”²² The historical truth behind the foundations of the University of Pennsylvania is much more complicated than the myth.

²² Beeman, 148; Michael Zuckerman, “An Inclination Joined with an Ability to Serve” in BF, *Autobiography*, 154.

Although Franklin took the lead in proposing the Academy, it was his friend William Coleman who conducted the day-to-day management of the school, as both secretary and treasurer of the board of Trustees. This, despite Franklin's retirement from his printing business in 1748, which left him ample time and resources to contribute to the Academy. Moreover, Franklin's correspondence during the formative years of the school reveals relatively little involvement on his part, outside of producing the general scheme first outlined in his *Proposals for the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*, and apparently ordering a few books from London.²³ Granted, his inaction is understandable in the context of his activities in the early 1750s. Franklin was kept busy lobbying for his Albany Plan of colonial union, working for the establishment of the Library Company, and experimenting with his ideas on electricity. Nevertheless, he had comparatively little influence on the Academy's curriculum or religious persuasion.²⁴ What is more troubling, though, is Franklin's modest financial contribution to his own school, which can be taken as a concrete measure of his assistance to the project.

Financial ledgers and other documents related to the first years of the school reveal that Franklin's subscription to the institution was a modest pledge of a £10 donation per annum for the half-decade 1750 to 1755. The sum is slightly below average when compared to the subscriptions of other Trustees (ranging from middling tradesman Philip Syng's £6 to affluent Justice William Allen's £75). Franklin's contribution was unusually parsimonious for a man rich enough to retire as a gentleman at forty-two. And Franklin ceases to appear in

²³ For example, Peter Collinson to BF, 3 July 1750 in Leonard Labaree et. al. eds. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959-), 4:3 and BF to Samuel Johnson, 25 October 1750 in *Ibid.*, 4:72.

²⁴ Edward Potts Cheyney, *History of the University of Pennsylvania: 1740 – 1940* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940), 171-2.

the subscriptions after 1755.²⁵ Furthermore, as Edward Potts Cheyney emphasizes in his *History of the University of Pennsylvania: 1740 – 1940*:

[After Franklin's subscription and] successful appeal for a subsidy from the Philadelphia City Council, he neither gave to [the school] from his own means or interested himself in securing support for it. He had no such claim to its gratitude for his financial efforts as Provost Smith obtained by his successful begging tours in England and the Carolinas.

Nor did he seek money from the Pennsylvania Assembly as he had done for the Pennsylvania Hospital.²⁶ When the Coleman's meticulously kept debt and credit ledger is inspected, it becomes apparent how quickly Franklin's attention ran out. Between April 1750 and October 1752, he paid £64.13.8 out of his own pocket for "sundry" expenses related to the school and its building and was repaid every shilling. After 1752 Franklin disappears completely from the books for six years, until a short addendum for 1758-9 when Coleman notes that Franklin was paid £491.7.3¼ in return for "instruments sent to the Academy" from London, where he was then living.²⁷ Most glaringly, however, Franklin failed to remember the school on his deathbed.

Drawn up in 1788 – with an addendum added a few months before his death indicating that he considered the distribution of his assets up until the very end – Franklin's will made no mention of the University. Gordon Wood notes that the will was especially "odd" in that Franklin, perceived to be so civic minded provided little for many of the public institutions he founded. He left only a single multivolume work out of his four-thousand

²⁵ While as I will recount, Franklin was eventually removed from his presidency of the Board of Trustees – thus creating a possible excuse for his paucity of contributions – he disappears a year *before* the coup to replace him occurred. Moreover, he was still technically a Trustee after, though no longer at the helm.

²⁶ Cheyney, 171.

²⁷ [Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania], *Ledger of the Academy of Philadelphia: January 16, 1749 to December 2, 1779*, UARC; Idem, *Day Book – Academy of Philadelphia: December 28, 1749 to May 7, 1789*, UARC; Idem, *Journal 'A' Belonging to the Trustees: December 27, 1749 to June 9, 1764*, UARC, 69. During this period, Franklin's choice to assist to the Academy specifically, and not the College is interesting within the context of the Academy/College dynamic outlined later in this paper.

book library to the Library Company and to the Pennsylvania Hospital he bequeathed the rights to £5,000 in old debts he had been unable to collect (the Hospital overseers eventually declined the trouble of attempting to collect the funds). The only other civic purpose to which he put his money was a grant of £1,000 each to Boston and Philadelphia to found loan foundations so “young journeymen mechanics setting themselves up in business” might emulate his own history.²⁸

Even Cheyney – a University spokesman – acknowledges that “the term ‘founder’ [for Franklin] is not a well chosen one.” Franklin was certainly not a founder in the modern, financial sense. Nor, Cheyney even admits – in direct contradiction to the storyline proffered by the University today – was the curriculum his creation. More accurately, it was “a compromise with the ideas of others in which his were original but persistently subordinated.” And even *before* he left for England as Pennsylvania’s envoy to Whitehall in 1757, Franklin had “practically lost contact with the College,” and was present only at a single commencement. Trustees’ minutes show in fact, that Franklin’s “great services” to the nascent University all occurred well within the first decade of its existence. Thus instead of designating him as *the* Founder, Cheyney summarizes, “it would be fairer to say that... Franklin was the spokesman” for the “twenty-four gentlemen of Philadelphia [who] voluntarily united themselves as Founders”²⁹ Cheyney goes a bit far by confining Franklin’s role simply to that of a mouthpiece, and the historian justly tempers his own critique by pointing out Franklin’s leading role in devising the general plan of the school, gathering initial funds for it, selecting the original Trustees and faculty, and overseeing the construction

²⁸ Wood, *Americanization*, 230.

²⁹ Cheyney, 27-8, 109.

of the school building. “Short as the period was,” he maintains, “this devotion and intelligent industry were at that stage absolutely invaluable.”

Cheyney’s history overreaches however, in attributing a prophetic “largeness [to] all Franklin’s ideas” saying that, despite his short term of service, this “tradition of Franklin” is a living legacy, making him the true leading figure in the formation of the University and thus, ultimately, deserving the title of Founder. While Cheyney’s recitation of Franklin’s early involvement is historically accurate, his interpretation glosses over the real possibility that this “tradition” we see today is in fact, a kitschified creation of those wishing to share in the “wider repute” Franklin received following his death; that his place as “the secular patron saint of the University” is perhaps out of deference, instead of actual miracles.³⁰ Perhaps then, Franklin should rightly be seen as simply the midwife, taking credit for the successful birth of the College of Philadelphia, but then leaving to pursue other labors which would gain him more acclaim. After all, Franklin would, in the end, leave the “child” to be reared by his bitterest enemy.

Who was Provost Smith?

Otherwise obscured by the Franklin kitsch, the lesser-known truth of the foundations of the University of Pennsylvania is quietly hinted at above the doorway of one of the Quadrangle’s virtually anonymous turn-of-the-century dormitories. Residents of the Upper Quad – but probably few others on campus – know that the fourth building west of Memorial Tower along Woodland Walk is called Provost Smith.³¹ Subsumed under the brash banner of Fisher-Hassenfeld College House, this eminently forgettable name is the only visible remnant

³⁰ Ibid., 173-5.

³¹ See appendix, figure 13.

of the Reverend William Smith left on the campus of the University.³² Who was William Smith? Virtually an unknown quantity outside of the University Archives and colonial specialists in the History Department, William Smith was the man who took Franklin's idea and brought it to life; a man whose "talents and influence were thought so essential to the prosperity of the school" that for contemporary Philadelphians, he was "almost identified with the school itself."³³

In 1754 Smith was appointed a professor at the Academy of Philadelphia, and upon the grant of a college charter he became the first provost of the College of Philadelphia.³⁴ He quickly became the leading personality behind the school's growth, and his influence was felt on its politics and its purse, as well as its pupils. In the words of a successor:

The History of the progress of the College of Philadelphia... during the first thirty years of its existence (1749-1779) is the history of the results of the extraordinary zeal, the unwearied devotion, and the wonderful skill, capacity and energy displayed in promoting its welfare by a single man – Rev. Dr. WILLIAM SMITH, the first Provost of the College.³⁵

As provost, Smith took Franklin's initial *Proposals*, adopting some of its concepts, but then generating and implementing his own concrete "Plan of Education" for the College – the spirit of which would control the content of a Penn education for the next century.³⁶ Those same early *University Catalogues* which insisted that "the University of Pennsylvania is the

³² It should be noted that Provost William Smith is unrelated to the eminent chemist and later Penn Provost Edgar Fahs Smith (1854-1928), who is commemorated on campus not only with his own Quadrangle building ("E. F. Smith") but also with a bronze which sits on 34th Street across from the Fisher Fine Arts Library, where Locust Walk becomes Smith Walk – which was also named for E. F. Smith. See appendix, figures 14 and 15.

³³ George B. Wood. *Early History of the University of Pennsylvania from its Origin to the Year 1827*, 3rd ed. With Supplementary Chapters by Frederick D. Stone (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1896), 31, 68.

³⁴ In the colonial period, the position of a college provost was roughly equivalent to that of a modern university president.

³⁵ Nineteenth-century Penn Provost Charles J. Stillé quoted in Albert Frank Gegenheimer, *William Smith: Educator and Churchman: 1727-1803* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1943), 81.

³⁶ [William Smith], "Plan of Education," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 12 August 1756 (Philadelphia: B. Franklin & D. Hall). A scrapbook (now in the UARC collection) of undergraduate life at the University of Pennsylvania compiled by J. M. Power Wallace, class of 1865, includes exams and report cards from classes quite similar in emphasis to those originally laid out by Smith, attesting to the continued importance of Smith's course of study.

outgrowth and successor of the College of Philadelphia, which was founded chiefly through the influence of Dr. Benjamin Franklin” acknowledged in the same breath that “Dr. [William] Smith was the first PROVOST” and that the College flourished under his “learned” and “skillful training.”³⁷ What is more, Smith’s work had vast implications beyond the walls of Penn. As the 1879 *Catalogue* notes, Smith “is conspicuous in American College history as having established in 1757 here the curriculum of study which was adopted substantially by all the Colleges of later foundation, until Scientific Departments were attached to them.”³⁸ Historians of education view his course of study as the earliest modern plan for education in America because it did not follow the loose, tutor-based medieval framework then in place at Oxford and Cambridge, nor did it have any specific religious objectives. It is placed alongside milestones like Henry Dunster’s 1642 reorganization of Harvard and Yale’s declaration on a “Liberal Course of Education” in 1827 for its vast influence over the basic curriculum for post-Revolutionary colleges.³⁹

Despite his importance to the history of American education and to the University specifically, Smith’s contributions are downplayed, if not downright ignored on campus. Unlike his contemporary College professor David Rittenhouse, Smith’s name does not prominently mark a campus building, nor is his portrait proudly displayed in College Hall – though that of his immediate successor, John Ewing, is. Most glaringly, the University’s overpowering kitschification of Franklin crowds out any alternative narratives of the University’s foundations. Despite his quarter-century of service to the school during its

³⁷ University of Pennsylvania, *Catalogue 1879-80*, 11; Idem, *Catalogue 1918-1919*, 18.

³⁸ Idem, *Catalogue 1879-80*, 11.

³⁹ Joe W. Kraus, “The Development of a Curriculum in the Early American Colleges,” *History of Education Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (June 1961): 68; Louis F. Snow, *The College Curriculum in the United States* (1907) quoted in William Smith, *Account of the College, Academy, and Charitable School of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania*, in *The American Magazine*, October 1758 (Philadelphia: W. Bradford); reprint ed. Thomas R. Adams, with commentary by Thomas Woody (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Library, 1951), 43.

fragile naissance, there seems to be no room to include Smith in the pantheon of Pennsylvania's heroes. Milan Kundera has written that "the true opponent of... kitsch is the person who asks questions" and in this thesis I have tried to do just that.⁴⁰

I discovered William Smith two years ago as an intern in the University Archives. During the preparations for the concurrent celebrations of Franklin's tercentennial and the University's 250th commencement, the Archives was expanding its online exhibit, "Penn in the Age of Franklin." I was charged with digitizing Smith's papers for the project and to add my own essay on Franklin's contributions to the school. I expected the myth, but what I found was vastly different.

Conventional biographies of Benjamin Franklin virtually ignore his relationship with Smith – for example, the Franklin/Smith connection occupies a mere two pages total in noted historian Edmund S. Morgan's 2002 biography of Franklin. Gordon Wood's *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* devotes roughly three pages, while Walter Isaacson's bestseller, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*, mentions Smith merely four times. Most notable, however, is the complete absence of even a passing mention of Smith in the collection of essays bound within the 2005 Penn Reading Project edition of Franklin's *Autobiography*, which was itself hyped as an ur-text for the University. Even when Smith does appear in these texts, he is drawn in caricature. Morgan notes Smith's ambition and duplicitous nature and portrays Franklin as a victim of the Provost's "mischief," but omits any further detail.⁴¹ Isaacson meanwhile, ties their rocky relationship up with suspect neatness, maintaining merely that "in the years right after [Franklin's] death, as personal

⁴⁰ Kundera, 254.

⁴¹ Edmund S. Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 134-5. For Morgan, like these other writers, the College of Philadelphia itself is nothing more than an afterthought, mentioned solely in terms of Smith's fundraising success, which in turn is linked to his betrayal of Franklin

antagonisms faded, reverence for him grew” – as John Adams “mellowed” Smith did “likewise.”⁴²

Reading Smith’s letters as I scanned them and reading University documents as I began my research, these interpretations seemed increasingly simplistic to me. I was reading bitter missives and perplexing Trustees minutes. A whole story was unfolding before me that I had never heard. One where Franklin wasn’t at the heart of the University after all; instead, Smith seemed to be the leading figure. But the few pieces I could find that gave Smith and his connection to the College more than a footnote were unpublished theses concentrating on Smith as a public, political actor rather than a private person.⁴³ Yet, his relationship to the College and with Franklin was nothing if not personal – the venom in their letters made that clear.

Given his influence, it seems entirely plausible that Smith could have attained the status afforded Ezra Stiles at Yale – though not a founder, at least breaking even with Franklin’s importance in the collective imagination of the University.⁴⁴ Why then, I asked, has a man who worked nearly his entire adult life to further the interests of this institution, been so utterly forgotten? Forgotten, especially when the University seems so meticulous in asserting and celebrating its history? These questions were left unanswered. As noted above, part of the explanation *has* to involve the cachet of an association with Franklin and his

⁴² Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 60.

⁴³ Elizabeth H. Lang, “Colonial Colleges and Politics: Yale, King’s College, and the College of Philadelphia: 1740 – 1764,” (Ph. D. diss. Cornell University, 1976); Jason Tally Polevoy, “Education and Politics: The College, Academy, and Charitable School of Philadelphia under Provost William Smith,” (Senior Honors thesis. University of Pennsylvania, 1994).

⁴⁴ Ezra Stiles was a prominent Connecticut minister and graduate of Yale (1746), who returned to his alma mater in 1778 as President (equivalent to William Smith’s position as Provost at the College of Philadelphia), a position he held through his death in 1795. Stiles is credited with vastly improving the quality of a Yale education resulting in the highest enrollment of any American college by the end of the eighteenth-century and a respectability for the school which lasts to the present day. Stiles was considered one of America’s foremost intellectuals and was a frequent correspondent of Franklin’s. For a noted biography see Edmund S. Morgan, *The Gentle Puritan: A Life of Ezra Stiles, 1727-1795*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

mythology. William Smith is simply not accessible, compelling and frankly, famous, a character as Franklin. While this might explain the exaltation of the latter, it does not explain why the former has been reduced to a virtual non-entity to the modern University community. Instead, uncovering the hidden history of Smith's relationship with Franklin suggested to me a more complicated, but more plausible reason.

Initially, Franklin was Smith's benefactor. Alerted to the bright and ambitious young schoolmaster, Franklin thought he had found a kindred spirit as the pair corresponded on the subject of educational reform. It was Franklin who proposed Smith's appointment in the Academy and opened the door for his entry into the highest echelons of America's elite by introducing him to men more influential than even Franklin himself – most notably, Pennsylvania proprietor Thomas Penn. However, instead of reciprocating Franklin's patronage, Smith's ambition got the best of him.

The middle decade of the eighteenth century was simultaneously a formative period for the Academy (and then College) of Philadelphia and for the colony of Pennsylvania itself. The devastation wrought by border wars with the Native Americans and French, and the constant need to raise funds to protect against them reopened unresolved constitutional issues between the Proprietor in London and the Assembly in Philadelphia. Both sides battled over the basic issues of taxation and representation well before those same concerns would spread throughout English America. In the ensuing political posturing Franklin, as an assemblyman, aligned himself with that body, ironically arguing in favor of royal rule in Pennsylvania. Smith conversely, bet his fortunes on Thomas Penn's aristocratic authority in England and America, casting his lot with the Proprietary cause and investing his time and his pen to

thwart Franklin's every move. The friends had a very public and notoriously bitter falling out followed by decades-long enmity.

While learning about Smith in the course of my archival work I began to see that the rivalry between Franklin and Smith was critical to the subsequent course of Penn's history and to Smith's obscurity today. Most importantly, the school bore the brunt of the estrangement, suffering as a focus of their political dispute. Through the 1750s and 1760s, their connections to the College of Philadelphia (and the potential leaders it molded) gave both Benjamin Franklin and William Smith a legitimate political voice. Instead of benevolently using that power in the interests of the students however, their ambitions transformed the school into a sectarian platform for their mutual abhorrence. The school was "wounded in the crossfire" by association with Smith's partisan politics as well as Franklin's ensuing alienation from – and even naked antipathy towards – the institution he had helped to launch.⁴⁵ The fortunes of the College were at the mercy of the political fortunes of these two men. And in the tumultuous political and religious milieu of Philadelphia in the second half of the eighteenth century the pair were at opposite ends of a trembling see-saw. As Smith's star rose, Franklin's (*did* indeed at times) fall, and as Franklin's was resurrected, Smith's faded.

Franklin's post-war popularity, cemented by diplomatic successes during the Revolutionary War, ensured that his politics would emerge from the turmoil triumphant. Wedded to his opposing political allegiances, Smith found himself intentionally marginalized in early Republican Philadelphia. In the heat of the political disputes, the young University (as it had become by the 1790s) set the tone for the next two hundred years of its history, attempting to expunge evidence of Smith's influence, instead advancing the impression that

⁴⁵ Lang, 232.

Franklin near single-handedly created the University of Pennsylvania. Ultimately, Franklin's final control over the finite pool of power in the state of Pennsylvania – and not any particularly spectacular contributions to Penn – determined what an acceptable version of University history would be. As the old adage says, history is written by the victors.

Smith's memory may be problematic for those invested in Franklin kitsch – and indeed, Smith is no protagonist in this tale – but the facts of his contribution to the school remain. As a later provost of the University of Pennsylvania, Charles J. Stillé, noted, "If the founder of a charity be in fact, as well as in law, he who has contributed most largely himself, or who has induced others to contribute most largely to its original funds, then Dr. Smith is the true *Founder* of the University."⁴⁶ Even simply the "large sums of money which Smith raised for the College" the Provost's biographer notes, "would have entitled him to honorable memory had he never served the institution in any other way."⁴⁷ Honorable or not, his memory has been relegated to obscurity, but the whitewashing of history can be challenged by drawing a fuller picture of the formative years of the University.

⁴⁶ [Former University of Pennsylvania Provost] Charles J. Stillé quoted in Gegenheimer, 75.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER ONE

PHILADELPHIA'S ACADEMY

By 1743, the Boston-born printer Benjamin Franklin had become something of a celebrity in his adopted city of Philadelphia. The hallmark of his press, *Poor Richard's Almanac*, was both popular and lucrative, membership in his social network or “Junto” of young artisans was so sought after that he authorized the formation of affiliate clubs, and his initial public projects – the Library Company (1731) and the Union Fire Company (1736) – were successfully launched.¹ Thus, capitalizing on the accomplishments of his community activism, he drew up some notes for the foundation of an institution of higher learning, passing them around for comment.²

Franklin could legitimately suggest such a project because he straddled the two disparate worlds of eighteenth-century society; conversing easily with both the lower classes of the Junto and the wealthy gentlemen he lobbied to finance his social endeavors. A member of the period's small but growing upwardly-mobile middle class, Franklin was determined to make a mark, not only in the public service, but in the service of his own reputation and advancement. Torn between his desire for association with the intellectual elite, the aristocracy, and the polis, and his roots among the semi-literate, provincial working classes, he would consciously compromise much of his original vision to get Philadelphia its own academy. Nevertheless, once founded, he would entrust the institution's future to a similarly

¹ Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 60.

² Ibid., 146; George B. Wood. *Early History of the University of Pennsylvania from its Origin to the Year 1827*, 3rd ed. With Supplementary Chapters by Frederick D. Stone (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1896), 5; Edward Potts Cheyney, *History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1740-1940*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940), 15.

ambitious, middling tutor named William Smith, whose comparable station he believed, had produced a set of moderate educational values analogous to his own. Unfortunately for Franklin, the same cross-pressures which led him in one direction and towards one political destiny, led his friend to the very opposite – ironically with Franklin’s own initial encouragement.

Philadelphia in the Mid-Eighteenth Century

A booming city (by colonial standards) of about 12,000 by mid-century, the Pennsylvania capital was both America’s largest and fastest growing – expanding by one-third in the 1750s alone.³ Founder William Penn’s legacy of toleration coupled with its geographically centralized location, temperate climate, and the good soil quality of the surrounding countryside promoted the city’s rapid growth from a relatively late established outpost to premier city of English America. By 1743, Philadelphia already had several successful tutors running home-based schools which taught the rudiments of reading and writing, but it lacked “such Seminaries of Learning, as might supply the succeeding Age with Men qualified to serve the Publick with Honour to themselves, and to their Country.”⁴ As the city supplanted Boston and Williamsburg in importance, it became increasingly clear to municipal leaders that some provision was needed formal education locally, as sending promising sons to New England, Virginia, or Britain was becoming a prohibitive expense.⁵

³ Cheyney, 3.

⁴ Benjamin Franklin [hereinafter cited as BF], *Proposals for the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*, (Philadelphia: B. Franklin, 1749), 5; Cheyney, 9-14. See also for example, the following school advertisements from the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 7 May 1741 [an advertisement placed by future College professor Theophilus Grew], 5 November 1741; 24 November 1743 [an advertisement placed by future College vice-provost Francis Allison]; 27 October 1748; and 4 May 1749 (Philadelphia: B. Franklin & D. Hall).

⁵ Ibid., 16; BF, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Peter Conn, Penn Reading Project Special Edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 87; Common Council of the City of Philadelphia,

Moreover, the unique disposition of the Pennsylvania colony made these options particularly unattractive.

Unlike the regions to its north and south, Pennsylvania was ethnically and religiously heterogeneous with a population of English, Scotch-Irish, German, Dutch, Swedish, French, and Spanish origin with religious affiliations spanning the gamut from Anglican, Quaker, Presbyterian and Baptist, to Moravian, Lutheran, Dutch and German Reformed, Roman Catholic, and Jewish, besides many unconnected persons. Indeed, adherence to “the Pennsylvania religion” was said to be a lighthearted way for men like Franklin – those “of no sect at all” – to gently express their beliefs.⁶ Thus, colleges exclusively associated with Congregationalism, Presbyterianism, or the Church of England were less than attractive options for polyglot Pennsylvania’s youth. Multiculturalism was, however, as much of a hindrance to as a driving force behind the foundation of a local academy.

Colonial colleges were viewed as creatures of the community they served, publicly granted “monopolies” with a responsibility to serve the needs of the citizens who bestowed the privilege.⁷ Traditional, religiously affiliated colleges could comfortably exist in localities like Boston because the homogenous constituency’s religious leanings generally fit those of the school. This was never a possibility in Philadelphia. There were simply too many religious (and increasingly important over the eighteenth century, political) subgroups for any one to develop a collegiate institution without backlash. As the prime shaper of the hearts and minds of the next generation of provincial leaders, many worried that a college could be used as an instrument to subjugate legitimate, though less powerful interests. Nonetheless, as

Minutes of the Common Council of the City of Philadelphia: 1704-1776, (Philadelphia: Crissy & Markley Printers, 1847), 31 July 1750, 526-530.

⁶ Cheyney; 4-5; BF, *Autobiography*, 94.

⁷ Elizabeth H. Lang, “Colonial Colleges and Politics: Yale, King’s College, and the College of Philadelphia: 1740 – 1764,” (Ph. D. diss. Cornell University, 1976), 14.

Philadelphia grew from a village into a small city, plans for a city charity school began to take shape.

Suggestions were offered and plans made as early as 1740. However, the trustees of this early project – a charity school inspired by the sermons of Rev. George Whitefield who visited Philadelphia in the 1730s – proved less than responsible with the public trust. As late as 1749 no school had gone into operation and subscribers to the project were clamoring for their money back. Support for the venture was tepid and progress null because the community was absorbed with the more pressing issue of Pennsylvania’s safety against increasing Native American and French encroachment on its western border. Philadelphians understandably placed greater priority on organizing for defense rather than for education. Franklin himself soon chose to “let the [1743 educational] scheme lie a while dormant.”⁸ Only later would Franklin’s ideas resurface, ultimately culminating in the pamphlet *Proposals for the Education of Youth in Pensilvania* (1749).

“The Molatto Gentleman”

To fully grasp the tensions revealed in Franklin’s *Proposals* one must first understand his own uncertain status in the 1740s. Franklin was a man caught between two worlds, simultaneously cultivating a reputation as a hardworking, middling, Philadelphia tradesman (the persona he would retrospectively promote when writing the *Autobiography*) and yet seeking out relationships with genteel men – both as patrons and adversaries – which he strove to emulate. As the “youngest Son of the youngest Son for 5 Generations back” and the son of a lowly soap and candle maker at that, Franklin’s humble origins contrasted greatly

⁸ BF, *Autobiography*, 87.

with his ambitions.⁹ Franklin's father had hoped his son would enter the ministry, but when he found the requisite schooling prohibitively expensive, took him out of school and put him under the charge of another son, James, who was a printer – a job one New Yorker remarked, in such “wretched Disrepute” that no family “of Substance would ever put their Sons to such an Art,” resigning the trade to only “the lowest people.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, amidst the heavy labor and mucky ink, Franklin cultivated friendships with booksellers' apprentices, enabling him a steady stream of reading material and writings to emulate, and he put this knowledge to good use in the satirical Silence Dogood essays he submitted anonymously to his brother's newspaper. Once found out however, Franklin realized that his jibes had made himself (as he often would be later in life) “a little obnoxious to the governing party” and he decided to flee Boston, determined to “emerge from the poverty and obscurity in which [he] was born and bred, to a state of affluence and some degree of reputation in the world.”¹¹

Settled in Philadelphia, Franklin began his rise by establishing his “credit and character as a tradesman” by taking “care not only to be in *reality* industrious and frugal, but to avoid all appearances to the contrary.” As he recalled in the *Autobiography*:

I drest [*sic*] plainly; I was seen at no places of idle diversion... and to show that I was not above my business, I sometimes brought home the paper I purchas'd at the stores thro' the streets on a wheelbarrow. Thus being esteem'd an industrious, thriving young man... the merchants who imported stationary solicited my custom... I went on swimmingly.¹²

Such diligence resulted not only in a successful printing business but impressed many influential men, including the rich Quaker merchant Thomas Denham and the colonial

⁹ Ibid., 8, 11.

¹⁰ Jeffrey L. Pasley, “*The Tyranny of Printers*”: *Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 27, quoted in Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 19.

¹¹ BF, *Autobiography*, 14-20, 20, 7.

¹² Ibid., 54.

governors of both Massachusetts and New York, who would come to sponsor Franklin, allowing his “[admission] into the society of gentlemen.”¹³ These men were so critical because, as Franklin himself wrote, “It seems certain that the hope of becoming at some time of Life free from the necessity and care of Labour, together with the fear of penury; are the mainsprings of most people’s industry.”¹⁴ The middle class with which Franklin would later become associated was just in its nascent stages; it was still a commonplace that labor was antithetical to virtue.

As Gordon Wood reminds us in his seminal study, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, despite the ideological upheavals of Britain’s seventeenth century revolutions – culminating in a radical “constitution specifically dedicated to liberty” – “mid-eighteenth century colonial society was in many ways still traditional... in its basic social relationships and in its cultural consciousness.” The existence of a social hierarchy – between “extraordinary and ordinary people, gentlemen and commoners” – was unquestioned as a natural characteristic of society. Simply put, “ordinary people... accepted their lowliness” and though determining just who *was* a gentleman was becoming difficult in an increasingly mobile world, the designation remained of no little value. As Wood points out, “Labor, or working in order to live was... considered servile, associated with a dependency and lowly status” and even Franklin:

For all his praise of the work ethic, never valued toil for its own sake, and certainly not for a gentleman. “Who is there,” he once wrote, “that can be handsomely Supported in Affluence, Ease and Pleasure by another, that will chuse rather to earn his Bread by the Sweat of his own Brows?” Men worked from necessity, he said, not from choice.¹⁵

¹³ Wood, *Americanization*, 26-7, 46.

¹⁴ BF to Peter Collinson, 9 May 1753 in Leonard Labaree et. al. eds. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959-), 4:481.

¹⁵ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992; Vintage Books, 1993), 13, 11, 24, 30, 38.

If one was interested in politics, as Franklin was, the distinction between the laborer and the “better sort” was especially stark. Civic virtue and participation in public life were purviews of the gentleman only, “government service... generally thought to be a personal sacrifice required of certain gentlemen because of their talents, independence, and social preeminence.” Anyone who worked with their hands was viewed as ignorant, polluted by a desire for personal gain, and therefore unqualified for the moral elevation political theory of the time required of political authorities.¹⁶

Despite his lowly origins however, Franklin’s crafted conscientiousness distinguished him in the eyes of the local gentry like Denham and the lawyer Andrew Hamilton, who, noticing those literary and civic interests he had refined in the backrooms of Boston’s bookshops, began to invite him into their political discussions and support him financially. Essentially, “he won over his superiors by allowing them to patronize him.”¹⁷ Franklin may have been a “*meer* Printer” but his industriousness paid dividends when he acquired the lucrative positions of printer to the Pennsylvania Assembly and postmaster of Philadelphia, began to print the *Pennsylvania Gazette* newspaper, and entered into partnerships with printers as far away as New York. His business rapidly prospered, in time making him just as rich as the gentlemen he mingled with in projects such as the Library Company.¹⁸ As Wood has noted, Franklin became an iconoclast, “more so perhaps than anyone in colonial America [he] was living in two social worlds simultaneously.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., 83

¹⁷ Wood, *Americanization*, 59.

¹⁸ Philadelphia lawyer John Webbe quoted in Ibid., 46. In 1740 Webbe stole Franklin’s idea for starting a local magazine, working on a publication with his competitor Andrew Bradford instead.

¹⁹ Ibid., 47.

This did not mean however, that he was fully comfortable with his awkward status. Franklin himself wrote anonymously in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of those who “by their Industry or good Fortune, from mean Beginnings find themselves in Circumstances a little more easy.” He chastised these people for their lack of “the natural and easy Manner of those who have been genteely educated” and their clumsy “Imitation” of it. “Of all sorts of *Molattoes*,” he wrote, none appear to me so monstrously ridiculous as the *Molatto Gentleman*.”²⁰ Through the 1740s Franklin would continue to self-identify as a “Tradesman of Philadelphia” even as he rallied the “middling People” against “those Great and rich Men” who he felt were not actively protecting the borders of Pennsylvania against the French.²¹ Yet, this involvement in colonial politics would fuel his aspiration to separate himself from those middling people.

For all his misgivings, however, Franklin above all desired to be viewed as a “mover and shaker in the province” – displaying that civic virtue attainable only to those “free of the need for money.” By the late 1740s he had earned enough to retire and enter public life, but afraid of appearing like one of the ridiculous parvenus he scorned, Franklin assiduously prepared for it. He learned foreign languages, acquired slaves, moved to a better part of town – significantly, to a house *not* conjoined to his printing office – adopted a coat of arms, and commissioned an expensive “coming out” portrait from the American painter Robert Feke.²² By 1748, on the eve of the development of the Academy, Franklin officially retired from the print shop and entered public service upon his election to the city Common Council. It was

²⁰ [BF], “Blackamore, on Molatto Gentlemen,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 30 August 1733 (Philadelphia: B. Franklin & D. Hall) quoted in *Ibid.*, 49-51.

²¹ [BF], “Plain Truth” (Philadelphia, 1747), in Labaree et. al. eds., 3: 201.

²² Wood, *Americanization*, 57. For more on Franklin’s pretensions and the influence of aristocratic patrons in his life, see also Wood, *Radicalism*, 76-7. And on his less than egalitarian early views, William S. Hanna, *Benjamin Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), 28-9, 72, 75, 160.

by no means a smooth transition, but Philadelphia's gentry were slowly coming to accept him as one of their own.

An Academy is Proposed

The voice of the *Proposals for the Education of Youth in Pensilvania* is that which modern Americans – and University historians – expect to hear – Franklin as a “practical... educational reformer taking on the rigid classicists.”²³ “Some things here propos'd may be found to differ a little from the Forms of Education in common Use,” he acknowledged at the bottom of the first page. The “*old Method* is in many Respects wrong; but long settled Forms are not easily changed, [however] for us, who are now to make a Beginning; 'tis, at least, as easy to set out right as wrong.”²⁴ Accordingly, the proposed academy was laid out with a particularly bourgeois American zeal for detail and discipline. “Boarding Scholars [should] diet together, plainly, temperately, and frugally” he noted, before even beginning a discussion of curriculum. Meanwhile, “to keep them in Heath, and to strengthen and render active their Bodies, they [should] be frequently exercis'd in Running, Leaping, Wrestling, and Swimming, &c.,” he admonished, appending nearly a page of footnotes on the subject and generously quoting the relevant opinions of Milton, Locke, and Turnbull.²⁵ “As to their STUDIES” Franklin wished:

[Students] could be taught *every Thing* that is useful, and *every Thing* that is ornamental: But Art is long, and their Time is short. It is therefore propos'd that they learn those Things that are likely to be *most useful* and *most ornamental*.²⁶

²³ Isaacson, 146-7. It should be noted that Isaacson's discussion of Franklin's involvement with the University is perfunctory at best, and errs in mischaracterizing his participation in the board of trustees as life long.

²⁴ BF, *Proposals*, 5. See also idem, “On the Need for an Academy” in Labaree et. al. eds, 3:385-388, and idem, “A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge” in Ibid., 2:378-383.

²⁵ BF, *Proposals*, 10.

²⁶ Ibid., 11.

In the last twenty-one pages of the pamphlet he detailed just what was most useful and ornamental – drawing, arithmetic, accounting, geometry, astronomy, English grammar (by way of Tillotson, Addison, Pope, and Sidney), reading, writing, rhetoric, history (ancient, modern, natural, and of commerce), geography, chronology, morality, and “mechanical philosophy” (among others) – justifying each point with additional literary commentary so copious it threatened at times to run Franklin’s own words off the page.²⁷ Further clarifying his ideas in a follow-up pamphlet, *Idea of the English School* (1751), he increased the emphasis on English proficiency, fluency of expression, and occupational preparation, and continued to place little faith in the traditional, classically-based education, stating that:

Youth will come out of this [English] School fitted for learning any Business, Calling, or Profession, except such wherein Languages are required; and tho’ unacquainted with any antient [sic] or foreign Tongue, they will be Masters of their own, which is of more immediate and general Use; and withal will have attain’d many other valuable Accomplishments; the Time usually spent in acquiring those Languages, often without Success, being here employ’d in laying such a Foundation of Knowledge and Ability, as, properly improv’d, may qualify them to pass thro’ and execute the several Offices of civil Life, with Advantage and Reputation to themselves and Country.²⁸

In eschewing the Latin and Greek standards of a British gentleman’s education – designed specifically to introduce the literary and political references deemed necessary knowledge for a leisurely landowner should he decide to dabble in affairs of state – to focus on more vocational training, Franklin is often seen as heralding in a modern, egalitarian educational system. This was system, which would throw off the yoke of the ancien regime and lead America into a more perfect future. Upon closer inspection, however, the printer’s insistence on doing away with the “old Method” is a tad disingenuous. Still unsure of his gentry status,

²⁷ Ibid., 12-32 passim.

²⁸ BF, *Idea of the English School*, (Philadelphia: B. Franklin & D. Hall, 1751), 8.

the academy envisioned by Franklin did not completely break with the eighteenth century's social schema.

The *Proposals*, for example, were directed specifically at "Persons of Leisure" who might exert their patronage on the pupils (i.e. creating a dependency) as an incentive to study. The specific course of study itself, meanwhile, was determined with "regard being had to the several Professions for which [the pupils] are intended," with the seemingly vocational emphasis on accounting and English proficiency proposed with an eye towards helping a gentleman maintain his estate and his reputation. For example, Franklin quoted John Locke as saying on "Merchants Accounts":

If it is not necessary to help a Gentleman to *get* an Estate, yet there is no thing of more Use and Efficacy to make him *preserve* the Estate he has... I would therefore advise all Gentlemen to learn perfectly Merchants Accounts; and not to think 'tis a skill that belongs not to them, because it has received its Name, and has been chiefly practis'd by men of Traffick.²⁹

Locke's opinion is cited on English grammar as well:

Whether all Gentlemen should not... take Pains in cultivating their Language and perfecting their Stiles... I leave to be considered, since the Want of Propriety and Grammatical Exactness is thought very misbecoming one of that Rank, and usually draws on one guilty of such Faults, the Imputation of having had a lower Breeding and worse Company than suits with his Quality.³⁰

As with most history, one should not anachronistically confuse Franklin's concept of a "practical education" with the modern meaning of practicality. The *Proposals* may have placed less emphasis on the ancient classics, but the vision was nevertheless, a brainchild of the eighteenth century.

A "Latin and Greek School"

²⁹ BF, *Proposals*, 6-7, 11, 13n.

³⁰ Ibid.

Franklin had submitted his initial 1743 proposals to the Reverend Richard Peters, a leader of Philadelphia's Anglican community and sometime government official "then out of employ... with the hope that... he [i.e. Peters] might be induced to take upon himself the superintendence of such an establishment, but Peters declined."³¹ Six years later, with security on the Pennsylvania frontier momentarily stabilized, Franklin reapplied to the public spirit and goodwill of established Pennsylvania gentry. He needed their money and endorsement to make the *Proposals* he circulated a reality. With the broken promises of the charity school venture likely in the back of their minds, he found them more receptive.

Catering to their desire to project the ideal persona of the disinterested gentleman selflessly working for the public good (just as he himself did), Franklin convinced Philadelphia leaders like jurist William Allen,³² Pennsylvania attorney-general Tench Francis, Chief Justice James Logan, and Rev. Richard Peters, now working as provincial secretary, to join the Board of Trustees of his new project. It was at this point that the trustees of the defunct charity school transferred its property and plan to the newly formed Academy Board of Trustees, who then incorporated the charity school idea into its proposed framework. It is thus through this charity project that the University of Pennsylvania lays claim to a foundation date of 1740, despite the formation of the official Board of Trustees in 1749, the start of Academy classes in 1751, and the granting of the first charter of the College in 1755.³³

³¹ Wood. *Early History*, 5; Richard Peters was known to Franklin as an original trustee of the Library Company in 1739. "Agreement of Directors of Library Company" in Labaree et. al. eds., 2:205-6. There is no extant correspondence between the two men detailing Peters exact reasons for declining the proposal, although the lack of adequate frontier defense may have taken precedence on his political agenda and/or the stated intentions of his patron Thomas Penn to found his own academy in Pennsylvania may have initially dissuaded him from heeding Franklin's call. See appendix, figure 16 for a portrait of Peters.

³² See appendix, figure 17 for a portrait of Allen.

³³ Interestingly, this earlier group of trustees purposely included clerical representatives from all of Philadelphia's major religious communities, as the later reformed University of the State of Pennsylvania Board

Altruism aside, in 1749 however, Franklin was still something of an upstart defending his new status and in no position to overrule the desires of his more established peers. If the original vision of the school contained strains of elitism, the original vision would be further compromised under the influence of the Trustees. When the newly invested Board released a set of guidelines for the new Academy, the scheme had tilted emphatically towards a traditional genteel education: “As nothing can more effectually contribute to the Cultivation and Improvement of a Country... than a proper Education of Youth,” the twenty-four Trustees announced in November 1749, the formation of “an ACADEMY for teaching the *Latin and Greek Languages, the English Tongue...* and every other Part of useful Learning and Knowledge.”³⁴ The “*Latin and Greek School*” would be the premier segment of the institution, being taught by the rector – a position akin to principal – instead of a secondary professor, who would serve as the master of the English School.³⁵

From the very start, Franklin had compromised. The Academy he presided over as president of the Board of Trustees (a post given in recognition of his part in the original idea) would not, and was not drawn up to, transform education. These were conservative men with traditional values who saw no problem with the way they and their fathers had been educated, a revolution in pedagogy would have to wait. Thus, a relatively unremarkable Academy of Philadelphia opened its doors in early 1751.³⁶ The school received not only private donations but also a grant from the city of Philadelphia. The minutes from the relevant city council meeting are especially relevant because they lay out in detail the

of Trustees would. For the details of the argument for the legitimacy of the 1740 date see Charles W. Dulles, “The Charity School of 1740 – The Foundation of the University of Pennsylvania,” *University of Pennsylvania Medical Bulletin* (December, 1904).

³⁴ [Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania], *Constitutions of the Publick Academy in the City of Philadelphia, 1749 and Oaths of the Faculty and Trustees, 1755-1776*, 1, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center [hereinafter cited as UARC].

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁶ See appendix, figure 18 for an early image of the Academy.

specific motivations for the formation of the Academy. This included not only the “opportunity [for their children to] receive a good Education at home” and that “a Number of [Pennsylvania] Natives will hereby be qualified to bear Magistracies [and] other public offices of Trust... there being at present great Want of Persons so qualified,” but also:

That a Number of the poorer sort will hereby be qualified to act as Schoolmasters in the Country... being of good morals and known character... the Country suffering at present very much for want of good Schoolmasters, and oblig’d frequently to employ in their Schools, vicious imported servants, or concealed Papists, who by their bad Examples and Instruction often deprave the Morals or corrupt the Principles of the Children under their Care. [Moreover,] a good Academy erected in Philadelphia, a healthy place where Provisions are plenty, situated in the center of the colonies, may draw Numbers of Students from the neighbouring Provinces, who must spend considerable Sums yearly among us, in Payment for their Lodging, Diet, Apparel, &c., which will be an Advantage to our Traders, Artisans, and Owners of Houses and Lands.³⁷

Coincidentally, that same year, a twenty-four year old Anglo-Scottish schoolmaster arrived in America, bursting with energy and ambition. Franklin would befriend this young man and believing him to be a kindred spirit, entrust him with this new endeavor. This move would prove disastrous for Franklin’s influence over the Academy.

Franklin Finds a Friend

William Smith was the son of a small-time Anglican landowner who sent him to King’s College, Aberdeen.³⁸ After leaving university, he took a post as a primary school teacher in the town Abernathy and became a leader amongst Scotland’s teaching community. In October 1750, Smith had led the charge for Parliament to raise the standard living towns provided to their local schoolmasters, and the experience enabled him to first crystallize his

³⁷ Common Council, 31 July 1750, 526-530. City councilors donated £200 immediately and promised £50 more per annum for the use of the Charity School arm.

³⁸ This biographical sketch of William Smith is principally based on Albert Frank Gegenheimer, *William Smith: Educator and Churchman: 1727-1803* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1943).

thoughts on the aims of education in a piece for the *Scots Magazine* entitled, “Some Reflections on Education.” Teachers must, “above all, form [children’s] taste and manners aright” he wrote, “distinguish the true from the false, regulate their passions, and make the first and strongest advances toward... training them up [as] reasonable and social creatures.”³⁹ Presumably it was on this trip to London to present the Scottish teachers’ petition that Smith first met the wealthy Long Islander Colonel Josiah Martin. Martin sought a private tutor for his children and applied to the energetic, young schoolmaster. Smith quickly accepted left with the family for America barely six months after he had first arrived in London.⁴⁰

With only two charges in his care, the New York position gave him the opportunity to dabble in current affairs, and he continued to write on educational issues, anonymously publishing *Some Thoughts on Education* in 1752. A pamphlet combining poetry and prose to push for the establishment of a college in the colony, *Some Thoughts* is principally an argument for the propriety of having a college in a metropolitan center like New York in contrast to an outlying provincial village. Smith tediously lists all possible objections (mostly moral claims) and counters them with assertions based on the supposition that the purpose of a collegiate education is to develop gentlemen. Despite its temptations, Smith argues, life in a city has a “Manner of softening our natural Roughness,” creating “a certain Easiness of Behaviour which is the Characteristic of a Gentleman.” This “peculiar Ornament of a public Station,” the “so necessary Air of the Gentleman, is not to be acquir’d,” according to Smith, “in any Part of this Country but our capital City.” Moreover, he continues, New York City:

[Was the] One Place in [the] Province [of New York], where the Breeding of the Gentleman can be acquir’d... [the New York Assembly] ought to fix [the

³⁹ *Scots Magazine*, October 1750 quoted in *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

proposed] College in this ONE place, [or] otherwise [risk] deny[ing our Youth the] Chance of uniting the Gentleman with the Scholar, or ever arriving at that Politeness which is the Bond of Social Life – the Ornament of human Nature.⁴¹

Franklin later wrote Smith that he read the piece with “great Approbation and Pleasure.”⁴²

The younger man’s efforts were ultimately successful. Launched in 1754, King’s College of New York – later Columbia University – originally sought Smith as their first provost.

By far, Smith’s most famous and influential work however, was his 1753 follow-up, *A General Idea of the College of Mirania*. Taking his lead from Thomas More’s *Utopia*, *Mirania* is a thinly fictionalized description of an English colonial government (New York, of course in a guise, but with issues equally applicable to Pennsylvania). In order to buttress the flourishing state and the order promoted by law – which alone “can at best but fright Vice into a Corner” – and faced with an influx of foreigners – who, “by creating separate Interests, might in the Issue prove fatal to the Government” – the “Miranians” established a model university.⁴³ In what amounts to an educational utopia, Smith’s imaginary tour guide Evander maintains the Miranians’ willingness to “reject some Things commonly taught at Colleges; to add others; and shorten or invert the Order of others, as best suited to their Circumstances.”⁴⁴ The sentiment clearly mirrors Franklin’s intent with his English School.⁴⁵

⁴¹ [William Smith, herein after WS], *Some Thoughts on Education*, (New York: J. Parker, 1752), 11-14.

Interestingly, in the relatively tortured poem accompanying his thoughts, Smith castigates opponents of the college plan with phrases ironic given his subsequent disputes in Philadelphia: “Ah ME! How long, how long! / Shall *Party-Zeal*, and little sneaking *Views*, / Of vile *Self-Interest*, our chief Thoughts engross, / And dim our Fires? Ah! Let us think, abash’d, / That this same *Zeal*, *Intrigue*, *Expen*ce, and *Toil*, / So ill-applied each Other to supplant, / Would, if united in this public Work, / Burst into *Patriot-Flame*, adorn the Land, / And consecrate our names to latest Time.” Perhaps Smith’s history would have turned out better if he could have taken his own advice. *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴² BF to WS, 19 April 1753 in Labaree et. al. eds., 4:469.

⁴³ WS, *A General Idea of the College of Mirania* (New York: J. Parker and W. Weyman, 1753), 10.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ As Franklin wrote to educator Samuel Johnson, his “Compleat Scheme” for the English school assumed that children afterwards “may have time to learn Merchandizing, Husbandry, or any other Profession (that does not need the learned Languages) by which they are to be supported thro’ Life [or] if they have Estates already

Specifically, the course of study outlined an initial basic education (in reading, writing, and basic arithmetic) for three years after which, “such of the youth as discover Genius, and are intended for the learn’d Professions” are separated from those not – termed the “Mechanics” – such that the entire imaginary society is divided into two “grand classes” of people based on their future occupation – and are schooled accordingly. The “learn’d” prepared themselves with instruction in classical languages, law, political philosophy, and religion, while their less able brethren were taught the “useful Parts of natural and mechanic Philosophy,” mathematics, and other, more vocational subjects. This “Division [was] absolutely necessary” because:

Any scheme... that either proposes to teach both these grand Classes under the same Master, or is wholly calculated for one of them, without regarding the other, must be very defective. And yet so it is, that Colleges are almost universally calculated for the First Class; while a collegiate school for breeding Mechanics, is rarely to be met with. This Class of People, by far the most numerous... are overlook’d, and have Nothing but this wretched Alternative left them; either to glean what Scraps of Science they can at private Schools, (often under no Regulations as to Morals or Method) or to go thro’ a Course of Learning at Colleges, for which they have neither Time nor Use.⁴⁶

The pamphlet focuses by and large on the College (i.e. classical) educational component of the scheme, assuming students’ English proficiency; but in its depiction of the Mechanics School, the *College of Mirania* dialogues with Franklin’s *Idea of the English School*. In the same mold as the “*Pennsylvanian* method” advanced at the time by the “very ingenious and worthy *Mr. Franklin*,” a Miranian mechanic would be taught English “grammatically, and as a Language, with Writing” along with “Accompts, Mathematics, Ethics, Oratory” and other

provided for them, they may continue longer, and make farther Progress in Philosophy, &c.” BF to Samuel Johnson, 25 October 1750 in Labaree et. al. eds., 4:72.

⁴⁶ WS, *Mirania*, 16, 13, 14.

subjects also noted by Franklin.⁴⁷ In light of Franklin's pamphlet, however, a "particular Account of it [was] needless" and Smith, perhaps revealing his true interests, quickly proceeds to Evander's nearly seventy-page description of the College's traditional, aristocratic classical education.

Despite a long interlude discussing the importance of the specifically Christian education provided in Mirania – leading students to "admire and adore the Deity in [their] Study"⁴⁸ – the pamphlet shows Smith to be somewhat of a kindred spirit to Franklin. Here it seemed, was a man who was also caught between the developing artisan middle class and aristocratic notions of hierarchy, both acknowledging the need for a more basic instruction focused on fluency of expression and subscribing to the elitist commonplaces of contemporary classical education. They seemed a natural pair in many other ways as well.

According to scholar Robert Middlekauff:

Smith rolled a concern for virtue off his tongue with ease, just as Franklin did, and he had the style of the moral man so admired by Franklin. Smith conceived of education as satisfying social and moral needs. So did Franklin. Smith professed to be interested in public affairs far more than his own. So did Franklin.⁴⁹

In a move reminiscent of the older man's own aggressive networking, Smith himself sent a copy of *Mirania* to the now gentrified and famous Benjamin Franklin. He received a generally positive reaction, "I know not when I have read a Piece that has more affected me,

⁴⁷ Ibid., 15-6.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 40-7, quote on page 47. In particular opposition to Franklin, given the feeling of pride in a lack of religious fervor which is expressed in the *Autobiography*, Smith writes that though a comprehensive Enlightenment education may risk creating "Freethinkers" who will not "learn Religion... let them once taste the manly, noble, and generous Pleasures, which true Philosophy and true Religion impart – never, never can they forsake them, for the mean Satisfaction of the narrow-foul'd Deist or Atheist, according to a fine Thought of the great Bacon: A superficial Taste of Philosophy, says he, may perchance incline the mind to Atheism; but a full Draught thereof brings it back again to Religion." The religious emphasis becomes understandable given, as discussed below, Smith's future ordination and activities with the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Ibid., 46.

⁴⁹ Robert Middlekauff, *Benjamin Franklin and His Enemies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 45.

so noble and just are the Sentiments, so warm and animated the Language,” Franklin wrote back. Recognizing their similarities and impressed with the young man, Franklin invited Smith to visit the new Academy of Philadelphia, flourishing under the direction of another Scottish-educated schoolmaster, the Presbyterian minister Francis Allison.⁵⁰ “I shall be extreamly [*sic*] glad to see and converse with you here,” the retired printer wrote, “For an Acquaintance and Communication with Men of Learning, Virtue, and Publick Spirit, is one of my greatest Enjoyments.”⁵¹ However, Franklin also expressed unease with *Mirania*’s vitriol against Smith’s political enemies.

In a clear stylistic holdover from the similar anger expressed in *Some Thoughts*, Smith had used his treatise on education to attack those opposed to his plan for a college in New York, “either because they Themselves cou’d not model it to their own Minds, or that they might favor the Interests of those that were already model’d in other Places.” Smith went on to crossly remark on “those Writers who delight to give frequent specimens of their Knack at Wrangling and Chicane” accusing him of “a selfish Motive” in proposing a college: “Sorry shou’d I be,” he retorted, “if after all my Partiality in treating this Matter, I shou’d fall under the Displeasure of any Sect or Party, who may claim an exclusive Right of modeling this Institution to their Mind. Every Person is at Liberty, and I think ought, to offer his Sentiments.”⁵² In a caution which would prove prophetic, Franklin wrote to Smith: “I wish you had omitted... all those Expressions of Resentment against your Adversaries... In such Cases, the noblest Victory is obtained, by Neglect, and by *Shining on*.”⁵³ Smith took up

⁵⁰BF to WS, 3 May 1753 in Labaree et. al. eds., 4:475-6. For example, in their early correspondence Franklin draws on his own experience to give Smith advice on how to ingratiate himself to fellow Trustee William Allen.

⁵¹BF to WS, 19 April 1753 in Ibid., 4:469-70. In the interests of accuracy and fairness to Franklin, and perhaps as an indication of his conscious compromises in the formation of the Academy, he attached a copy of the *Proposals* to this letter noting, “They had (however imperfect) the desired Success.”

⁵² WS, *Mirania*, 65, 79.

⁵³ BF to WS, 3 May 1753 in Labaree et. al. eds., 4:475.

Franklin's offer and made his first appearance in Philadelphia in late May/early June of 1753, commemorating the short visit with a poem dedicated to the Academy trustees. Smith biographer Albert Gegenheimer plausibly suggests that it was during this trip that Franklin first contemplated recruiting Smith to lead the Academy.

Franklin would have to wait however, for after his stay in Philadelphia, Smith was to depart for England to receive ordination in the Anglican Church (a common occurrence among schoolmasters of the period). When he left in June, Franklin gave Smith a letter to deliver to his friend Londoner Peter Collinson, to whom he had been conversing on the subject of the Academy. "We now only want a Person in the Academy, qualified to teach the higher Parts of Learning," Franklin wrote, "I only hint this to you; as a thought now occurs to me, that this Bearer, Mr. Smith, who has already given great Satisfaction as a Tutor to some young Gentlemen, and appears by his Mirania to have excellent Notions of Education... may possibly be prevail'd on to engage in that Service."⁵⁴ Collinson was also a friend of the proprietor of Pennsylvania, William Penn's son Thomas, and had already suggested to Franklin that the Academy Trustees apply to the proprietor for funds to enlarge it into a college. Such a plan would principally involve the endowment of a provost's salary – leaving student tuition free to better fund needed instruments and materials.⁵⁵ Franklin later discussed these possibilities with Smith expressing the Trustees' nervousness about expansion plans given the debt the seminary was already incurring, "Thus, unless the Proprietors shall think it fit to put the finishing Hand to our Institution, it must I fear, wait some Years longer before it can arrive at that State of Perfection which to me it seems now to

⁵⁴ BF to Peter Collinson, 26 June 1753 in *Ibid.*, 4:512.

⁵⁵ See e.g. Cadwallader Colden to BF, November 1749 in *Ibid.*, 3:430.

be capable of.”⁵⁶ Franklin now prodded Collinson to take “proper Steps” to introduce the young educator to Penn: “If you should think with me as to the Expediency and Utility of this Matter, I know I need not urge your Goodness to take some early Opportunity of proposing it to the Consideration of the Proprietors.”⁵⁷

Even without Collinson’s help, Smith was in a unique position to ingratiate himself to Penn. First, Smith’s current employer, Colonel Martin, was a personal friend of Penn’s.⁵⁸ Second, and more importantly, Smith’s planned ordination threw him into acquaintance with high-ranking Church of England officials who could exert additional pressure on the proprietor – who had rejected his father’s Quakerism and returned the Penn family to the Anglican fold.⁵⁹ Franklin thus actively promoted the development of a relationship – ties of obligation – between Penn and his new protégé. As Gordon Wood notes, eighteenth-century society was composed of “delicate webs of paternalistic obligation.” The “mutual relationships” of patronage were seen as the fundamental bonds which held society together, the powerful solidifying their position at the apex of the accepted social hierarchy by adopting those below them in social status. Men like Thomas Penn could augment their own power by granting favors to upstarts like William Smith, producing “personal loyalties” they

⁵⁶ BF to WS, 27 November 1753 in Labaree et. al. eds., 5:120.

⁵⁷ BF to Peter Collinson, 26 June 1753 in Ibid., 4:512.

⁵⁸ Thomas Penn to WS, 18 October 1753, William Smith Papers, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center [hereinafter cited as WS Papers, UARC].

⁵⁹ Gegenheimer, 32-4. Jason Tally Polevoy, “Education and Politics: The College, Academy, and Charitable School of Philadelphia under Provost William Smith,” (Senior Honors thesis. University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 15. Regarding Smith’s ordination, Polevoy reasonably asserts that it was for purely political reasons – “in order to gain the respect and position which came with being a representative of the church” [Ibid., 23] – a milder echo of contemporary accusations leveled against him. [See for example, the venom expressed in *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, No. 698, 22 April 1756 (Philadelphia: W. Bradford).] For his part, Penn discouraged Smith from taking orders, afraid that they would hamper his influence in Pennsylvania’s Quaker dominated politics. Middlekauff, 44. See also Smith’s Deacon’s Orders from 21 December 1753 and Priest’s Orders, License, and Declaration from 23 December 1753, WS Papers, UARC. Smith received his ordination under the auspices of the Bishop of London, who oversaw the American colonies, and the license he received entitled him to practice in Pennsylvania, indicating that by this point he had become certain of obtaining a post in the Academy.

could redeem for services in the future.⁶⁰ Such an organizing principle of mutual self-interest must have worked through Franklin's mind in 1753. Most simply, if Penn were to be convinced of Smith's worth and high standing he might find it personally advantageous to endow the teacher's salary. If Franklin's maneuverings worked, his new friend would find steady employment *and* there would be more money freed up to invest in his new school. It seemed a win-win plan. Sure, Thomas Penn would also gain a dependent, but while calling upon his London contacts to aid in Smith's social advancement, Franklin must have thought a Penn-Smith alliance an inconsequential effect of the scheme. This oversight would come back to haunt him.

Once Smith had arrived in England in September 1753 Collinson, as promised, wrote him a letter of recommendation to Penn.⁶¹ Moreover, Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Herring – who knew Smith from his early Scottish petition – sent Penn his own glowing recommendation calling Smith “ingenious” and “of a temper fitted, as it seems to me to pursue a Plan of Education upon the large and generous footing of aiming at the Publick Good.”⁶² With his personal prospects at stake, the newly ordained Reverend Smith proved successful at cultivating Penn's good graces; the proprietor's reply to Herring after their first meeting gushed, “[Smith] shal [*sic*] have my countenance and friendship – whatever that can be of service to him.”⁶³ Smith arrived back in Philadelphia on 22 May 1754 and was

⁶⁰ Wood, *Radicalism*, 57.

⁶¹ Peter Collinson to BF, 14 January 1754 in Labaree et. al. eds., 5:188

⁶² [Archbishop of Canterbury] Thomas Herring to Thomas Penn, 19 September 1753 quoted in Gegenheimer, 36.

⁶³ Thomas Penn to Thomas Herring, 23 September 1753 quoted in Gegenheimer, 37. See also WS to BF and Richard Peters, February [?] 1754 in Labaree et. al. eds., 5:206-7. In this latter letter, Smith jokes to Franklin and fellow trustee Peters about his “disinterested” proposition to Penn that he endow a professorship position, which would then be presented to Smith. Smith also notes that in convincing Penn to help fund the Academy he had to overcome the proprietor's own intentions to found a school in Pennsylvania. Smith also notes that he dined with Penn on several occasions, discussing several matters relating to the management of the province –

immediately received an official request from the Academy to teach “Logick Rhetorick Ethicks and Natural Philosophy.”⁶⁴ He accepted.

An “Ingenious” Man

Thomas Herring was not the only man who termed Smith “ingenious.” As Smith was making a name for himself in London, barrister Richard Jackson wrote Franklin that Smith seemed to him “a very Ingenious Modest Man” and Peter Collinson reported, “Mr. Smith’s a Very Ingenious Man. Its a Pitty but He was more Solid, and Less Flighty.” A few months later Collinson continued, “he has great Abilities and he has been Indefatigable in Applying them to several usefull purposes... Few if any can Excell [*sic*] Him [if] the Warmth and fire of youth will be Temper’d by your [i.e. Franklin’s] prudent and Cordial Advice”⁶⁵

Ingeniousness was in one sense, a praiseworthy quality – Smith was “able” and “talented.” Yet the definition of ingenuity also encompasses the idea of “cleverness” and “having an aptitude for invention or construction.” As Franklin’s own personal history illustrates, a talent for self-invention was necessary to capitalize on the upward mobility offered by the eighteenth century’s prevailing patronage system. Ingeniousness could thus be used as a rough euphemism for ambition; and as Franklin was clever and ambitious, so was his new friend.⁶⁶ Later, during the Revolution, John Adams called him “artful” and expressed misgivings about his ambitious nature, and even earlier, rumors (plausibly) abounded that

Herring’s letter he said, “procured me an uncommon share of [Penn’s] confidence, and such as no indifferent person ever before enjoyed.”

⁶⁴ [Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania], *University of Pennsylvania Trustees Minutes vol. 1: 1749-1768*, 25 May 1754, UARC, 40.

⁶⁵ Richard Jackson to BF, 17 March 1754; P. Collinson to BF, 12 August 1753 and 26 January 1754 in Labaree et. al. eds., 5:242, 20, 193.

⁶⁶ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, 2d ed. (1989), s.v. “ingenious,” <http://dictionary.oed.com>, (8 January 2007).

Smith was lobbying for the creation of an American Anglican bishopric – humbly offering himself for the position.⁶⁷

Accepting the position at the Academy, was the first step on the path to advancement. By doing so, Smith placed himself at the vanguard of American education, with vast powers to influence the path of the school and thus of his own fortunes. Franklin and the trustees all had other pressing personal interests; their purview would be administrative matters, leaving the details of educational instruction to Smith and allowing him to put into practice the vision he had outlined in *Mirania*. The ability to shape gentlemanly minds would also throw him into the way of gentlemen, like Thomas Penn, who could bestow both tangible privileges upon him as well as an aura of importance, influence, and power. From a middling provincial teacher and household employee, he could become a player in trans-Atlantic aristocratic circles. Ingratiating himself to Penn proved to be especially important.

Thomas Penn was a powerful man in need of an ally. He had succeeded to the proprietorship in 1746 and had quickly devoted himself to producing a “balanced government” in his province – by greatly expanding his own power in relation to that of the Pennsylvania Assembly. He both jealously guarded his proprietary prerogatives and intensely distrusted Assembly members – “exhibit[ing] a kind of visceral suspiciousness toward them and a capacity for misunderstanding their motives so profound that it bordered on paranoia.”⁶⁸ Penn viewed their vast influence on the public affairs of his realm as an unlawful appropriation of his rights, rather than as the necessary result of his absentee

⁶⁷ Middlekauff, 44; “MILD ADVICE to a certain PARSON,” *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, No. 694 (Supplement) 25 March 1756 (Philadelphia: W. Bradford).

⁶⁸ James H. Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics, 1746-1770* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 7.

leadership, and took measures to control the body's finances.⁶⁹ The Assembly, understandably, became suspicious of Penn, taking steps to subvert his influence, and the Pennsylvania political community was wrenched into two camps emphatically opposed to one another – the Quaker (or Assembly) Party and the Proprietary Party – who engaged in a constant series of attacks and counterattacks up until the eve of the Revolution.

Many of Penn's allies were counted among the aristocratic elite – most notably, trustees William Allen and Richard Peters – but to succeed, he needed to find a way popularize his resentment of the Assembly, thereby upending its power base among the citizenry. The young, articulate William Smith – an unknown quantity in the colony but already battle-tested by his New York pamphleteering – was a tool he could use to do just that. Moreover, by endowing Smith's position in the Academy, he was not only creating a new dependent who could be called upon to propagandize for his cause, but he was also installing that debtor in the unique position to influence the hearts and minds of the province's youth. Smith could promote the Proprietary cause in the Academy, thereby ensuring the future of Penn's regime. For his part Smith must have seen in Penn two important things: a way to ingratiate himself to the Trustees – who might in gratitude for Penn's funds, give him wide discretion with the Academy – and most critically, a far more influential benefactor than he had ever had before. But for Penn, an educator ever eager to please must have also seemed like a prayer answered.

It should surprise no one that, once installed at the Academy of Philadelphia, the “ingenious” author of the *College of Mirania* would move quickly to impose a similar design upon it. By promoting his appointment and encouraging Penn's patronage, Franklin had

⁶⁹ See for example, Thomas Penn to [Pennsylvania Governor] James Hamilton, 29 July 1751, Penn Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Pennsylvania Assembly Reports of 14, 23 September 1756 in Labaree et. al. eds., 6:518; [WS], *A Brief State of the Province of Pennsylvania*, 2nd ed. (London: R. Griffiths, 1755), 19-20.

given his blessing to Smith. Scientific experiments and provincial politics were taking the older man's attention away from the Academy. Reading *Mirania*, Franklin must have selectively remembered those passages which most harmonized with his own thoughts and assured himself that those would be the hallmarks of Smith's tenure at the school.

“A PLAN of EDUCATION”

By December of 1754 Smith was proposing with fellow professor Francis Alison that the Academy should have “a Power of conferring Degrees upon such Students as [make] a suitable proficiency in Learning to merit that Distinction.” Originally, the trustees decided that Alison and Smith should simply “draw up a Clause to be added to the Charter [of the Academy] for that Purpose,” upon the subsequent Trustees meeting however, they were presented with the draft of an entirely new charter which they referred to a smaller committee for review.⁷⁰ A revised document was subsequently presented to the governor and proprietors who empowered it.⁷¹ The new charter of “the College, Academy and Charity School of Philadelphia in the Province of Pennsylvania” specified that the institution be led by a provost and vice-provost – titles not in regular use at that time in reference to education, but which was a clear mark of Smith's influence, echoing the leadership of the fictional College of Mirania, which was under “the Government of the same Head whom they call *Provost* or *Principal*.”⁷² A little over three months after Smith's initial lobby of the Trustees on 17 March 1755, their minutes record that, “[in] Pursuance of the proposed new Institution Mr. William Smith was chosen Provost and Mr. Francis Alison vice-provost and Rector” (the last designation being a remnant from Alison's previous position at the helm of the

⁷⁰ Trustees, *Minutes* vol. 1, 10 December 1754 and 14 January 1755, 45, 46.

⁷¹ Ibid., 10 June 1755, 51-53. Thomas Penn shared proprietary duties with his brother Richard.

⁷² Ibid., 53; Gegenheimer, 49; WS, *Mirania*, 14.

Academy, attempting perhaps to compensate for his demotion). Curiously, squeezed into the margins of the note is the added emphasis that both were chosen “*unanimously*” – a note in Smith’s own hand. In an ominous foreshadowing of the struggles which would soon engulf the Academy’s leadership, two months later the new charter was quickly amended when one of the trustees pointed out that under the current document Smith and Alison had accidentally been given life appointments.⁷³

With a new charter and new leadership, the College of Philadelphia quickly matured from the colonial equivalent of a public high school into a trailblazer of American higher education. In an organization reminiscent of a university (which Penn officially would become with the establishment of the Medical Department in 1765) the institution consisted of three sub-schools teaching at increasing levels of difficulty. The lowest, Charity School, provided basic instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic to both young boys and girls gratis, and though connected to the two upper levels by their shared trustees, remained essentially independent.⁷⁴ There was at first however, little distinction between the higher instruction in the Academy and the College as classes were mixed and instructors common to all. The arrangement soon caused alarm and was eventually amended because, as noted by early University historian George B. Wood, it “produc[ed] on the public mind an impression that the whole institution was calculated rather for the primary instruction than for completing the education of youth.” Concerns raised no doubt, by Provost Smith.⁷⁵ Each of

⁷³ Trustees, *Minutes vol. 1*, 17 March 1755, 48-49. I have been able to verify with reasonable certainty that it is Smith’s addition by a comparison of the handwriting with marginalia on a copy of *Some Thoughts on Education* (now in the possession of the Library Company of Philadelphia) which Smith was editing in preparation for an edition of his complete works; *Ibid.*, 13 May 1755, 50.

⁷⁴ The one tenuous connection was that in exchange for public funds, the Common Council was, for the early years of the Academy, allowed to designate one scholarship student to enter from the Charity School. *Common Council*, 31 July 1750, 529-30. The charity instruction would survive as an arm of the University well into the nineteenth century.

⁷⁵ Wood, *Early History*, 18-9, quote on 19.

the two sectors was itself divided into several schools or classrooms, each on one of several subjects, overseen by a professor and his assistants. Students were enrolled in a single school at any one time, although could be sent to sit in with other schools;⁷⁶ English and mathematical instruction occurred in the Academy (hence the term English School later applied to the Academy generally), while classics and philosophy were the bulk of instruction in the College (thus informally termed the Philosophy School).

Thus for the structure of the school at the beginning of Smith's tenure; as to the question of religion, the school was reasonably nonsectarian. There were no specific religious qualifications outlined in either the original constitutions of the Academy or in the early minutes of the institution (through 1752) – with two minor exceptions. First, there exists an oath of the faculty and trustees appended to a copy of the Penn family's 1755 endorsement of the College pledging, "I believe there is not any Transubstantiation in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or in the Elements of Bread and Wine, at or after the Consecration thereof by any Person whatsoever" – a relatively innocuous requirement given that colonial Pennsylvania's religious multiplicity was largely confined to the Protestant end of the spectrum. As a testament, among others, the signatures of Smith, Franklin (technically an Anglican, though notoriously deist), Trustee Peters (an Anglican minister), Vice-Provost Alison (a Presbyterian), and English School professor Ebenezer Kinnersley (a Baptist) all follow.⁷⁷ While a short minute from 9 June 1752 requests that Rev. Peters revise a collection of prayers he had written to be printed for the use of the young scholars, this occurred after

⁷⁶ Cheyney, 71; WS, *Account of the College, Academy, and Charitable School of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania*, in *The American Magazine*, October 1758 (Philadelphia: W. Bradford); reprint ed. Thomas R. Adams, with commentary by Thomas Woody (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Library, 1951), 17-21.

⁷⁷ Trustees, *Constitutions and Oaths*, 27, UARC. As a comment on the relative importance of this pledge, it should be noted also that this short oath (taking up barely a quarter of the page) is preceded by one several pages long which committed the trustees to the belief that George II was the true king of Great Britain and that current Stuart claimant to the throne (James, the Young Pretender) was illegitimate.

the hiring of Rev. Alison (occurring earlier that year) and there is nothing to indicate that the prayers were specifically Anglican. The College of Philadelphia was, without a doubt, established on nonsectarian basis, even if not as the “startling vision of a secular” seminary as the current administration would believe.⁷⁸

Similarly, the 12 August 1756 edition of Franklin’s *Pennsylvania Gazette* contained “A PLAN of EDUCATION, now fixed... for a three Year Trial, in the LATIN, GREEK, and PHILOSOPHY SCHOOLS, of the College and Academy of this City” – the formal unveiling of the new College’s curriculum. The course of study was deeply rooted in the classics – Livy, Horace, and Virgil were taught early on – a stark contrast to Franklin’s English School construction. However, to emphasize only the “CLASSICAL and RHETORICAL *Studies*” of the Philosophy School would give short shrift to the other two-thirds of instruction in the plan, devoted to many “practical” subjects which also appeared in Franklin’s plans – geometry, astronomy, trade and commerce, architecture, chemistry and “mechanic powers” (including “hydrostatics!”) among others.⁷⁹ The contrast between Smith’s educational design and Franklin’s was simply not black against white. Even if classical studies were, as Franklin believed, non-essential, one must admit that the College curriculum *did* encompass the both the “useful” as well as the “ornamental.” Franklin’s surviving correspondence at the time of the Plan’s unveiling is silent on his impressions of it – he barely wrote of the College at all in July, August and September of 1756 – but he allowed this compromise plan to be printed in his *own* newspaper, published moreover, under the auspices of the Board of Trustees which

⁷⁸ Trustees, *Minutes vol. 1*, 9 June 1752, 23; Office of the University [of Pennsylvania] Secretary, 250th Commencement Program: Monday, May 15, 2006 (Philadelphia, 2006), 1.

⁷⁹ [WS], “Plan of Education,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 12 August 1756 (Philadelphia: B. Franklin & D. Hall).

he chaired.⁸⁰ Thus, at least in 1756 it seems that Franklin endorsed this compromise curriculum.

Multi-tiered, non-sectarian, and traditionally focused, yet also broadly disciplined: such was the state of the College of Philadelphia when its first official class of seven graduated on 17 May 1757 – including Francis Hopkinson, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and Jacob Duché Jr., the first chaplain of Congress . By 1763, the school would grow to have almost four hundred pupils among its three divisions.⁸¹ As president of the Board of Trustees, Franklin had provided the germ and now expected Smith to nurture it. Later, after the Revolutionary War, Franklin would point to this moment, the very beginning of the College, as the moment in which Smith corrupted his original vision, turning it into something Franklin no longer believed was his creation. In spite of the old man's bitterness, he was correct. From this point forward the seminary would become recognizably Smith's College. Franklin had tried to cultivate both Thomas Penn and William Smith in order to make his dream school a reality, but under Penn's influence Smith began to mix education with politics. To establish the College Franklin had already conceded much, but this was one compromise he could not accept. The Franklin/Smith collaboration which initially seemed so promising fell apart, and men's life long enmity would begin.

⁸⁰ The only mention was a short comment on Smith's political activities in a letter to George Whitfield on 2 July (quoted in Chapter Two).

⁸¹ Wood, *Early History*, 26.

CHAPTER TWO

SMITH'S COLLEGE

Franklin took Smith under his wing and placed him in a position of great power: charging him with the responsibility to mold the hearts and minds of the next generation of Pennsylvania's leaders. The current leadership however, quickly became a more pressing concern. Questions of the legitimate balance of power between the executive and legislative branches of Pennsylvania government would overwhelm nearly all other issues of the 1750s and 1760s. William Penn's toleration evaporated upon his son Thomas' ascension to the Proprietorship. He would provoke an irreparable split in Pennsylvania politics, pitting himself against Franklin and the colonial Assembly. This quarrel was disastrous for the College because it relied on the cooperation of the two sides for its survival. Penn and his associates were the school's principal source of funding, while the sanction of Franklin and the Assembly was necessary to legitimize the College in the eyes of their constituents (who might then send their sons there). William Smith made a fateful choice between his two patrons, choosing to stake his fortunes on the success of Thomas Penn and the Proprietary side.

Smith would become Penn's surrogate in Philadelphia, tying the political posturing tightly to the College. Instead of cooperating and compromising as they had in the beginning of their relationship, Franklin and Smith targeted each other for political destruction. As the Provost simultaneously augmented his influence over the College and fought on Penn's behalf, both he and Franklin realized that the institution was a potential power base. Implicitly, Smith and Franklin came to the mutual decision that future leaders would have to

sacrifice for the interest of preserving those currently in power. The College of Philadelphia was used by both sides as a tool to injure the opposition and thereby, the men who were so instrumental in its creation allowed it to nearly become a casualty of their war. Initially, Smith was triumphant. Both the political high ground and the College would be his. By the late 1760s Franklin was humiliated and permanently stripped of any influence on the school he had founded.

A Microcosm of Pennsylvania Politics

As previously mentioned, following the ever-suspicious Thomas Penn's ascension to the proprietorship in 1746, the 1750s became a dramatic period in Pennsylvania politics. By the necessity of proximity, the Pennsylvania Assembly had long raised and dispersed local tax revenues without direction from the London-based Penn family. Thomas, desirous of increasing Proprietary control, targeted the Assembly as a personal threat and this power in particular as the keystone of its influence. Using his authority to appoint – and thereby control the actions of – Pennsylvania's governors, in 1751 he instituted a policy of directing each successive governor to veto all tax bills passed by the Assembly, unless the members provided for an executive veto of any specific expenditure Penn did not approve of. Understandably, the Assembly demurred from relinquishing powers it had exercised without outside interference for nearly fifty years. A stalemate ensued and within the decade, the directive left the Assembly bankrupt and impotent.¹ Despite its success, the policy left Penn's advisors dumbstruck, predicting "a downright Civil War in the Province [because] the Governor and his Friends would be publicly branded as Deliverers up of the People's Rights" and noting that "notwithstanding" the legality of the governor's actions,

¹ James H. Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics, 1746-1770* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 10.

Philadelphians “cou’d cut his throat for it.”² The governor at the time, James Hamilton, proceeded gingerly, attempting to follow Penn’s instructions while endeavoring to hide their existence from the public. His ruse was soon obvious and contributed not only to widespread popular anger but also to a damaging perception that all unpopular executive actions could be traced back to clandestine Proprietary machinations.³

The elected representatives initially retaliated by sending agents to Westminster – Franklin among them – carrying petitions and “remonstrances” to George III in “exasperation and outrage... over Thomas Penn’s persistent efforts to impose policies on them from England without their consent, which violated what they considered to be their rights and privileges.”⁴ Foreshadowing the divisions of the American Revolution, Pennsylvania soon divided into two camps, supporters of the proprietary interest (who believed the ruling hand over Pennsylvania should originate in England) and supporters of the Assembly (who believed the government in Pennsylvania should govern Pennsylvania). The political war also had religious overtones in the polyglot colony, with Anglicans on the Proprietary side, Quakers and their German allies with the Assembly, and Presbyterians split between the two factions.

Mismanagement by Hamilton’s successor, Gov. Robert Hunter Morris, only increased this popular rancor. Hamilton was native of the colony, a former Assemblyman and Philadelphia mayor, who up to this point had been held in high esteem as a “benevolent and upright, as well as a sensible man.” Understandably, he was perturbed by Penn’s instructions, and eventually resigned in 1754 after his work for Penn had made him “a pariah

² [Pennsylvania Attorney General] Tench Francis to Thomas Penn and Richard Hockley to Thomas Penn quoted in *Ibid.*, 12.

³ *Ibid.*, 13-4; Hutson, “Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics, 1751-1755,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 93, no.3 (July 1969): 320-1.

⁴ Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics*, 244-5.

among his own people.”⁵ Morris meanwhile, was an outsider, a New Jersey native with no ties or loyalty to the Assembly. And while Hamilton’s government dealt mostly with the economic implications of Penn’s directive, Morris took power at the eve of the French and Indian War when the much more emotional issue of Pennsylvania’s ‘homeland’ security was at stake. With the French massing on the western frontier, Morris’ unflagging attempts to subvert Assembly power enflamed an already volatile situation. Most egregiously, as General Edward Braddock prepared to face a French force along the Monongahela River in western Pennsylvania in early 1755, Morris refused to adequately supply the troops, blaming a lack of funding by a Gallic-allied Pennsylvania Assembly. It was, of course, a lie. The Assembly had voted on several measures to aid the war effort, but the misrepresentation – combined with a Braddock victory – could be used as a way of ousting Thomas Penn’s chief opponents, the ruling Quaker Party.⁶ Franklin, for his part, thought Morris’ actions those of “half a Madman” – sentiments borne out by Braddock’s subsequent, devastating defeat.⁷ Provoked by the Governor’s actions on the Proprietor’s behalf, it was at this point Franklin permanently split from Thomas Penn, a man whose favor he had sought (both personally and through William Smith) in order to get the College of Philadelphia off the ground.

Thus far, Franklin had been disgusted with the mutual political posturing of both the Proprietary Party and the Quaker (Assembly) Party, writing to his friend Peter Collinson, “I am heartily sick of our present Situation: I like neither the Governor’s Conduct nor the Assembly’s, and having some Share in the Confidence of both, I have endeavour’d to

⁵ Benjamin Franklin [hereinafter cited as BF] to James Logan, 3 April 1753 in Leonard Labaree et. al. eds. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959-), 3:283; Hutson, “Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics,” 323.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 349-50.

⁷ BF to Richard Partridge, 27 November 1755 in Labaree et. al. eds., 6:273.

reconcile ‘em, but in vain and between ‘em they make me very uneasy.”⁸ Braddock’s disaster, however, coupled with Morris’ refusal to allow passage of a new land tax, compelled him to abandon his previous position as a mediator between the two sides, and fully support the Assembly (to which he had been elected in 1751). Morris had been demanding an exemption from the tax – which was to pay for Pennsylvania’s defense against the French – for all land personally owned by Thomas Penn. This stipulation was viewed incredulously by Pennsylvanians who assumed, as proprietor, that Penn should at least contribute – if not fund entirely – a defense of the land to which they paid him quit-rents.⁹ Franklin was pre-eminent among those offended by the proposal because, according to historian James H. Hutson:

It violated his moral... convictions, specifically his belief that the fundamental duty of man to himself and to his God was to serve his fellow man. Franklin believed that this precept was especially applicable to public men, because their positions gave them singular powers to implement it. Consequently, any official, not a pacifist, who refused to help his fellow citizens in such a critical matter as protecting their property from a foreign aggressor, was guilty of conduct as closely approximating his notion of sin as any action of which he could conceive.

Thus, Franklin began to perceive Penn with the “ardor which the faithful reserve for heretics.”¹⁰ Franklin’s impression of Penn’s selfishness placed two of Pennsylvania’s most powerful men in opposition to one another, energizing the brewing legislative/executive conflict. It was into this milieu that William Smith injected himself on Penn’s behalf. The clash, though seemingly irrelevant to education, thus absorbed the College as its two principal influences found themselves in bitter opposition to one another.

⁸ BF to Peter Collinson, 26 June 1755 in *Ibid.*, 6:86.

⁹ Hutson, “Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics,” 356-8. The Assembly estimated that Penn would have paid no more than £500 in taxes, a sum he could have easily afforded.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 359-60. See also BF, *Preface to Joseph Galloway’s Speech* [1764] in Labaree et. al. eds., 11:298-9.

Smith anonymously published *A Brief State of the Province of Pennsylvania* in April of 1755. As one would expect from a Penn protégé, the pamphlet was an invective against the Assembly and its Quaker establishment, blaming their pacifism for Pennsylvania's poor defenses and arguing for the institution of oaths for elected officials – which would preclude practicing Quakers from sitting in the body.¹¹ At this point, Smith seemed to have been profiting from an alignment of interest and conscience, as his personal correspondence shows signs of real distress over the colony's lack of defenses. "'Tis far from being my desire to see any Sett [*sic*] of Men hampered by real religious Scruples," he wrote the Archbishop of Canterbury in October 1755:

But surely, if these Scruples unfit such Men for that which is the chief End of all Government (the Protection of the Governed), they ought in Conscience to resign to those who are better qualified. The Lives and properties of the People are things too sacred to be trifled with. And yet while our Government rests in the hands of the *Quakers*, they must trifle on the Subject of Defence. They will suffer no Body to share power with them, & as they themselves can take no Part of a Military Power, so they are determined never to suffer it in the Province... For my Part I shall with my whole Influence oppose such Principles which tend to subvert all Society. My Conscience, & Charity to our poor suffering back-Inhabitants, would not permit me to act otherwise.¹²

The Provost's measured eloquence here contrasts sharply with the bitterness of his pamphlet in which he drew the Quakers as "conducting political Intrigues, under the Mask of Religion," using connections in the German community to manipulate that population and priming them for alignment with the French by keeping them as ignorant as possible.¹³

Perhaps if Smith had been more deliberate with his words – as he was clearly able to do – the four decades of hostility that followed might have been avoided.

¹¹ [William Smith, hereinafter cited as WS], *A Brief State of the Province of Pennsylvania*, 2nd ed. (London: R. Griffiths, 1755), 40.

¹² WS to Archbishop of Canterbury, 22 October 1755 in Horace Wemyss Smith, *Life and Correspondence of the Rev. William Smith D.D.*, Vol. 1, (Philadelphia: S.A. George & Co., 1879); reprint (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 118-9 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

¹³ WS, *Brief State*, 26, 28-30. Smith himself would later use his own connections with German printers to publish anti-Assembly tracts in German-language newspapers.

Given his membership in the Assembly, alignment with Quaker politics, and most importantly, his conviction that Penn was intent on destroying the natural liberties of Pennsylvanians as British subjects,¹⁴ not to mention their lives and livelihoods, Franklin's angry reaction to *Brief State* is understandable. The incendiary paper, however, was originally attributed to Gov. Morris, and even when Smith was discovered to be the author, Franklin hesitated to attribute it to his proprietary-leaning friend, outside perhaps of being called upon to "touch up the Stile a little."¹⁵ He did not however, hesitate to come to the defense of the Assembly, proceeding to publish attacks on Morris as well as the Penn family. The writings alarmed Smith who wrote to Thomas Penn: "the Substance of these late inflammatory Messages I have often had of him [Franklin] as his real Sentiments but never thought they would be so unseasonably brought on the Carpet." At this point, however, Smith similarly still defended his "Bosom-friend":

I would still think he could not have deceived us and all the World so long as to carry about any Wickedness in his Intentions... In short, I must suspend my Judgment of my Friend for a little; for I cannot yet believe so ill of him as many do, and perhaps it would be wrong to drive him entirely from us by a hasty Judgment.

Nevertheless, Rev. Smith renewed his allegiance to the Proprietor:

A just Cause like Yours... set in a clear historical light, in good Language, by a Person acquainted with the Principles of Society, would be of prodigious Service to expose the Schemes [the Quaker Party has] long been carrying on. If an abler Hand cannot be found, I will attempt it at my Leisure Hours, and submit it to your Correction, if you will furnish me with Materials... I shall make no Apology for this Freedom. I hope you are well satisfied from whence it proceeds, and will always take in good Part my hasty scribble.¹⁶

Smith's offer came to fruition in May 1756 when his sequel, *A Brief View of the Conduct of Pennsylvania for the Year 1755*, was published in London and Philadelphia. *Brief View* was a

¹⁴ Hutson, "Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics," 361, 363.

¹⁵ BF to Peter Collinson, 27 August 1755 in Labaree et. al. eds., 6:170-1.

¹⁶ WS to Thomas Penn, September 1755 in Labaree et. al. eds., 6:211-214.

similar anti-Quaker diatribe, accusing them of having “corrupted the Germans,” being a “factious Cabal, effectually promoting the *French* Interest” and allowing their yearly and monthly religious meetings to “degenerate” into colonial versions of the smoke-filled political back room, where prior to elections they “fix[ed] the Choice of Assembly-men and issue[d] out... *Edicts*.”¹⁷

Once Smith was revealed behind the pen of *Brief State*, Assembly partisans swiftly retaliated, releasing an anonymous letter – supposedly written by a secret agent of the French – “revealing” Smith and fellow proprietary man, Rev. Richard Peters, as closet Jesuits intent on helping France capture control of Pennsylvania. “If the many unguarded Expressions he throws out,” the ‘agent’ wrote, “through the abundance of his Zeal for our Cause, do not discover him, I have great Reason to think that he will... deserve to be canoniz’d.” Key to this scheme was Smith’s place “at the Head of a S—m—ry of L—rn—g,” [i.e. “at the Head of a Seminary of Learning,” dashes being used in correspondence of this period to ostensibly obscure the identifying characteristics of attacked or controversial persons] which allowed him to earn the confidence of important and “unsuspecting Persons.”¹⁸

While there is no evidence Franklin himself was the author of this libel, his son William and political protégé Joseph Galloway were implicated, and after a dispute between Franklin supporters in the newly elected militia and a renegade group of potential officers sponsored by Smith, the Founder and the Provost became permanently at odds. A war of words ensued in William Bradford’s *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, with Franklin demanding the independent force give an account of their actions – including an

¹⁷ [WS], *A Brief View of the Conduct of Pennsylvania for the Year 1755*, (London: R. Griffiths, 1756), 21, 9, 21.

¹⁸ *Tit for Tat, or the Score Wip’d Off By Humphrey Scourge Esq.*, (Philadelphia, 1755) quoted in Ralph L. Ketcham, “Benjamin Franklin and William Smith: New Light on an Old Philadelphia Quarrel,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 88, no. 2 (April 1964): 146.

episode where Smith's group held a meeting inside the Academy of Philadelphia building, and proceeded to bar the door when the elected officers arrived to participate in the discussion. Wasn't, Franklin asked, such an act unwarrantedly disrespectful to "good Men who have generously taken up Arms in Defence of their Country" and who simply looked for a "consultation" with the Independents? Why did they "deserve, for so doing, to be discountenanc'd and meet with every kind of Discouragement and Obstacle that Power and Party Views can throw in their Way?" Moreover, "If the [Independents] intend[ed] Nothing but the Use of their own Liberty... [could] they not enjoy that Liberty, without endeavouring to *divide* and *break* the Force already formed under Sanction of the Law; and without soliciting the People to sign and Engagement not to *Act under the Law*; thereby restraining them in the Liberty they have of acting under the Law if they should chuse it?"¹⁹

Smith responded in the next issue by highlighting inequalities in the current law, which allowed conscientious objectors (i.e. the Quakers) an exemption from service, using that element to characterize the entire law as "an Attempt to reduce us [non-Quakers] and our Posterity to the most ignominious Bondage, by endeavouring to get one Part of the People to... bear the Burden of Defence for others who are equally concerned" and therefore of no force. Do "Englishmen have," he continued, "not a Right to meet and consult together for the better securing their Lives and Liberties in Time of Danger? ... [Is it] not unprecedented, except in the Days of *Cromwell*, to bring an armed Force to a Meeting of *Freemen*, with a Design to influence, or intimidate them in their Resolutions?"²⁰ Despite this seemingly principled beginning, however, the dispute quickly degenerated.

¹⁹ Ketcham, 146-7; *Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, No. 691, 4 March 1756 (Philadelphia: W. Bradford).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, No. 692, 11 March 1756.

Franklin's camp (most likely Galloway) quickly responded, "the old Assembly are odious to the Grantees," ²¹ summarizing much of the popular anger against the Proprietary side; and while "the Petitions for Money and a Militia Law were just and reasonable" they insisted:

The Request was increas'd to a clamorous Demand by the Proprietary Party, who imagined that the House would not or could not grant the Petitions, and hoped thence to bring them into Disgrace with the People, and get a Set of the Proprietor's Friends elected in their Places.

Then, when Franklin proposed a compromise with the formation an independent rather than state-based militia, an anonymous partisan in the *Pennsylvania Journal* wrote, the Proprietary Party "cry'd aloud, *No, no we will have no Associations.*" Moreover, the writer recounts, when the law in question was "unexpectedly obtain'd" their "next Step was to damn it, as imperfect, insufficient and impracticable; and endeavour if possible to prevent the Execution of it, that some Pretence might still remain for a Clamour against the Assembly." Assembly partisans thus painted their opposition as traitors to "their country," sarcastically highlighting that:

Those very Gentlemen who were lately for having a Law cramm'd down our Throats to lay a heavy Tax on the People for Defence of the Proprietary Estate, and exempt the Proprietor from paying any Part of that Tax, and suffered their country to be delug'd in Blood before they would advise the [Governor] to consent to the thing that was fair and reasonable; these very equitable Gentlemen now exclaim against the Militia Act as partial and unjust, tho' it leaves every Man to his Liberty.²²

In March 1756, Smith engaged in a well publicized verbal outburst with Franklin associate Daniel Roberdeau in which he *seemed* to acknowledge that the Quaker Party represented the interests of the general public and that his own political actions were fueled, not by honorable

²¹ Ketcham, 148.

²² "A TRUE STATE of the Disputes now subsisting in the Province of Pennsylvania. March 24, 1756," *Pennsylvania Journal*, No. 694 (Supplement) 25 March 1756.

personal beliefs, but rather simply by the fact that Thomas Penn supported him financially.²³

This provoked another letter in the pages of the *Journal*, targeting the Provost directly.

Professing friendship and cautioning him to “behave more prudently, and give less Occasion of Offence to the People,” the author nevertheless asked with a harsher tone:

‘Tis said, thee expects by their means to be made BISHOP of *America*, and that thee has already begun to try thy Hand at *Pastoral Letters*. Has thee considered whether this will not be too difficult a Station for thee? Whether thou canst easily learn all those Things that ought to be learned, and unlearn all those Things that ought to be unlearned, before thee canst be duly qualified for a Bishop?²⁴

Such comments by the pseudonymous “Humphry Scourge” are an early example of the rumors of bishopric ambition that dogged Smith throughout his political life. Supported by his later lobbying for a similar position in the American Episcopal Church, public knowledge of this aim made Smith a particularly attractive target in colonial Philadelphia where tolerance produced the pernicious side effect of religious paranoia. The faithful remained on constant guard of their freedoms, especially as religious designations and prejudices seeped into Assembly politics. Assembly propagandists intentionally highlighted Smith’s aspirations to make him seem that much more unworthy of the public trust both as an educator and a politician.²⁵

Scourge goes on to quote a passage from the Apostles and imagines Smith’s “venting [his] own observations [to its warnings about the proper behavior of clerics] in Soliloquy,” reading, “*Let a Bishop not be fond of making his Court for Gain*,” and responding, “Pray what else should he make it for?” To a second warning – “*Let him rather receive than do an*

²³ Thomas Harrison Montgomery, *A History of the University of Pennsylvania from its Foundation to A. D. 1770* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co, 1900), 270-1; Jason Tally Polevoy, “Education and Politics: The College, Academy, and Charitable School of Philadelphia under Provost William Smith,” (Senior Honors thesis. University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 38.

²⁴ “MILD ADVICE to a certain PARSON,” *Pennsylvania Journal*, No. 694.

²⁵ Smith’s post-Revolutionary Church activities are detailed in Chapter Three.

Injury,” Rev. Smith was imagined to declare “Who’d be Fool then? Here it is certainly some Mistake; --- for *Injury* read *Kindness*.” To some of the Biblical cautions Scourge supposes Smith replies with incredulity ironic to the newspaper’s audience: “*Let him not be engaged in the Business and Disputes of this World*. Of what World then, Mr. Apostle? If we must not be engaged in the Business of this World, what Business have we in it? These Gentlemen certainly know nothing of the World.” To other reproaches, the fictive Smith attempts to bend the fundamentals of a good Christian life more to his liking:

Let him not be given to Evil Speaking. That’s hard! However, I must vent myself then in Evil Writing... *Let him not be ambitious*. How shall I strive for the Bishoprick then? ... *Nor double-minded*. Poh! I can mind not only two Things but ten Things at once. --- *Nor double-tongued*. What, may I not say one Thing to the [Governor] another to the People? One thing to the *Calvinists* another to the *Lutherans*? Become all Things to all Men, that so I may gain some – Thing? May I not speak well of a Man to his Face and Ill behind his Back? May I not by carrying Tales set Friends at Variance with one another, to become of Use in their Quarrels? May I not preach *Peace, Unity* and *mutual Forbearance*, to show my *Goodness*, and privately stir up Mutinies and excite Insurrections to show my *Influence*?²⁶

Such an exaggerated portrayal of self-absorption, manipulation, and the failure of introspection was a not-so-subtle hint to Philadelphians that Smith and his Proprietary allies did not have their best interests in mind. That interpretation was further buttressed by another Apostolic admonition and its haughty, imagined reply:

Let him not be fond of hearing or repeating Claumny; nor use either Simulation or Dissimulation in his Conduct; nor vain and fallacious Sophism in his Discourse. --- At this Rate a Man had as good plug up his Ears, and put a Padlock on his Mouth. No SOPHISMS, truly! Why I may as well not talk at all.²⁷

Positioning Smith’s pronouncements as sophistry makes his assertions of the Quaker threat to Pennsylvanians’ liberties the twisted language of a false philosopher or false prophet,

²⁶ “MILD ADVICE to a certain PARSON,” *Pennsylvania Journal*, No. 694.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

heightening the danger posed by his assumptions. Implicitly then, the opposing Assembly position is offered as true reason.

The scathing attack also overtly shows Smith as proudly corrupt, with the Bible reading, “*Let him not be ready to answer for others,*” and Smith replying, “Well, but suppose they are not able to answer for themselves, and are willing to *pay* a Body for Answering, how can one refuse them?” As well as, “*Let him not be the Advocate of private Interest in publick Cause,*” to which he comments, “Indeed, Gentlemen, you are too nice. Who would be an Advocate in publick Causes without some regard to his private Interest?” At one point Smith interjects “Very hard all this!” expressing a blatant annoyance with Christian teachings which should be uncharacteristic of a member of the clergy and is similarly flippant upon finishing the passage. “*For all these Things are hateful to God and pleasing to the Devil,*” he reads, concluding, “Very belike; but what’s that to you? And what care I?”²⁸

The Smith character’s complete disregard for the virtuous logic of the Apostles is curiously similar to the traditional Protestant trope of the conniving and irreligious Catholic priest. With French Catholic armies threatening invasion on the Pennsylvania border, this piece not only throws suspicion on Smith for his Anglican allegiances but for Catholic ones as well, delicately reiterating the earlier accusation of closet Catholicism against Smith and his friend Rev. Peters. Thus, the Assembly partisan skillfully exploits the two religious fears most likely to unite Pennsylvanians of all persuasions.

“So I see Friend,” Scourge finally laments, “that this Admonition hath no good Effect upon thee, I shall not be discouraged, however, but send thee more from Time to Time; for we ought not to despair of the Conversion of any living Sinner.”²⁹ In his personal

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

letters of the time, Franklin made it clear that Smith's ambitions – like that of a bishopric – resulted in neglect of the College, Academy, and Charity Schools, writing to George Whitfield that the schools “go on pretty well and will do better, when Mr. Smith, who has at present the principal Care of them, shall learn to mind Party-Writing and Party Politicks less and his proper Business more; which I hope time will bring about.”³⁰

Franklin's hopes were not realized. Smith only worsened the pattern of personal attacks, accusing Franklin of “prostitut[ing]” Pennsylvania's “Military Strength” for his own “private ambition, turn[ing it] into vain parade, and divid[ing] against itself.” Now adopting the independent militia plan – made obsolete by the passage of the Militia Law – Smith wrote that though the formation of an independent militia was “consistent with... *Freedom and Independency*” it:

Interfered with the aspiring views of a certain might Politician [i.e. Franklin], who expected that every Person would fall down and Worship the GOLDEN CALF... which his hands had just set up [and] he was determined to pour his whole Fury upon the disobedient.

“Accordingly,” Smith continued, upon the publication of an independent militia plan:

[Franklin] took the Alarm, marshall'd his Host, and in due Form marched up with great Guns, and ponderous Axes, and fierce Steeds, and lighted Matches, and all the dreadful Apparatus of War, to lay Siege to – *a poor half Sheet of paper*; of which... he bound and gagged and threw... into the World, as a Malefactor; stigmatized with his own injurious Remarks before and impertinent Queries behind.³¹

A Franklin supporter (again, most likely Joseph Galloway) retorted even more vehemently, characterizing Smith's writings as “Inveterate Calumny, foul mouth'd Aspersion, shameless Falsehood, and insatiate Malice... What must we think of the Man who could be the Author of so detestable a Performance?” He continues:

³⁰ BF to George Whitfield, September 1755 in Labaree et. al. eds., 6:469.

³¹ *Pennsylvania Journal*, No. 697, 15 April 1756.

Can we possibly think him a Clergyman of the Church of *England*? a [sic] minister of the Blessed *Jesus*? Surely, no! Should we not rather conclude him to be a Frantick Incendiary? a Minister of the infernal Prince of Darkness, the *Father of LIES*? The Vomitings of this infamous Hireling against an absent Person [i.e. Franklin], one who has ever been industrious in promoting the public Weal, betoken that Redundancy of Rancour, and Rottenness of Heart, which render him the most despicable of his Species.

The partisan underscores Smith's "*Impudence*" by recalling that he had not yet been settled in Pennsylvania for more than two years and his "whole Knowledge of *America*" was little older than that. And yet, the writer asks in astonishment, this outsider dared to "put himself in Competition with one, of whose Public Spirit, and disinterested Services, we have had many Years experience" and accuse that "Gentleman, whom he has so copiously vilify'd" of "writing some of those Pieces lately published against him?" Highlighting once again the crucial difference in station between the established Franklin and upstart Smith, the readers are assured Franklin would not do such a thing moreover, "altho' tis well known that were that Gentleman inclined to descend so low as to gratify the Ambition of this paltry Scribler, by entering into a Controversy with him, the many momentous Affairs he is engaged in will not permit." Smith's villainy is ultimately summarized in his scorn of Franklin's generosity in supporting him for the provostship, "and as to his Ingratitude, I shall only mention That the Person who has show'd him the most disinterested Acts of Kindness, and was the most instrumental in promoting him to his present Station, is the Object of his Slander and Abuse."³²

By 1764, Penn had successfully broken the Assembly's finances and the legislature could stand him no longer. They charged Franklin to petition in London for Pennsylvania's conversion into a royal colony, viewing this as the only way to rid itself of the Proprietorship. Thus ironically, the birthplace of American independence was seeking stronger ties to the

³² Ibid., No. 698, 22 April 1756.

British crown just as rumblings about rights and representation began to appear throughout the Atlantic seaboard in response to the Stamp Act. One could argue however, that this political strife in fact perfectly primed Pennsylvania (and Philadelphia in particular) to take the center stage in the play for independence. After all, the arguments the Assembly was making against Thomas Penn – his arbitrary and self-interested dealings subjugating the natural rights of the colony’s citizens as Englishmen – were exactly those men like Samuel Adams were beginning to use against the British ministry, Parliament, and eventually, the King himself. All the conversion to independence required was to recognize grievances against Penn in the actions of the entire British government. Yet, the divisions of the 1750s were not directly parallel to those of the 1770s. Some Assembly men like Joseph Galloway, continued their attachment to the Crown forged in the trenches of the earlier political wars, and became ardent Loyalists alongside former Proprietary men like William Allen; while men such as Francis Hopkinson, nurtured in the Proprietary cause, became ardent Patriots alongside Quaker Party stalwarts like Doctor Franklin. The animosity between Franklin and Smith was just one of many divisions between Philadelphia’s elite in this uncertain political milieu, but unlike other friendships gone sour, their newspaper war had consequences far beyond hurt pride and spilled ink. As Franklin had noted to Whitefield, the College of Philadelphia found itself increasingly “wounded in the crossfire between executive and legislative branches” of government.³³

When the Board of Trustees of the Academy of Philadelphia was first formed in 1749, its members were taken from all points on the political spectrum, from Assemblymen Tench Francis and Isaac Norris to Rev. Richard Peters and Justice William Allen, both

³³ Elizabeth H. Lang, “Colonial Colleges and Politics: Yale, King’s College, and the College of Philadelphia: 1740 – 1764,” (Ph. D. diss. Cornell University, 1976), 232.

powerful figures on the Proprietary side. Bipartisan cooperation in multicultural and politically charged Philadelphia was essential if the fledgling school was to get off the ground (especially when it came to fund-raising), but this early necessity made the succeeding Academy especially vulnerable to the caprices of faction which eventually played out over the next four decades.

“The Schemes of Public Parties”

Benjamin Franklin and William Smith’s war jumped out of the newspapers in late spring of 1756. Smith struck the first blow. On 11 May 1756 – and without Franklin present among them – the Trustees of the College of Philadelphia ousted him as president of the board, installing Richard Peters in his place.³⁴ Franklin supporters were incensed, taking to the newspapers to accuse that Smith, “when resident at *New York*, was a strenuous Advocate for putting the College there entirely into the Hands of the Church Party, to the Exclusion of the Presbyterians, who were to contribute more than any other Denomination towards its support: And also when last in *London*, [of] endeavour[ing] by all possible Means to frustrate the Designs of the two Presbyterian clergymen who went over to procure Subscriptions for the *Jersey* College.” Like Smith’s accusations of cabal-like tendencies among the Quakers, in religiously plural Pennsylvania – where each group jealously guarded their independence from subjugation and proselytization – such accusations could not be taken lightly. Moreover, Smith’s activities with the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.), which intended to create a system of charity schools through which they could convert western Pennsylvania’s Catholic and dissenting German population, were by this

³⁴[Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania], *University of Pennsylvania Trustees Minutes vol. 1: 1749-1768*, 11 May 1756, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center [hereinafter cited as UARC], 40.

point well known.³⁵ Considering also Thomas Penn's fervent Anglicanism, any activities partial to the Church of England could be interpreted as evidence for political partisanship, as borne out by a third accusation: that in return for the Penn family's subsidies of his salary as provost, Smith was determined, "to get the College wholly into the Hands of the Proprietary Faction, that high notions of Proprietary Power may be early inculcated in the Minds of the Youth of this Province."³⁶ This was an allegation not entirely groundless; as historian Ralph L. Ketcham notes, within two years of Franklin's removal only one eighth of the Trustees could be said to be Assembly supporters, the remainder were associated with the Penn family.³⁷ Although Franklin would remain on the Board of Trustees, and later serve the young University in a similar capacity, his posts were of nominal importance and Franklin himself would never again have a controlling interest in the institution, a reality which left him embittered. As he later wrote to College professor Ebenezer Kinnersley from London:

Before I left Philadelphia, everything to be done in the Academy was privately preconcerted in a Cabal without my Knowledge or Participation and accordingly carried into Execution. The Schemes of Public Parties made it seem requisite to lessen my Influence wherever [*sic*] it could be lessened. The Trustees had reap'd the full Advantage of my Head, Hands, Heart, and Purse, in getting through the first Difficulties of the Design, and when they thought they could do without me, they laid me aside. I wish Success to the Schools nevertheless and am sorry to hear that the whole Number of Scholars does not at present exceed an hundred and forty.³⁸

The next month, however, Franklin parried.

In June of 1756, six pacifist Quaker assemblymen resigned their posts in protest of the military measures being taken on the frontier, providing the Proprietary bloc with an opportunity to lessen that group's influence in the legislature. Such hopes were thwarted

³⁵ Polevoy, 20-6 passim.

³⁶ *Pennsylvania Journal*, No. 702, 20 May 1756.

³⁷ Ketcham, 153.

³⁸ BF to Ebenezer Kinnersley, 28 July 1759 in Labaree et. al. eds., 8:415-416.

however, with the successful special election of pro-Assembly Anglicans – Richard Peters called them “partisans” and “minions” intent on doing “just as the Quakers and Mr. Franklin please.”³⁹ Franklin was jubilant at the recompense for his loss with the board of Trustees, writing that “these Changes... promise us some fair Weather, which I have long sigh’d for.” Consigned to the loss of a former friend (and just a bit politically optimistic), he acknowledged, “Smith, now known to be the Writer of the Brief State, &c. still endeavours to keep up a Flame; but is become universally odious, and almost infamous, as you will see in the Papers. He will do no longer here.”⁴⁰ Unfortunately, Smith’s political influence did not wane. The changes in the Assembly’s composition did nothing to change the make up of the College of Philadelphia’s board of Trustees and the school was beginning to suffer. Smith’s increasing notoriety on the political scene, along with the Proprietary influence and its largely Anglican undercurrent threatened to destroy the non-denominational seminary Franklin had built over the past seven years. The public began to turn against the College, protesting the school’s politics by withdrawing funding and students when it needed them most.

By July, the situation became bad enough that the Trustees felt they had to address the controversy head on. The group conducted an investigation “into the Foundation of the Several Charges lately published to the Disadvantage of Mr. Smith, as the Reputation of the Academy might be affected by them.” Meanwhile, Smith’s own protégés in the “Senior Philosophy Class,” including Francis Hopkinson and Hugh Williamson, presented the board with a letter of support for the professor against the “several unjust and malicious Insinuations... spread throughout this City by the Heat of Party.” A week later, the Trustees

³⁹ Richard Peters to Thomas Penn, 1, 3, and 26 June 1756 quoted in Ketcham, 152.

⁴⁰ BF to Peter Collinson, 15 June 1756 in Labaree et. al. eds., 6:456-457.

unanimously (without Franklin present) agreed to a resolution absolving Smith of Franklin's accusations against him – namely, that he was inculcating students with his personal ideology – asserting that “[his] conduct... as Provost... has been becoming and satisfactory to us... he has charged his Trust as a capable Professor and an honest man.” Just to be safe they also emphasized the College's own institutional safeguards against politicization. The final report was supposed to be available for public consumption in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, but the *Gazette*'s publisher (and Benjamin Franklin's principal business partner) David Hall refused to print it.⁴¹

Despite the controversy swirling around him, with the support of the Board and at least some students in hand, Reverend Smith only increased his influence over the College. In November 1756 he wrote gleefully to his superiors in the Church of England, “the Church, by soft and easy Means daily gains ground... Of Twenty-four Trustees fifteen or sixteen are regular [Anglican] Churchmen... We have Prayers twice a days, the Children learn the Church-Catechism.”⁴² Vice-Provost Francis Alison, a Presbyterian, would later write that Smith was encouraging Presbyterian youth in the College to take Anglican orders, frustrating him to the point of being “ready to resign my place in the College and retire in the country meerly thro chagrine [*sic*].” Discouraged by the conversions of Presbyterian students – “the Flower of our Youth... by the intrigues of that designing subtile [*sic*] Mortal Dr. Smith”⁴³ – Alison wrote to Ezra Stiles:

The College is artfully got into the hands of Episcopal Trustees. Young men educated here get a taste for high life and many of them do not like to bear the poverty and dependence of our ministers... they are flatterd [*sic*] and enticed by their Episcopal acquaintances and go to London for orders. Now two or three of our ablest young men are ready to sail for London for this purpose;

⁴¹ Trustees, *Minutes vol. 1*, 5 July 1756, 13 July 1756, and 10 August 1756, UARC, 70-75.

⁴² WS quoted in Ketcham, 154.

⁴³ Francis Alison to Ezra Stiles, 4 December 1766 quoted in Lang, 304.

this makes parents uneasy, and it gives me pain, as our enemys gathr [*sic*] strength by our loss.⁴⁴

The same month Smith reported he was gaining ground, Franklin wrote despairingly of the “surreptitious” Anglicization: “[Smith] and I [are] not... on speaking Terms... The Proprietary Faction alone countenance him a little; but the Academy dwindles, and will come to nothing if he is continued.”⁴⁵ Each of the twenty-four College Trustees was entitled to his post until death and one of the first changes in the Board’s composition occurred the following January upon the passing of Franklin’s close friend Lloyd Zachary. Zachary’s death enabled the appointment of Penn family lawyer (and later Pennsylvania Chief Justice) Benjamin Chew, enhancing the Board’s Penn-Anglican bloc. In subsequent years the body would increasingly lean towards the Proprietary faction. Chief Justice Allen’s two sons Andrew and John would join him on the Board, as would Smith protégés (and College graduates) Anglican minister Jacob Duché Jr. and Francis Hopkinson, Proprietary notable James Hamilton (son of Franklin’s old patron, the lawyer Andrew Hamilton), and Lynford Lardner – an Englishman who was both an apprentice to and brother-in-law of Thomas Penn.⁴⁶ In 1757 however, the appointment of Chew was especially “to the mortification of Mr. Franklin,” Richard Peters wrote Thomas Penn, and he:

Blame[d] the Trustees that they did not beforehand consult him in the Election, saying it was a piece of Justice due to him as he was the Father and principal support of the Academy, and this is true, but for all that it was not thought proper to gratify his Pride which now grows insufferable.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Francis Alison to Ezra Stiles, 30 October 1766 quoted in *Ibid.*, 303. See below for a discussion of the concurrent creation of the Presbyterian Party, resulting in part from men like Alison’s fears of Smith’s religious ambitions.

⁴⁵ Ketcham, 154; BF to Peter Collinson, 5 November 1756 in Labaree et. al. eds., 7:12.

⁴⁶ For biographies of the early Trustees see UARC, “Penn in the 18th Century: Trustees 1749-1800,” 2004, *UARC Website*, <http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/1700s/trustees.html> (22 February 2007). Much of Penn’s fortune came from his participation in the wool trade, it was to this concern which Lardner was apprenticed.

⁴⁷ Richard Peters to Thomas Penn, 14 February 1757 quoted in Ketcham, 154.

After this last insult, Franklin was sent on the Pennsylvania Assembly's mission to obtain a royal government for the colony. He was to spend the next several years in London, but the strife did not end there.

Provost Smith was arrested in early 1758 for libel against the Assembly. The representatives were attempting to oust a Chester County judge, William Moore, from his appointed position on charges of cruelty and their remonstrances to the Governor were made public in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Moore was a proprietary partisan and Smith was suspected of coming to his defense, writing a bitter response to the Assembly in the following *Gazette*, and under his supervision as a trustee of the S.P.G.'s German school scheme, he had it reprinted for use as a piece of anti-Quaker and anti-Assembly propaganda in a German-language newspaper. Unamused, the Assembly charged and convicted the pair of slander when they refused to apologize. Until the Assembly adjourned and the Supreme Court freed him three months later, Smith infamously lectured to his philosophy students inside the city jail.⁴⁸

Throughout the summer and early fall of 1758, the Assembly continued to threaten him with re-arrest, and by early December he obtained leave from his responsibilities with the College, absconding to England to apply for redress directly from the King. Ironically, the Privy Council's hearings on Smith's petition were Franklin's first as an emissary for Pennsylvania. Franklin took no pains in telling the investigators that Smith was an "old Offender," chiefly "employ'd in [the] dirty work" of "keeping up Party Heats in the Province, on which Account [despite his ordination] he had been refused the Pulpit by the

⁴⁸ Edward Potts Cheyney, *History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1740-1940*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940), 106-8; Montgomery, 322-9.

Minister, and denied a Certificate of Good Behaviour by the Vestry.”⁴⁹ Franklin’s protestations notwithstanding (and with the intercession of Thomas Penn on his behalf), the eventual verdict fell in Smith’s favor, but the declaration of the “king’s displeasure at [the Assembly] assuming to themselves powers which did not belong to them... invading [both] the royal prerogative [and] the power Parliament claimed” had no practical effect.⁵⁰

Fuelled by his exoneration, Smith published a new series of pieces under the pseudonym “Watchman,” righteously defending free speech and “the cherished rights of Englishmen” against the Assembly, and touched off yet another libelous spat with Franklin supporters (again, most likely Joseph Galloway) in the pages of the *Pennsylvania Journal*.⁵¹ The pseudonymous “Timothy Scourge” printed an “autobiography” from “A *certain Parson*” which combined three refrains – antipathy to politically ambitious clergy, fear that the school was being exploited by a faction, and apprehension that the college would ruin the province by disseminating false principles. In it, an ambitious and greedy Smith ‘admitted’ that the “greatest joy [in his] *Life*” was a “*Salary*.” He thus followed his “own interest” as the “first principle in nature... And on the altar of this comfortable deity sacrific[ed his] morals, religion and virtue,” specifically by using his “station in a S-----y of l-----g” [i.e. “Seminary of learning”] to “teach [the] infant minds” of his pupils “to believe that *Liberty* is *Licentiousness*... and in an implicit obedience to their superiours” no matter how arbitrary or exploitive the directions. Carrying out the designs of his patron Penn, he would teach the principles of Machiavelli instead of Sidney, Locke, and Cato, priming his pupils – future

⁴⁹ BF’s Notes on WS’s petition to the Privy Council quoted in Ketcham, 156.

⁵⁰ Cheyney, 108. See also Lang, 274-5 and BF to Joseph Galloway, 7 April 1759 in Labaree et. al. eds., 8:311.

⁵¹ Ketcham, 156.

leaders of the people – to destroy the Pennsylvania constitution, allowing Penn to enslave the citizenry.⁵²

The Provost responded to the vicious attacks on his character with equally vicious attacks on Franklin. In the October 1758 edition of Smith's self-edited *American Magazine* he included "An Account of the College and Academy of Philadelphia." Although he accurately included Franklin's part in the school's founding, he succeeded in attacking the source of his enemy's worldwide fame: his scientific reputation. Franklin, Smith insisted, was not "the Chief Inventor of the Electrical apparatus" but had collaborated on his electricity projects with a friend, College English professor Ebenezer Kinnersley. Smith attributed the bulk of the innovation to Kinnersley, asserting that Franklin "ha[d] not been careful enough to distinguish between their particular discoveries" and essentially stole Kinnersley's ideas.⁵³ For his part, Kinnersley quickly refuted the claim against the "ingenious and worthy Mr. Franklin," and David Hall printed the teacher's public repudiation on the front page of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.⁵⁴

Libels in London

After this incident Franklin apparently decided that the death of his treasured institution would be an acceptable casualty to their mutual enmity. By killing the College of Philadelphia, Franklin would then disgrace Smith and deprive him of at least some influence in Pennsylvania politics. Thus, from London, Franklin lobbied for the preservation of an

⁵² *Pennsylvania Journal*, No. 696, 6 April 1758. "Timothy Scourge" claimed to be a relative of "Humphrey Scourge," who received the "autobiography" in a letter from "A certain Parson" explaining why he could not reform but had to dedicate body and soul to the "court party."

⁵³ WS, *Account of the College, Academy, and Charitable School of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania*, in *The American Magazine*, October 1758 (Philadelphia: W. Bradford); reprint ed. Thomas R. Adams, with commentary by Thomas Woody (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Library, 1951), 32.

⁵⁴ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 30 November 1758 (Philadelphia: B. Franklin & D. Hall) quoted in Ketcham, 158; Lang, 270n.

Assembly bill which would have prevented the College from conducting a lottery for its support (although he had approved of such tactics in the early days of the school).⁵⁵

Although many Philadelphians objected to lottery fundraisers on moral grounds (that they robbed unsuspecting people of their money), his son William wrote that Franklin's opposition was intended specifically "to prevent the ill Effects to the Province that [were] likely to proceed from the present management of the College."⁵⁶ The Assembly passed a ban, but this approach failed on appeal to the King, who invalidated the law. Thus, when Provost Smith himself returned to England in 1762 to raise money for the College, Franklin continued his endeavor to foil every attempt.

Initially, Franklin seemed keen to help Smith, agreeing to create a possible donor list for the College despite having not spoken to the Provost since 1757. When the pair met for the last time at the London home of a mutual friend they were icily civil. Smith noted that "He [Franklin] & I were not in the best Terms, nor the worst... he could not expect that I could say any Thing in his favor." In perhaps an unconscious indication of how he perceived his role in the College in comparison to Franklin's, Smith's letter to Richard Peters strangely refers to Franklin as if he were a potential donor rather than someone intimately connected to the history of the institution. "You will wait," Smith tells Peters:

To see what Part he takes in *our* Academy. If disposed to *befriend* it, you will not refuse his Aid; tho I think you should have more than one or two Marks of his Regard for it; before you admit him to *take* any Lead among you. Your Constitution I hope will be adhered to... Let no Disrespect be shew[n] to the Church, where we have so many warm Friends here [emphasis mine].

This is the most overt acknowledgment by Smith of his success at subverting Franklin's original vision. He himself recognized this, apologizing to Peters at the end of the letter for

⁵⁵ Lang, 279; Melvin Buxbaum, "Benjamin Franklin and William Smith: Their School and Their Dispute," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 39, no. 4 (December 1970): 375.

⁵⁶ William Franklin to Joseph Galloway [?] quoted in Buxbaum, 376.

“the Freedom of it & the Incorrectness” imploring him to keep its contents to himself.⁵⁷ As Franklin traveled the countryside and prepared himself for a return to Pennsylvania, however, he was offered an honorary doctorate of laws by Oxford University where he learned that Smith had been lobbying against such an honorarium as far back as their mutual appearance in front of the Privy Council in 1759. He also discovered that Smith was using the Franklin name as a fundraising tool, something the latter had not given him permission to do.⁵⁸ This was the last straw. He was livid and his tepid support evaporated.

If Smith was determined to make an enemy of him, rebuking his olive branch of assistance and identifying the College principally with himself and with Franklin only when it suited his purposes, then Franklin would accept this, but not without bitterness. As Melvin Buxbaum has summarized, “convinced that the Academy was lost anyway because of neglect, Franklin was willing to sacrifice what remained of it in order to make certain that the College would not prosper.”⁵⁹ Franklin sullied Smith’s credit in London and sabotaged his efforts to raise money by refusing to write necessary letters of introduction to the many British educators who could possibly donate to the College. Those Smith did manage to meet at Oxford he found “very adverse” to contributing anything to the College.⁶⁰ The Provost noted Franklin’s “Virulence” in another missive to Richard Peters:

Dr. Franklin took uncommon Pains to misrepresent our Academy before he went away to sundry of... People; saying it was a narrow bigotted [*sic*] Institution, got into the Hands of the Proprietary Party as an Engine of Government... with many Things grievously reflecting on the principal Persons concerned in it; that the Country & Province would readily support it if it was not for these Things; that we have no Occasion to beg; & that my

⁵⁷ WS to Richard Peters, 14 August 1762 quoted in Albert Frank Gegenheimer, *William Smith: Educator and Churchman: 1727-1803* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1943), 151.

⁵⁸ James H. Hutson, “Benjamin Franklin and William Smith: More Light on an Old Philadelphia Quarrel,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 93, no. 1 (January 1969): 110; Ketcham, 159.

⁵⁹ Buxbaum, 377-8, 379. On the fate of the Academy and Franklin’s impressions of it, see chapter 3.

⁶⁰ H.W. Smith, 336.

Zeal proceeds from a fear of its sinking & and losing my Livelyhood [*sic*]...
the old Rancor is still brooding at the Heart of this Man.⁶¹

When Franklin *did* encourage his wealthy British friends to contribute to the Philadelphia institution – one must remember he was at this time still officially a Trustee – he pushed the needs of the Academy (the surviving remnant of Franklin’s original English School) by persuading them to endow prizes for talent in the English language.⁶² Moreover, Franklin himself gave nothing out of his own fortune, nor did he continue to exert his considerable influence in the Assembly to grant money to the school, as he had done for the Pennsylvania Hospital a decade previous. And as he drafted his will, Franklin offered to donate his many scientific tools to Yale, rather than the College, nor did he set aside any money for the Philadelphia institution, not even the Academy and Charity Schools to which he had shown partiality.⁶³ This attempt to “starve out” his political opposition however, only served to increase the volume of Smith’s slanders and the Provost’s next retaliation was the harshest yet.

It was a poorly kept secret among Philadelphia’s elite that William Franklin, Benjamin’s only son, was illegitimate. Thus far however, the ingenuity of both father and son had made the fact irrelevant to the rise of either within the privileged social circles of England and British North America; so irrelevant in fact, that at the same time the Provost was soliciting influential Britons for funds, the *London Chronicle* announced William’s appointment as royal governor of New Jersey. It was an unparalleled triumph for the Franklin family – in two generations Franklins went from common, uneducated tallow chandlers and

⁶¹ WS to Richard Peters, 14 September 1762 quoted in Gegenheimer, 151-2. See also Hutson, “More Light,” 111.

⁶² Gegenheimer, 155.

⁶³ WS to Richard Peters, undated letter received 2 October 1762, quoted in Gegenheimer, 153-4; Lang, 283, H.W. Smith, 335; Buxbaum, 375.

soap makers to genteel and powerful personal appointees of the King. Upon hearing the news, Rev. Smith, in an act devoid of all Christian charity, informed Thomas Penn of the “irregularity” in the younger Franklin’s maternity and the two conspired to sabotage the appointment “on the grounds that the people of New Jersey would refuse to be governed by the illegitimate son of a printer from a neighboring province.” Penn – who hated Franklin with venom equal to the Provost’s⁶⁴ – and Smith did eventually succeed in releasing the information, but not until after Franklin took the oath of office. As James H. Hutson notes however, for the newly married William, the news nevertheless must have been extremely distressing (following this episode, William Franklin wrote of “*my good friend* Parson Smith” in painfully sarcastic italics).⁶⁵ The elder Franklin later wrote to British printer William Strahan that Smith was “as usual, just [the] Reverse” of a “sensible, worthy, friendly Man” and that he was “done with him: For I believe no body here will prevail with me to give him another Meeting.”⁶⁶ And he wrote to another friend Mary Stevenson, not without a touch of sadness:

I made that Man my Enemy by doing him too much Kindness. Tis the honestest Way of acquiring an Enemy. And since ’tis convenient to have at least one Enemy, who by his Readiness to revile one on all Occasions may make one careful of one’s Conduct, I shall keep him an Enemy for that purpose; and shall observe your good Mother’s Advice, never again to receive him as a Friend.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ For example, Penn wrote of Franklin: “I should be very Glad he inhabited any other Country, as I believe him of a very uneasy Spirit.” Thomas Penn to Richard Peters, 9 June 1748, quoted in Robert Middlekauff, *Benjamin Franklin and His Enemies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 39.

⁶⁵ Hutson, “More Light,” 109n, 112, 113. Much of the information in this section regarding William Franklin is taken from Hutson’s article. William’s appointment was announced by the Chronicle in its issue of 24-26 August 1762, but he was not confirmed until the second week of September, and the news of William’s bastardy did not reach the London papers until the end of that month. William had married Elizabeth Downes on 4 September 1762.

⁶⁶ BF to William Strahan, 2 June 1763 in Labaree et. al. eds., 10:271.

⁶⁷ BF to Mary Stevenson, 25 March 1763 in *Ibid.*, 231.

While drawing the (relatively) innocent William into their feud was Provost Smith's primary coup during this period, he also tried to spread rumors that the elder Franklin's political support in Pennsylvania had dwindled to insignificance.⁶⁸

Smith spent two years in England raising funds for the College, an effort eventually conjoined to that of the College of New York, which had sent James Jay on a similar endeavor. The royal brief or permit issued to the men – through the influence of the Archbishop of Canterbury – authorized them to collect door-to-door throughout the kingdom, as Smith did when he privately solicited funds from Franklin's associates and noble friends of the Penn family. More lucratively, however, the brief also requested collections be taken up on their behalf by all Anglican parishes in the kingdom, a number reaching into the thousands. The plight of the American colleges would be “a charity of the week” with the local priest – or even the Provost himself, who embarked on a series of sermons to augment his takings – preaching on their behalf followed by a collection.⁶⁹ Smith and Jay thus managed to raise funds not simply from the elite, but also from a wide swath of the lower and middle class English public attending their local Sunday services. Joining the money raised by these efforts with a £500 gift from the Penn family and a £200 gift from the King, Smith

⁶⁸ Lang, 281, 284. See BF to Richard Jackson, 2 and 6 December 1762 and BF to William Strahan, 7 December 1762 in Labaree et. al. eds, 10:160, 162, 166.

⁶⁹ Polevoy, 55. See also WS, Account of fundraising activities: 1 November 1762 – 19 December 1762, WS Papers, UARC. Smith records that on 3 December he was “employed... at Oxford with great Labor. Raised at last £156 as [wished?] but found St. John's & Baliol, where Dr. F's Friends were, very averse.” The same notebook contains some idea of the class of people Smith was soliciting from, overwhelmingly dominated as it is by references to influential Anglican clergymen. Occasionally however, the diary contains references to widows, physicians, and other more bourgeois donors. Limited in temporal scope, the record does not encompass time spent soliciting in London, and thus does not contain information on Smith's likely takings from the aristocracy he would have encountered in Thomas Penn's circle. Significantly, nonetheless, it does contain Smith's transcription of a letter of introduction dated 20 November 1762 from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham asking him “to recommend and assist” Smith and James Jay “in Consequence of the Licence and Encouragement lately given them by his Majesty... making Use of my Name to Vice-Chancellor, if it be needful & wherever else you conceive it may do Service... because I well know Your Readiness to countenance every good Design.”

returned to Philadelphia with nearly £7,000, a considerable sum for the time.⁷⁰ Although the Provost's biographer Albert Gegenheimer characterizes the fundraising trip as a success, University historian Edward Cheyney takes a more measured stance. "It may be doubted whether in the long run it was a benefit to the College," Cheyney writes, continuing:

It bound more firmly the bonds that connected the College with the Proprietors and therefore with the Proprietary Party in Pennsylvania; it drew closer to England and so weakened it for the day when loyalty to the Crown was to become disloyalty to the new state and nation. Franklin is said to have expressed the opinion that the College could have secured sufficient support in Pennsylvania if it had not been so subservient to the Proprietors.

Moreover, it seems that the money was poorly managed, being immediately spent rather than invested to bear interest for the long-term, making the years after Smith's return "no less years of scarcity than those that preceded them." Smith may have returned in triumph, but accusations of alliance with Great Britain and financial mismanagement first aired in 1764 would later haunt both the College and Smith.⁷¹

Partisanship in Pennsylvania

Upon his return from the English fundraising trip, Smith continued his political activities in the Pennsylvania election of 1764, combating the Quaker push towards royal government, and in essence, trying to save his own job. Smith was by this time even more deeply embedded in the Proprietary cause, indebted to Thomas Penn for his influence in the libel case and financial patronage of the struggling school, as well as his own prosperity, both having had his salary as provost greatly increased and having been granted land under the

⁷⁰ Gegenheimer, 72-3; Cheyney, 63-6; WS to R. Peters, 5 April 1762 and WS to Rebecca Smith, 17 April 1764, WS Papers, UARC.

⁷¹ Cheyney, 66-7. See chapter 3 for the fate of the College during the American Revolution.

discretion of Penn.⁷² But the relationship was not simply one sided; after spending two years reaffirming the College's ties to Anglicanism, as well as several months in jail in defense of the Proprietary cause, Smith had earned Penn's trust. "I am very sensible of your regard for us, and for the rights of Government," the Proprietor wrote the Provost in 1765. With warmth he continued, referring to the Assembly petition for royal government, "You have acted with great spirit in opposition to the republican measures of the faction... Your pen has been of great use and we thank you in particular for your zeal in the petition and giving us timely intelligence... I am much pleased to find in a time of so much contention you have attended closely to the duties which I hope will always have a chief place in your mind."⁷³ Smith's ability to clearly articulate Penn's position and successfully discredit the opposition led the Proprietor to rely on him, just as Smith relied on Penn. Thus, as to be expected, the partisanship between Smith and Penn's highest profile enemy – Franklin – continued with both men back in the country of its birth. While the focus of this phase of their dispute was the establishment of royal government, the sons of the College would be intimately involved in the controversy.

The year 1764 saw the publication of Franklin's *Cool Thoughts on the Present Situation of our Public Affairs*, an endeavor to convince Pennsylvanians of the superiority of royal government, insisting that "it does not appear... that this *Change of Government* can possibly hurt" Pennsylvanians, adding ironically that "the Expression *Change of Government*, seems indeed, to be too extensive:

It is rather only a Change of Governor, that is, instead of self-interested Proprietaries, a gracious King! His Majesty who has no Views but for the Good of the People will thenceforth appoint the Governor, who, unshackled

⁷² Polevoy, 71.

⁷³ Thomas Penn to WS, 15 February 1765, WS Papers, UARC. See also Penn's emotive concern for Smith's health in Thomas Penn to WS, 22 December 1763, Ibid.

by Proprietary Instructions, will be at Liberty to join with the Assembly in enacting wholesome Laws.”⁷⁴

This pamphlet was quickly followed by two highly antagonistic tracts from Hugh Williamson – class of 1757, protégé of Smith, and a professor in the College – accusing Franklin of “meanly *beging* [*sic*] and some Times *buying* Honorary Degrees... receiving *enormous Sums* from the Province for services He never performed” and not only fathering illegitimate children (alluding to his son William) by his maidservant Barbara but also treating her as a “slave,” starving her to death, and burying the body “Without a Pall, the Covering due to her *Dignity*, Without a *Groan*, a *Sigh* or a *Tear*.”⁷⁵ Moreover, after the Proprietary side succeeded in blocking Franklin’s seventh consecutive re-election to the Assembly, some faculty and Trustees began to protest publicly Franklin’s re-appointment to his other post as Pennsylvania’s agent in England.⁷⁶

Given the sentiments expressed in *Cool Thoughts*, Presbyterians of influence in Philadelphia – even those not formally aligned with the Proprietary faction, such as Vice-Provost Francis Alison and Professor John Ewing – were beginning to fear Franklin’s appointment would “rashly” usher in a royal government under which their “privileges... may be greatly *abridged*, but will never be *enlarged*” considering that the king would be an equally absentee ruler and who, as the monarch, would be more immune to potential challenges to his powers under the colonial charter. A letter released among the Presbyterian elite in early 1764 also vaguely suggested that Franklin sought a change in government to

⁷⁴ [BF], *Cool Thoughts on the Present Situation of our Public Affairs*, (Philadelphia: A. Steuart, 1764), 19.

⁷⁵ [Hugh Williamson], *What is Sauce for a Goose is also Sauce for a Gander, or Tit for Tat* [An Epitaph On a certain great Man], (Philadelphia, 1764), 3, 5, 6; see also idem, *The Plain Dealer* [Nos. 1, 2, and 3], (Philadelphia, 1764).

⁷⁶ Apparently, Pennsylvania voters had no qualms repeatedly voting in a man who was resident in London during this period.

further his own political ambition to attain the governorship.⁷⁷ The Proprietary side cultivated these misgivings and a paper of protest was subsequently produced, most likely by the hand of Provost Smith. It was submitted but not received or officially read by the Assembly, and its creators eventually published it publicly. In a signed response published two days before he sailed yet again for England,⁷⁸ Franklin pointed a finger at Smith for circulating false reports about him:

His long Success in maiming or murdering all Reputations that stand in his Way, which as been the dear Delight and constant employment of his Life, may likewise have given him some just ground for Confidence that he as, as they call it, done for me, among the rest.⁷⁹

Smith rejoined:

Our ambitious and time-serving remarker [i.e. Franklin, who was by then residing in London] in America delight[s] in contention, anarchy and opposition to government. And then, when he has created an embassy for himself, and gets to the other side of the Atlantic, he shifts with the scene; puts off the noisy demagogue, forgets the cause of his employers, truckles for preferment for himself and his family, [a reference to Franklin's work to get his son William a royal appointment in New Jersey] and boasts of services he never performed.⁸⁰

Franklin was not wholly without supporters in the College however. Isaac Hunt, a fresh graduate of the school, jumped to his defense in *A Letter from a Gentleman in Transylvania*, attacking proprietary government, and *A Humble Attempt at Scurrility: In Imitation of Those Great Masters of the Art, the Rev. S--th, the Rev. Dr. Al---n, and the Rev. Mr. Ew-n-*, [i.e. “the Rev. Smith, the Rev. Dr. Alison, and Rev. Mr. Ewing”] a scathing attack on the men and the institution which had educated him, in 1764 and 1765. Angrily, the Trustees responded to

⁷⁷ Francis Alison, John Ewing, and Gilbert Tennent, Circular Letter, 30 March 1764 quoted in Montgomery, 439.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 440-1.

⁷⁹ BF, *Remarks on a Late Protest Against the Appointment of Mr. Franklin an Agent for this Province*, (Philadelphia, 1764), 2.

⁸⁰ [WS], *An Answer to Mr. Franklin's Remarks on a Late Protest*, (Philadelphia: W. Bradford, 1764), 17.

Hunt's pamphlets by refusing his application for (what was at that time) the semi-honorary M.A. degree in 1766, considering him "unworthy of future honors from a seminary that he had maligned in writings 'unworthy of a good man or Person of Education.'"⁸¹

Once again, however, the Quaker Party was losing its fight to overthrow the Penn family, and in 1765 the situation got worse. Franklin and his allies "presupposed a symbiotic relationship" between events in Philadelphia and London – for their plan of royal government to succeed they "believed that they had to shape Pennsylvania politics to please the British ministry." They had to prove that Pennsylvanians would be docile and that their opposition to absentee government was specific to the policies of Thomas Penn and not to British rule in general. And there was no better evidence than unequivocal obedience to ministerial policy.⁸² In Franklin's words, it was hoped "it might by Government be thought as good Policy to show Favour where there has been Obedience as Resentment where there has been the Reverse."⁸³ The Stamp Act "played havoc" with these "politics of ingratiation."⁸⁴

Quaker Party leaders like Franklin and Joseph Galloway privately agreed with the mass public opinion which asserted that the paper tax amounted to a tax on knowledge, but quietly confined their comments to anonymous newspaper essays and continued to please the British by working against the increasing threat of nullification by force. Meanwhile, the Proprietary Party took the opportunity to roil the mobs, highlighting the act as a display of authority more "fatal to Pennsylvania's liberties" than anything that Thomas Penn could

⁸¹ Polevoy, 70-2; Cheyney, 113-4. Well into the nineteenth century, the M.A. degree was summarily granted to any graduate of three years standing, provided they applied to the Trustees for the honor.

⁸² Hutson, *Politics*, 192-3.

⁸³ BF to Joseph Galloway, 13 June 1767 in Labaree et. al. eds., 14:182.

⁸⁴ Hutson, *Politics*, 192, 194.

dream up.⁸⁵ “Fatal” is in fact, a more appropriate word to describe the vise in which Franklin’s party now found itself; the politicians who had railed against excessive and arbitrary Proprietary powers were now forced to defend such actions by their proffered alternative leader, the King. Stirred (albeit covertly) by the Proprietary side, the mobs vilified Franklin – who had anticipated no appreciable opposition to the measure – as an author of the Stamp Act, betraying the people he was elected to serve.⁸⁶ For a short time however, under Galloway’s leadership, Quaker allies among the laboring classes (especially organized ship carpenters) miraculously succeeded in quelling outright chaos and even managed to protect the local stamp distributor from the attacks which were so common in other colonies. Franklin had succeeded in pleasing Westminster, but Provost Smith and his cohorts were not to be disappointed.⁸⁷

Thomas Penn’s nephew John, then serving as the colony’s governor, had fled Philadelphia at the height of the crisis, but when peace was restored, it was he who took credit for it; Britain’s minister in charge of America even wrote to him with thanks for “the wise and prudent, as well as dutiful Behaviour, which the Province of Pennsylvania has held amidst the too prevailing Distraction. This Behaviour of your Province reflects on your Administration.”⁸⁸ The Stamp Act had effectively reversed the roles of the province’s parties. The old distinctions of the Quaker Party as anti-Executive prerogative, pro-Legislature guardians of the public interest and the Proprietary Party as the “court” faction evaporated. Incredibly, now, on the very eve of the American Revolution, all of Pennsylvania’s politicians – including both Franklin *and* Smith – could agree on one thing:

⁸⁵ Ibid., 192.

⁸⁶ See Deborah Franklin to BF, October 1765 in Labaree et. al. eds., 12:301.

⁸⁷ Hutson, *Politics*, 197-9.

⁸⁸ [Secretary of State for America] Henry Conway to John Penn, 31 March 1766 quoted in Ibid., 199.

they wanted to be friends of the King. This would change of course, and understanding the political aftereffects of the Stamp Act is critical to deciphering the final fortunes of both men.

In the glow of the stability engineered by Galloway, the Quaker Party emerged from the 1765 Assembly elections victorious. Buoyed by the supposed endorsement, Franklin returned to England shortly after and presented the Privy Council with his party's petition for Crown government. "There is scarce a Man of Weight in or out of the Ministry that has not now a favorable Opinion of the Proposed Change of Government," he wrote home confidently.⁸⁹ The petition was promptly dismissed.

Never quite the politician as he was a diplomat, Franklin did not understand that displeasure with Thomas Penn's management within high British circles did not automatically translate into a desire to take on more administrative responsibility themselves. Pennsylvania was, for all intents and purposes, a British colony, with British subjects subject to British laws (such as the Stamp Act) the Ministry would have added little tangible power (and more logistical headaches) to the Crown by stripping Thomas Penn of his influence over it. Moreover, in the end, Penn himself was a subject of the King anyway. Discredited by the rejection, the Quaker Party was in shambles, and like vultures, Smith and his allies descended on the wreckage, making overtures to Presbyterian and German allies of the Assembly. This tentative realignment collapsed however, when William Smith's notorious ambition got in the way.

As the threat of French and Indian encroachment finally subsided in the late 1760s, Britain allowed itself a measure of confidence in the security of the American colonies and Smith's old dream of an American bishopric increasingly appeared to be a reality. Presbyterians and other religious dissenters were understandably perturbed at the prospect.

⁸⁹ BF to John Ross, 11 April 1767 quoted in *Ibid.*, 218.

“Doctor Smith has said something in religious Polliticks that has greatly Iretated the Prisbetearean Clerge [sic],” Franklin learned from a friend in June 1766, “the Synod at New York have nominated some wits of the laiety to handle him it relats [sic] to the having of an American Bishop of which Smith has great Hopes of the Appointment.”⁹⁰ A few months later Presbyterian Samuel Purviance wrote to Ezra Stiles that Smith and the Anglicans “rejoyce[d] at the Quarrel between us and the Quakers and no doubt expect that in the midst of our Contests theyle one day or other get the upper hand of us both.” Purviance contended that Smith had double crossed the Presbyterians – like Vice-Provost Francis Allison and proprietary officeholder William Allen – by approaching William Franklin and proposing that “the Churchmen should no longer oppose his Father in the Scheme of changing the Government” if “the Quakers could be engaged not to oppose their Views of a Bishop.”⁹¹ Men like Purviance were so alarmed at the prospect of an American bishop because Westminster was concurrently working to tighten its grip on the colonies. Though the Ministry eventually capitulated on the Stamp Act, it subsequently came down even harder on the colonials with the Declaratory Act which enforced the supremacy of Crown policies on Americans – a threat to their locally protected civil liberties. Presbyterians, as James Hutson describes, saw the potential for “a government with such unlimited power [to] imperil their religious liberties as well by riveting an Anglican establishment upon them.”⁹² The first step of which would be the installment of a bishop. Thus, even the rumor of Smith’s wishful thinking was potent enough to provoke the Presbyterians into the creation of their own political party.

⁹⁰ John Reed to BF, 17 June 1766 in Labaree et. al. eds., 13:320.

⁹¹ Samuel Purviance to Ezra Stiles, 1 November 1766 quoted in Hutson, *Politics*, 209.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 211.

The Presbyterian or Whig Party – the latter term a more accurate description of the group, which, like the Quaker (Assembly) Party before it, was in fact, multi-denominational – quickly became the political alternative for Pennsylvanians dissatisfied with the absence of local opposition to arbitrary Crown actions. The Party first gained steam in 1768 when they spearheaded the Colonies’ non-importation response to the Townshend Acts, their leader John Dickinson becoming famous for his pamphlet *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania* which urged nullification. Initially, Joseph Galloway and the Quakers were able to quell the radical thunder in Pennsylvania, persuading local merchants that “non-importation was a New England trick, designed to destroy Philadelphia’s competitive commercial advantage.”⁹³ Success did not last long.

Lord Hillsborough, the newly appointed lead minister on America, responded to the Townshend Act resistance in other colonies by issuing a directive to all colonial governors, asking them to dissolve uncooperative assemblies and ordering the assemblies to disregard communications from Massachusetts (whose assembly was then attempting to coordinate inter-colonial resistance). All too familiar with the threat of arbitrary external control, the Pennsylvania Assembly exploded. Coupled with the failure to obtain royal government, Hillsborough’s circular letter further discredited Franklin and his assurances that the King took Pennsylvanians’ liberties to heart, favoring them for their relative obedience thus far. Demoralized, Quaker Party resistance to Crown policies dissolved and they lost key support among Philadelphia’s laboring people and tradesmen. Weakened and without a legitimate opposition policy, the remnant of the Quaker Party entered into a “tacit alliance” with their old Proprietary foes. And as a result, “by the eve of the Revolution they were often functionally indistinguishable.” Along with the votes of the working class – whom they

⁹³ Ibid., 222.

“assiduously cultivated [using] appeals to their vanity and self-interest” – power shifted to the party which had been the figurehead of resistance to British tyranny: the Presbyterians.⁹⁴

As his party crumbled around him, Benjamin Franklin sat in London smarting from the rejection of the petition he had fervently believed would pass. He was humiliated both at home and in England. Former friends like Galloway turned icy, believing he had intentionally deceived them. The British powerbrokers he mixed with vented their frustration with Americans’ rebellious behavior at him as the official representative of several colonial assemblies. Rebuffs from men like Lord Hillsborough especially hurt Franklin, who up until this point viewed himself first and foremost as a Briton. Distrusted by, and alienated from, those he admired and relied on, this was his life’s lowest point. And it was at this point – triggered by his wounded pride – that Franklin made the ideological step that was to determine the course of the rest of his life and legacy, the course of American history, and important for this story, the rest of William Smith’s life as well: he became an American patriot.

Displaying an uncharacteristic political prudence, Franklin adopted the cause of independence as his own, abandoned the sinking Quaker Party ship and aligned himself with the Presbyterians. The young party jumped at the legitimacy (especially in the eyes of the crucial cohort of artisans) that Franklin’s fame would bring them and welcomed him wholeheartedly into their fold. With their support, Franklin’s star would ascend as quickly as it had fallen, raising him to greater heights.⁹⁵ Meanwhile, that of his old adversary had descended just as quickly. Smith had staked his political and real fortunes on a flourishing

⁹⁴Ibid., 239, 215, 241. To illustrate, Hutson quotes contemporary diarist Christopher Marshall remarking during the Assembly election of 1776 that “Quakers, Papists, Church, Allen family, with all the Proprietary Party, were never seemingly so happily united as at this election” Ibid., 240.

⁹⁵ Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 105-151 passim.

Proprietary Party and as it died around him so did his political fortification. He still controlled the College, but without the influence of Proprietary leaders like Trustee William Allen (who took the opportunity to retire from public life) that position was at risk. As Thomas Penn's mouthpiece Smith had simply made too many enemies to survive alone. His chief enemy of course, had a particular axe to grind on the subject of the College. As Franklin's luck revived, he recognized the opportunity to exact revenge and constructed the foundations of William Smith's present insignificance.

CHAPTER THREE

FRANKLIN'S UNIVERSITY

Through the 1750s and 1760s, the College of Philadelphia sat at the intersection of Pennsylvania's political crosscurrents. Early American schools like the College of Philadelphia were viewed as *public* organizations, formed to "serve the province and strengthen its citizens' bonds of unity" by providing able community leaders.¹ However illusory the classic English vision of utopian concord under disinterested benevolence of liberally-educated 'gentlemen,' this idea held tremendous power for the maturing Revolutionary generation; it offered a basis for the republican critique of monarchical, aristocratic authority.² Well-educated American leaders – men like John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Franklin himself – were proof that the nobility was not the sole purveyor of good governance. The long-term credibility of these leaders' calls for colonial self-government, however, relied on the constant cultivation of such home-grown gentlemen – something achievable through a proper education. Thus, more than at any other time in American history, higher education was a political entity. For Pennsylvanians, the election of 1770 made this dynamic manifest. The realignment of political control in the provincial Assembly after the Stamp Act Crisis prepared the province for the coming upheaval of the American Revolution; and in so doing, spurred parallel alterations in the fabric of the College of Philadelphia. Before 1770, William Smith had solidified his control over the College with the curriculum privileged his political viewpoints. Cut off from any further influence,

¹ Elizabeth H. Lang, "Colonial Colleges and Politics: Yale, King's College, and the College of Philadelphia: 1740 – 1764," (Ph. D. diss. Cornell University, 1976), 13.

² Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992; Vintage Books, 1993), 195-203 *passim*.

Benjamin Franklin could only look upon the institution with horror. After 1770, however, the fortunes of the school and its two power brokers would permanently change.

Smith's Dance with Independence

After 1770, the disintegration of the Quaker Party led to the fragmentation of its Proprietary symbiot. Without an enemy to rally against, the parties concurrently collapsed into loose collections of officials interested more in self-preservation than ideology. A political calm settled over Pennsylvania in the early 1770s as the principals of the 1760s aged, mellowed, and disappeared. Thomas Penn and Richard Peters were dead by the middle of the decade while Quaker leaders resigned themselves to peripheral influence, rubber-stamping prevailing anti-monarchical attitudes.³ The political vacuum allowed the new Presbyterian Party to grow unfettered. With the politically resuscitated Benjamin Franklin at its head, Pennsylvania was led into increasingly radical republican waters, reaching its apex with the fanatically democratic Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776.

Franklin's experiences during this era are famous; Smith's encounter with the Revolution is, however, less well known. Although through the 1760s he had become a symbol of the Proprietary Party's opposition to Royal government, the faction was fading into oblivion. He no longer enjoyed its protection and his ties to the London-based Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.), led many to conclude that he was a Loyalist. It was a dangerous classification. Smith ran the S.P.G.'s effort to convert the Pennsylvania Germans at a time when mounting American hostility toward "the old country" after the Stamp Act crisis often targeted parsons and schoolteachers like Smith. "Once

³ Jason Tally Polevoy, "Education and Politics: The College, Academy, and Charitable School of Philadelphia under Provost William Smith," (Senior Honors thesis. University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 82-3; William S. Hanna, *Benjamin Franklin and Pennsylvania Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), 193.

hostilities commenced,” S.P.G. historian John Calam notes, “an inept statement, a clumsy or inappropriate comparison, and Society parsons’ lives and property were at stake.”⁴ Amidst the aggression, Smith found himself torn. Modern historians often note that large numbers of colonials never declared allegiance to either the Revolutionaries or the British, but simply tried to survive the conflict with a minimum of personal hardship.⁵ The Provost, however, did not have the luxury of remaining neutral. His previous political activity, and most importantly, his post as a mouthpiece for the College, virtually required that Smith choose a side. His access to education and politics made him a molder of minds, and he could direct the school’s considerable influence to the benefit of either side. To maintain and protect the school from potential wartime dismemberment, it was imperative that Smith clearly state his allegiances and gamble on the protection offered by the clashing armies. His ultimate inability to do so dishonored him in the eyes of all and gave his enemies an excuse to attack the College.

Ideologically, like many Britons of the period, the Provost was jealous of his rights and moreover, viewed himself as a Pennsylvanian. By that time he had lived in the province for over twenty years. Thus, at first he vociferously opposed British imperial policies, becoming a member of the Philadelphia Committee of Correspondence and writing justifications of colonial resistance.⁶ He even went so far as to affix his signature rebelliously to a letter voicing support for the people of Boston after their port was forcibly closed in the

⁴ John Calam, *Parsons and Pedagogues: The SPG Adventure in American Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 164-5.

⁵ See for example, the prominence David McCullough places on John Adams’ famous phrase that on the eve of the Revolution Americans were one third Loyalist, one third Patriot, and one third “timid.” David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 78.

⁶ Calam, 168.

wake of the Boston Tea Party. In his notes on the subject, the Provost recalled that the Committee resolved to:

Write to the people of Boston, assuring them that we truly feel for their unhappy situation; that we consider them suffering in the general Cause. That we recommend to them Firmness, Prudence, and Moderation; that we shall continue to evince our Firmness in the cause of *American Liberty*.⁷

As later developments would show, the key word in that passage was “Moderation.”

Smith believed that Americans were equally as British as their English brethren and was committed to the preservation of Americans’ liberties, but when “independence” began to pepper the lips of his fellow oppositionists, Smith demurred. As former Penn undergraduate Jason Polevoy has written, “he owed too much to the Proprietary family, the Anglican Church, and to the English financial contributors to the College” to support such a drastic separation.⁸ Instead, Smith revealed himself as the core (if tepid) Loyalist Philadelphians had always suspected he was. He favored diplomacy and remonstrance to Westminster, believing that “many wise and good men in the mother country [will] begin to see the necessity of a good understanding with the colonies upon the general plan of liberty” and hoping that a “Peaceful Resolution of Conflict will come” with “overtures of Accommodation” by the Continental Congress.⁹ When it became clear that the tide of public

⁷ William Smith [herein after WS], *Notes on the Stamp Act and American Revolution*, William Smith Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1-2. Closing of the Port of Boston was a reaction by British authorities to the Boston Tea Party. Albert Frank Gegenheimer suggests that Smith himself might have been the author of the resulting letter. Albert Frank Gegenheimer, *William Smith: Educator and Churchman: 1727-1803* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1943), 160.

⁸ Polevoy, 85.

⁹ WS, *Notes*, 4, 21. See also Calam, 165-6, noting that “using such slogans as ‘tree of liberty’ and ‘sons of liberty,’ so prevalent among later patriots, [Smith] maintained that [Americans’] full and free enjoyment of British liberty... could only be expected in return for... constitutional and legal restrictions and economic subordination. Such obedience [Smith wrote, should bend] ‘thoughts to a virtuous industry, beneficial to ourselves and Great Britain; acting as free, but not using our liberty as a cloak of maliciousness or licentiousness.’ A state of colonial rapport... would not, however, rule out the airing of views on such matters as empire propriety. On the contrary, in an oration delivered in 1773 to the American Philosophical Society [he] stressed that organizations such as he addressed should supplement schools by providing room for differences

opinion was running against conciliation, Smith's Canterbury allegiances led him to join an ironically non-partisan coalition of Loyalists including former Quaker Party propagandist Joseph Galloway and early Presbyterian Party principal John Dickinson. His middle of the road stance however, provoked distrust on the British side; London papers noted that "Dr. Smith, though an Episcopal Clergyman, appears to be as zealous a friend to the Liberties of America, and as warm against the measures of administration, *as any person whatsoever*."¹⁰

No longer under the protection of Thomas Penn, the Provost had to prove himself a loyal Briton. He got his chance in March 1776 when revolutionary James Cannon used the pseudonym "Cassandra" to publish an inflammatory missive in the *Philadelphia Evening Post*. Cannon proposed that British negotiators, recently arrived in America, "should be taken into custody by the army and conveyed incommunicado to Congress, which should negotiate only after they had altered all English fleets and armies home." Incensed, Smith responded in the next week's *Pennsylvania Gazette* with the first of an eight letter series in defense of British "sincerity in negotiations with the colonies." Under the pseudonym "Cato," Smith described "Cassandra's" suggestion as "barbaric" and confirmed British intent to find a non-military solution to the conflict. Smith was proven spectacularly wrong when word arrived in May 1776 that German mercenaries were being deployed alongside His Majesty's troops.

Moreover, Smith's reputation especially suffered during the revolutionary period from the ongoing rumor that he sought the first Anglican bishopric of America. As Calam emphasizes, this desire suggested a combustible combination of oligarch leanings and the endorsement of English overlordship of America. Cannon/Cassandra (presumably knowing that Cato was Smith) played on these rumors and responded to Smith's letters with the pithy

of opinion, freedom of discussion, and the general coordination of men of 'different parties and persuasions in one grand pursuit' of peace and abundance."

¹⁰ *London Magazine*, August 1775 (R. Baldwin: London) quoted in Polevoy, 88.

proposition that Cato's fortunes might improve if he could meet with the British officials – when he joined them in custody.¹¹ Discredited and increasingly friendless, by 1778, Smith found himself attacked by both sides. His continued allegiance to the Crown pegged him as a Tory in the eyes of Revolutionaries, but his moderation made him suspect in the eyes of Loyalists. Samuel Seabury, consecrated a reverend at the same time as Smith and later an Anglican bishop of Connecticut, for example, complained to S.P.G. officials in London that Pennsylvania's churchmen, including Smith and College graduate Jacob Duché Jr., “rushed headlong into Rebellion” to the “great Disadvantage [of] the loyal Clergy” (presumably Seabury included). He did note however, that “when the Army was in Motion towards Philadelphia, the Doctor [i.e. Smith] refused to sign an Association in favour of the Rebellion & was taken into Custody.”¹² Unable to extricate himself from the vise, Smith withdrew from the debate on independence, arriving at the equally “accommodating” and indecisive thesis that the King held legitimate, God-granted authority, but such “authority could only stem from a free and common consent.”¹³

This newspaper war was Smith's last gasp of politics and it was useless; by July the fervor for independence became a flood no dam of cautious words could contain. Of the three College trustees present in the Pennsylvania State House for the vote on independence, Thomas Willing – Proprietary alumnus William Allen's successor as provincial Chief Justice – voted against it, moderate revolutionary James Wilson voted for it, and financier Robert Morris abstained, although he would later join the American side. With the passage of the Declaration, Pennsylvania's Proprietary government was finally vanquished. Smith would

¹¹ Ibid., 90-1.

¹² Samuel Seabury to Secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 29 December 1776 quoted in Gegenheimer, 179.

¹³ Calam, 167.

make few public appearances during the war, but his silence did not stem merely from patriotic disillusionment or fear of living behind enemy lines (he never fled to Britain or Canada as many Loyalists did). Nor was he self-interestedly buying time in order to align himself with the ultimate victor. No, Smith had more pressing concerns than Americans' liberties. The Revolution put his *own* liberties at stake. Alienated, he became a sitting duck for the re-energized revolutionary Pennsylvania Assembly, out to expunge any Loyalist influences from the new state. This was an Assembly moreover, led by none other than his old nemesis, Benjamin Franklin.

“The State of Public Affairs”

In light of “the state of public affairs” – the British occupation of Philadelphia and of the school buildings themselves – the College of Philadelphia was closed from June 1777 to September 1778,¹⁴ officially reopening in January of 1779. Such an interlude was not uncommon for America's colleges – the histories of Columbia, Brown, and Harvard all feature similar episodes.¹⁵ The College of Philadelphia, however, suffered particularly from the wartime pause in instruction. Post-closure enrollment was devastated – a prewar student body of over four hundred shrunk to just twenty-eight pupils in all divisions combined – and currency depreciations drained the school of the funds Smith had worked so hard to collect. The College's financial situation ultimately became the pretext for legislative interference in its affairs – justified because, though the College was technically a private institution of

¹⁴ [Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania], *University of Pennsylvania Trustees Minutes vol. 2: 1768-1779, 1798-1791*, 28 September 1778, University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center [hereinafter cited as UARC], 107.

¹⁵ Edward Potts Cheyney, *History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1740-1940*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940), 116-7; George B. Wood, *Early History of the University of Pennsylvania from its Origin to the Year 1827*, 3rd ed. With Supplementary Chapters by Frederick D. Stone (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1896), 67.

higher education, to the colonial mind, it existed solely in the public service.¹⁶ Writing within a generation of events, historian George Wood described the scene:

The provost, who, from his long and very important services, and the success with which his exertions had been attended, was, in the public estimation, almost identified with the school itself, had, by his attachment to the proprietors, in their former disputes with the legislature, rendered himself highly unpopular... and his foreign birth, his clerical office in the English church... the favour in which he stood with men of high station in Great Britain, were circumstances which, as they might naturally give his partialities a direction towards the mother country, tended no doubt, at the commencement of the Revolution to increase the enmity of those who were attached to the cause of independence. Among the trustees of the College, also, were many who were known to be unfavourable to the new order of things, some of whom indeed had left the country and openly joined the enemy. When to these considerations we add the fact, that the institution had been fostered by English liberality [i.e. English funds Smith had collected from the King, Penn, and others] we can feel no surprise that it should have been suspected of a strong attachment to the royal interest, and therefore regarded by many with feelings of unkindness and distrust.¹⁷

To the Assembly, the College represented an insidious weed of the old order, which if left to Provost Smith's devices threatened to strangle their budding Republic. Indeed, the Assembly would later explicitly declare its fears, asserting that "the education of youth has ever been found to be of the most essential consequence... to the peace and welfare of Society [and] when in the hands of dangerous and disaffected men, [i.e. like Smith] they have troubled the peace of Society, shaken the government, and often caused tumult, sedition, and bloodshed."¹⁸ At the mercy of Pennsylvania's militant revolutionary Assembly, the prospects of the College did not look bright. Meanwhile, by 1779, its illustrious Founder had not only

¹⁶ Wood, *Early History*, 59, 62. 'A private institution in the public service' is a phrase explicitly used today by New York University.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 68-9. See also Cheyney, 120.

¹⁸ Pennsylvania General Assembly, "An Act to confirm the estates and interests of the College, Academy and Charitable School of the city of Philadelphia, and to amend and alter the charters thereof, conformably to the Revolution and to the Constitution and Government of this Commonwealth, and to erect the same into a University" [Saturday, 27 November 1779] in *Laws Enacted in the First Sitting of the Fourth General Assembly* [from 25 October 1779] (Philadelphia, 1779), 271.

resuscitated his political career, but with his diplomatic work in the service of the Continental Congress, ascended to new heights.

Franklin, one must remember, found himself in disgrace after the final dismissal of his London petitions against Proprietary rule in 1768. For Franklin, this had been a devastating blow, for he had hoped to parlay his allegiances to the King into a government post at Whitehall.¹⁹ It is a great irony of Smith and Franklin's relationship that this aspiration was startlingly similar to Smith's hope to work his connections to Thomas Penn into a Canterbury-granted bishopric; the political opposites were attempting to raise their statures in virtually identical ways. Lord Hillsborough, then secretary of state with jurisdiction over both of Franklin's aims, however, was not friendly to any American concerns in the wake of the Stamp Act controversy. Franklin himself admitted that "it is a settled point here that I am too much of an American." Like Smith would later find in Philadelphia, Franklin was distrusted "in England of being too much of an American, and in America of being too much of an Englishman."²⁰ Hillsborough would later join in on the Privy Council's humiliation of Franklin in 1774 when he represented post-Boston Tea Party Massachusetts against its royal governor Thomas Hutchinson.²¹

His rejection by the British establishment generated a vast change in Franklin's politics. Anger underscored his growing impression that American rights were being violated and solidified his alignment with Pennsylvania's Presbyterian Party. Essentially, Franklin's chagrin and personal losses turned him into the American patriot we think of today. Now a

¹⁹ At this time Franklin held the peripheral royal post of America's postmaster general.

²⁰ Benjamin Franklin [hereinafter cited as BF] to William Franklin, 9 January 1768 in Leonard Labaree et. al. eds. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959-), 15:16.

²¹ Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 275-9; Robert Middlekauff, *Benjamin Franklin and His Enemies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 124-5.

“political outcast” in London, the death of Franklin’s wife Deborah just before Christmas of 1774 spurred his return to Philadelphia. He landed on 5 May 1775, just in time to represent his new, radical Presbyterian Assembly allies in the Second Continental Congress.²² Franklin served concurrently as the new Assembly’s president (the two bodies conveniently meeting in the same building) and helping to draft Pennsylvania’s ultra-democratic Constitution of 1776. The document featured broad suffrage for all taxpayers, regular public referenda, weak Executive and Judiciary branches coupled with extensive unicameral Legislative powers and provisions for periodic, automatic constitutional conventions – provisions which all bear Franklin’s ideological fingerprint.²³

By switching his loyalties Franklin had rehabilitated his fortunes, becoming once again, popular and powerful. After his involvement in the framing of the Declaration of Independence, Congress sent Franklin as an envoy to France. As minister plenipotentiary to France in September 1778 he famously negotiated with the French foreign minister Vergennes for critical loans financing the American cause and then became an American negotiator of the Peace of Paris. Franklin’s final endorsement of the Revolution and his presence as America’s elder statesman at key steps on the way to independence fixed his re-ascension in the public mind. Franklin had become the representative American to the rest of the world, but he was a son of Philadelphia first and foremost.²⁴ Although he was physically absent from the Pennsylvania political scene from late 1776 to 1785, his ties to the state

²² Isaacson, 279, 291.

²³ Richard R. Beeman, *The Varieties of Political Experience in Eighteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 273. Interestingly, as shown below, the life of this document would parallel the life of the radical Revolutionary Assembly’s other great project, the University of the State of Pennsylvania, the former lasting from 1776 to 1790, while the latter from 1779 to 1791 (as noted below, the College of Philadelphia was closed from June 1777 to January 1779 when its buildings were used to quarter British troops). Moreover, the 1790 Constitution was the product of a 1789 convention – called by the same counter-revolutionary legislators who acquiesced to Smith’s protests and reinstated the charter of the College.

²⁴ Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 201.

remained strong – Philadelphians would receive him later in life as a hero, in his own words, “with huzzas and... acclamations” carrying him “quite to [his] door.”²⁵ Such popular support would spell disaster for his old enemy Smith.

The University of the State of Pennsylvania

Returning from their exile in Lancaster during the British occupation, Franklin’s allies in the Assembly took the interruption as an opportunity at a fresh start for republican Pennsylvania and began to review the “present State of the College and Academy of Philadelphia.”²⁶ While at Lancaster in early 1778 they had voted to suspend the powers of the trustees as long as the British remained in possession of the city and for three months following, complaining that some professors and Trustees had remained in Philadelphia during the occupation and “thereby voluntarily put themselves under the power of the...enemy.”²⁷ The 1779 investigative committee’s reports were read in the Assembly on 5 April, 24 September, and 25 September. They found (predictably) that the trustees had “shown an Evident Hostility to the present Government... and Enmity to the common Cause,” that the school’s finances were badly mismanaged, and “that the fair and original Plan of equal Privileges to all Denominations hath not been fully adhered to.”²⁸ Legislators were no doubt encouraged in their activities by Franklin, who would later publish bitterly on Smith’s betrayal of the original intent of the founding trustees.²⁹ Debate was postponed when

²⁵ BF, Journal, 14 September 1785 quoted in Isaacson, 437.

²⁶ Trustees, *Minutes vol. 2*, 1 March 1779, UARC, 120. See also Pennsylvania General Assembly, *Minutes of the Third General Assembly* [from 26 October 1778] (Philadelphia: Dunlap, 1778), 58.

²⁷ Cheyney, 119-120.

²⁸ Assembly, *Minutes*, 116, 135, 136; Trustees, *Minutes vol. 2*, 28 September 1779, UARC, 151-2; Wood, *Early History*, 72-5.

²⁹ See BF, “Observations Relative to the Original Founders of the Academy in Philadelphia” (Philadelphia, 1789) from Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text and Image at the University of Pennsylvania, SCETI, 2006, <http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/> (12 October 2006).

the Provost submitted a petition asking to see a copy of the final report and “that all who are interested... may have an opportunity of being heard respecting the matters alleged in the said report, before any further proceeding thereon.” The request was granted and the Assembly ordered the Attorney-General to oversee a hearing the next week. The trustees actively tried to fight the Assembly, even retaining counsel to defend their actions, but would ultimately lose the argument.³⁰

On Saturday, 2 October 1779, four votes were taken regarding the formation of a committee to write a bill “to alter and amend the charters” of the College. The record reveals a highly polarized body, but one in the end committed radical revisions of the charters. The first vote was to consult “Judges... previous to the appointment of such a Committee,” which failed 18 to 31. The second was on the original motion to form the committee. It “was carried in the affirmative” 33 to 18 – a virtual flip of the previous vote. The majority clearly believed in an immediate need for changes. Reflecting the deep divisions however, of the original investigative committee only three voted in favor, with two voting against. A third vote was taken to authorize amendment “as to make them conformable to the revolution, and the Constitution and Government of this State.” As to be expected, this was passed by the same margin as the second, and subsequently, a second committee of five was formed for this purpose. The final vote was on whether the original investigative committee could take additional time to re-present their findings (which had already, as noted above, been read before the House, but only hurriedly debated). Again, this was carried in the negative by a split of 33 to 16. Unusually, an unsigned dissent to the vote was preserved for the record below the vote tallies:

³⁰ Assembly, *Minutes*, 136, 137; Polevoy, 95.

In our opinion the proceedings of this House... have been hurried on without regard to accustomed forms, by which the appearance of justice as not been in the least kept up... For the report brought in by the Committee... has never yet been discussed by the House... It was asserted... that such evidence could not be produced, because it did not exist. This House therefore, with regard to the facts, has no other basis for their proceedings than the denied and unsupported suggestions of the Committee. To proceed on such a basis is unprecedented... it is utterly subversive of [the] privilege [of trial by jury] and of the fundamental principles of freedom.”³¹

The accusation of injustice in the Assembly’s dealings with the College would later be revived in Smith’s final effort to rectify his fortunes.

Despite the dissent, a proposed bill was read on the floor of the Assembly on Thursday, 7 October 1779 and enacted into law on Saturday, 27 November.³² As with its reformation of Pennsylvania’s government, the reorganization of the College reflected the activist Assembly’s commitment to eradicate all corrupting British influence on the new state by imposition of fundamental, structural change; but among many upended institutions, the College was unique. Franklin’s history with the school coupled with his political resurgence as a leader of this radical movement made it possible for the Assembly to construe the College as a particular symbol of Pennsylvania itself. Reading Franklin’s mature ideology back onto his younger days (no doubt encouraged by the image-conscious politician himself), the Assembly determined that the College – much like Pennsylvania – was founded upon model democratic principles which were tragically subverted by interference from London. The Assembly thus “disqualified” the existing Board of Trustees and decided there was “sufficient ground to model the Charter and government of the said College so as to answer the original purpose of the said Institution... establish[ing it] on a liberal foundation in which

³¹ Assembly, *Minutes*, 143-5.

³² Ibid., 149; Assembly, *Laws*, 274.

the interests of American Liberty and Independence will be advanced and promoted.”³³ The legislators intended to transform the College to promote their ideology of independence, but naturalized and legitimized the shift as a mere “restoration” rather than a controversial transfiguration. The Assembly’s assertion was based entirely on a single episode occurring in April 1764, and while its claim is certainly exaggerated – as detailed earlier, Franklin’s initial curricular compromises belie the suggestion of egalitarian original intent – it is not without some merit.

The Act specifically cited that the school was “first founded on a plan of free and unlimited catholicism.” It also noted however, that the Trustees “departed from the plan of the original founders, and narrowed the foundation of the said institution.”³⁴ This accusation referred to the events surrounding a letter sent to the College Trustees jointly from the Penn family, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and S.P.G. leader Samuel Chandler in the wake of Provost Smith’s 1762-4 British fundraising trip. This missive is worth quoting in its entirety because the Trustees’ response to it was the central argument for the creation of the University. The note read:

We cannot omit the opportunity which Dr. Smith’s Return to Philadelphia gives us of congratulating you on the great Success of the Collection which he came to pursue, and of acknowledging your obliging Addressed of Thanks to us for the Share we had in recommending and encouraging this Design. Such a Mark of your attention to us will, we no doubt, excuse our hinting to you what we think may be further necessary to a due improvement of this Collection and the future Prosperity of the Institution under your Care.

This Institution you have professed to have been originally founded and hitherto carried on for the benefit of a mixed Body of People. In his Majesty’s Royal Brief, it is represented as a Seminary that would be of great use “for the raising of public Instructors and Teachers, as well as for the Service of the Society for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts, as for other Protestant Denominations in the Colonies.” At the time of the granting

³³ Trustees, *Minutes* vol. 2, 28 September 1779, UARC, 151-152.

³⁴ Assembly, *Laws*, 271.

of this Collection, which was solicited by the Provost, who is a Clergyman of the Church of England, it was known that there was united with him a Vice-provost who is a Presbyterian [Rev. Francis Allison], and a principle Professor of the Baptist Persuasion [Ebenezer Kinnersley], with sundry inferior professors and Tutors, all carrying on the education of Youth with great Harmony, and People of various Denominations have hereupon contributed liberally and freely.

But Jealousies now arising lest this Foundation be narrowed, or some Party endeavour to exclude the Rest, or put them on worse Footing than they have been from the Beginning, or *were at the Time of this Collection*, which might not be deemed unjust in itself, but might likewise be productive of the Contentions unfriendly to Learning and hurtful to Religion. We would therefore recommend it to you to make some Fundamental Rule or Declaration to prevent inconveniences of this kind; in doing of which, the more closely you keep in view the Plan on which the Seminary was at the time of obtaining the Royal Brief, and on which it has been carried on from the Beginning, so much the less Cause we think you will give for any Party to be dissatisfied [emphasis mine].³⁵

A careful reading of this letter in its historical context reveals that while seemingly endorsing freedom of religion within the College, its Church of England benefactors were actually demanding official sanction of the Anglican majority which Smith had secured – with an eye towards the Church money on which the cash-strapped College had come to depend. One should remember that the “Collection which [Smith] came to pursue” was notoriously undermined by Franklin’s influence, partly to combat just this Anglican influence in the College.

In the 1760s, the Trustees were in no position to refuse their request. Moreover, it is doubtful that they wanted to. “At the Time of obtaining the Royal Brief” [i.e. at the time of the King’s donation in 1764] the Board’s most influential Trustees were either Church of England clergymen or adherents. As University historian Thomas Montgomery wrote, the Board’s composition alone “would suffice to give color to any accusations of [religious bias]

³⁵ Archbishop of Canterbury, Richard Penn, and Samuel Chandler to the Trustees of the College of Philadelphia, 9 April 1764 copied in [Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania], *University of Pennsylvania Trustees Minutes vol. 1: 1749-1768*, 14 July 1764, UARC, 260-1.

which might be raised against it.”³⁶ Thus, at least cognizant of religious concerns and “being ever desirous to promote the Peace and Prosperity of this Seminary, and to give satisfaction to all its worthy benefactors,” the Trustees pledged to preserve the existing “balance” in College leadership and directed all future Trustees to pledge as well.³⁷ There was no perceptible effect on College operations, but the oath was an implicit endorsement of Anglican control of the school. It was no longer a non-sectarian institution.

The first action the 1779 Assembly took in pursuance of their Act was to reorganize the Board of Trustees to ensure this denominational coup would not re-occur. Members would now include government officials, a multi-denominational group of senior religious leaders, and selected secular civic leaders – nearly all of whom had been Revolutionary sympathizers or veterans of Washington’s Continental Army.³⁸ The Assembly also retained the right to nullify the subsequent election of any new Trustee. The College charter was amended to replace British references and affirmations to the Crown with citations to the Commonwealth, and Trustees were obligated to take the same oaths as government officials. What had been a *de facto* public institution was now a *de jure* public institution and to commemorate the change the style of the school officially became “the University of the State of Pennsylvania.”³⁹

³⁶ Thomas Harrison Montgomery, *A History of the University of Pennsylvania from its Foundation to A. D. 1770* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co, 1900), 425.

³⁷ Trustees, *Minutes vol. I*, 14 July 1764, UARC, 162-3

³⁸ Some examples include George Clymer, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a member of both the Second Continental Congress and the first US House of Representatives; Thomas Fitzsimmons, a framer of the Constitution as well as Clymer’s peer in both congresses; Francis Hopkinson, alumnus and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and Thomas McKean, of the Stamp Act Congress and the Second Continental Congress. Joseph Reed himself was a former aide-de-camp to Washington. Men like Jacob Duché Jr. and a New Jersey Loyalist and physician John Lawrence were pointedly not offered seats on the new Board. UARC, “Penn in the 18th Century: Trustees 1749-1800,” 2004, *UARC Website*, <http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/1700s/trustees.html> (22 February 2007).

³⁹ Assembly, *Laws*, 272-3; Cheyney, 123-4. Linguistically speaking, the College had already officially become a university with the addition of the Medical Department in 1765. See also Chapter One for a short description of the oaths of allegiance to the English king required of College trustees.

The new Trustees first met in December of 1779 with Joseph Reed – as president of the Executive Council of the State (roughly equivalent to the governor) – acting as ex officio president. Their first act was to remove the man viewed to have perverted the College’s original intent and who had a history of politicizing it for his own, pro-English, purposes. William Smith was dismissed from the provostship he had held for over two decades; he was, Edward Potts Cheyney described, “intentionally disregarded as representing all to which the new administration was opposed.” Former College professor and Presbyterian Reverend John Ewing was installed in his place.⁴⁰ Franklin’s revenge was complete.⁴¹

Exile in Maryland, Fêtes in Paris

Smith and the old Trustees never accepted the act of 1779 to be legal, but rather as a “forcible seizure of their estates, rights and powers.” Smith himself was “unmeasured in his denunciation of the new Trustees” calling them “robbers.” He appealed to the Assembly for restitution annually from 1780 to 1783 and was ignored each time. In 1784 he gained a short-lived victory when that year’s petition was brought before the Council of Censors (the body charged under the 1776 Pennsylvania constitution with reviewing the constitutionality of legislation) but they refused to disallow the Act, declaring that “the great majority of the late

⁴⁰ Cheyney, 131.

⁴¹ Cheyney has noted that subsequently it had been “customary to speak of this act of 1779 as ‘an abrogation of the charters,’” an accusation possibly borne out by George Wood’s early record that an “impediment to [the] prosperity [of the University] existed in the unfriendly feelings with which it was regarded by many respectable citizens. Attached to the old school and its officers, and considering the new as having been founded in usurpation, they were disposed both from inclination and principle to prefer some distant seminary for the education of their children... withdrawing their immediate support from the University.” Wood, *Early History*, 92-3. This disillusionment may have stunted the national reputation of the University in the nineteenth century, leading perhaps to its relatively lower profile in comparison to the rest of the modern Ivy League. Such an attitude Cheyney notes however, leads to the “erroneous impression that there was a break in the continuity of the institution.” In the Act of 1779 “there was no breach of continuity... the charters were still intact.” He notes that “the procedure, except for the involuntary character of one party’s action, was somewhat like that by which the property and trusts of the Trustees of 1740 were handed over to those of 1749.” Cheyney, 124-5.

Trustees... were not only hostile to our independency but abettors of the cause of the King of Great Britain and totally disqualified for such a trust under our present government... legislative imposition became absolutely necessary.” Nevertheless, Smith submitted another petition to the next Assembly.⁴²

The old Provost was even more obstinate in the immediate aftermath of the Act. He made no objection to handing over the charters and minute books to the new trustees or to allowing the University to occupy College buildings, but when asked to deliver up the symbolic keys and seal of the College he refused. Nor would he give up his lodgings in the University-owned Provost’s house. Only after a year long struggle and the beginning of legal procedures to expel him did he give way, still demanding restitution in order to pay his outstanding debts – a request declined by the trustees. Obviously finding Philadelphia’s job market a bit hostile, Smith removed to self-imposed exile in Chestertown, Kent County, Maryland, where he was reduced to accepting a post as the local parish priest. In a characteristic effort to regain his former prestige, within two years Smith managed to transform a local grammar school into a college of his own invention. Anxious as ever to cultivate friends in high places, he named the school after the recently victorious General Washington, to whom an honorary degree was bestowed at Washington College’s third commencement in 1785.⁴³ That same year Smith received some vindication from the University trustees when they voted to repay him the arrears in his salary up to the date of formation of the new Board and for improvements he had made to the Provost’s House. They also voted however, to charge him rent for the period he had squatted in the building.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., 146-8. Wood, *Early History*, 94.

⁴³ Cheyney, 131-2; Gegenheimer, 81, 86.

⁴⁴ [Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania], *University of Pennsylvania Trustees Minutes vol. 3: 1779-1788*, 13 July 1785, UARC, 209.

Washington College flourished and still exists today, but Smith's troubles followed him to Maryland.⁴⁵ Smith's involvement in the Chestertown parish reaffirmed his commitment to the Episcopal Church. Fortuitously, he became an active member of the state clergy conventions just when the American Episcopal community was reassessing its position in post-Revolutionary society – principally contemplating the assignment of independent American bishops. While politically, appointment as Bishop of America was clearly out of reach, Smith was now closer than ever to fulfilling at least a modicum of his ambition. In August 1783, his fellow clergymen were prepared to recommend him as in “every Way well qualified to be invested with the sacred Office” of Bishop of Maryland.⁴⁶

The appointment of American bishops was a problem for early American Episcopalians because of the oath of allegiance to the English king required upon the ascension to a bishopric. Initially, the problem was triaged by the creation of bishops under the jurisdiction of the nominally independent Scottish Anglican Church. However, in order to provide for the survival of Anglicanism in America, the Church received a special act of Parliament in 1787 permitting the creation of a minimum number of bishops in foreign lands not under the jurisdiction of the King – and thus without the allegiance oath. The number was set at three, that being the number required by canon law for the consecration of another bishop. When it became clear however, that leaders of the Anglican Communion would not permit the consecration of more than three American bishops, Smith was passed over for selection in favor of Pennsylvania's William White, who was incidentally, also a University trustee.⁴⁷ Buoyed by his Maryland brethren Smith had apparently applied for an appointment

⁴⁵ For an extended discussion of Smith's involvement with Washington College see Charlotte Goldsborough Fletcher, *Cato's Mirania: A Life of Provost Smith* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002).

⁴⁶ Gegenheimer, 192-3.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 194.

at the American Episcopal Church General Convention in October 1786 but as Dr. David Griffith of Virginia (who was recommended for a position but did not accept because of poor health) wrote to William White (his eventual replacement), he received only a “publick and general... censure on his conduct.”

Smith would not be deterred and the following week returned to the Maryland state convention with testimonials attesting to his “very great Services” to the Church, hoping that a reaffirmation of local support would lead to better success at the next General Convention. Smith was rebuffed. Letters between the clergy of Baltimore and Philadelphia around the time of the Convention reveal that Smith was charged with “intoxication” and “gross Acts of Immorality” at previous Church conventions. The charge was eventually dropped, but the episode was yet another injury to Smith’s already wounded reputation, renewing “strong prejudices against him.”⁴⁸ Smith’s biographer Albert Gegenheimer clarifies the indictment, citing Dr. Benjamin Rush’s comments after the Provost’s death. Rush remembered that Smith had “early contracted a love of strong drink and came towards the close of his life a habitual drunkard. He was often seen to reel and once to fall in the streets of Philadelphia.” Rush did not claim to see such behavior himself and it is entirely possible that his unrevealed source was a Franklin and/or Assembly partisan, but the story itself is also plausible given the availability and social acceptability of alcohol consumption⁴⁹ and Smith’s declining

⁴⁸ David Griffith to William White, 20 October 1786; Thomas Craddock to John Andrews, 27 October 1786; Samuel Johnston to J. Andrews, 31 October 1786 all quoted in Gegenheimer, 195-8.

⁴⁹ As Eric Burns has noted of early America, “No other activity of the time... was as important to the colonists as the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Booze was food, medicine, and companionship in the early days of America: ichor, elixir, and *aqua vitae*.” In his social history of alcohol in America, Burns outlines an hour by hour estimation of colonials’ constant alcohol consumption from six-thirty in the morning to eleven in the evening. He also lists the many occasions in which alcohol consumption played a major role including: during and as a reward for work and soldiering, as an enticement to shoppers, hospitality to neighbors, as part of marriage, funeral, and nationalistic festivities, as well as schooling, adjudication, and governing – nearly every facet of life both public and private. Eric Burns, *The Spirits of America: A Social History of Alcohol*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 8, 10-19 *passim*.

fortunes – both in reputation and material wealth in his later years.⁵⁰ Whatever their misgivings, the Episcopal clergy continued to allow Smith to represent Maryland at Church conventions, and at times even to preside over and sermonize to the meetings.⁵¹

While Smith was reduced to a subsistence stipend from the Church and embarked upon yet another round of fundraising campaigns to beg for money for his new educational institution, Franklin's star continued to rise.⁵² As America's principal minister in Paris, Franklin took a leading role in the peace talks with Great Britain which commenced in that city following Lord Cornwallis' 1781 defeat at Yorktown. The Peace of Paris was official by 1783, but Franklin would remain in Paris through 1785, indulging himself in the luxurious idyll of pre-revolutionary aristocratic French society. The French adored Franklin, repeatedly fêting him with laurels, writing poetry in his honor, and even imitating his 'rustic American' hairstyle. "Wherever he traveled in his carriage," Gordon Wood has described, "crowds gathered and, amid acclamations, gave way to him in the most respectful manner, 'an honour,' noted [fellow American commissioner] Silas Dean, "seldom paid to the first princes of the blood."⁵³ "I am here" Franklin wrote of France in 1784, "among a People that love and respect me, a most amiable Nation to live with."⁵⁴ But having turned seventy-nine by 1785, Franklin's body was beginning to betray his youthful inclinations. His gout and kidney stones were increasingly debilitating, and when Congress finally sent Thomas Jefferson to replace him, the old man decided to make the arduous journey homeward. Upon arrival in Philadelphia on 14 September 1785 the Pennsylvania Assembly unanimously elected him to lead the state's Executive Council (comparable to a governorship). He accepted, having "not

⁵⁰ Gegenheimer, 198-9.

⁵¹ Ibid., 203-4.

⁵² Ibid., 81, 83.

⁵³ Wood, *Americanization*, 177.

⁵⁴ BF to William Franklin, 16 August 1784 quoted in Ibid., 209.

the Firmness to refuse their Support.” He was reelected – without opposition – in both the 1786 and 1787 elections. If Smith ultimately stumbled on the path to his aristocratic dream, Franklin seems to have found a suitable replacement. “This universal and unbounded confidence of a whole People,” he wrote to his sister Jane, “flatters my Vanity much more than a Peerage could do.”⁵⁵

The College of Philadelphia Resurrected

Unsurprisingly, Smith found his banishment unfulfilling. As Franklin served his last term on the Executive Council, the now ex-Provost published a pamphlet directed at the Assembly, lobbying it publicly this time to restore the charter of the College of Philadelphia. In the 1788 piece, Smith repeated his old accusations of a virtual theft of property by the 1779 Assembly from the College Trustees. “I hoped to enjoy the remainder of my days in quiet, without being arbitrarily *dispossessed* of my *freeholds*, and without any legal trial or even fault alleged,” he wrote bitterly.⁵⁶ “The seminary,” Smith maintained, was “a *private corporation*... declaring the TRUSTEES as FOUNDERS *at large*, to govern themselves by their own LAWS, amenable or answerable to no foreign or other jurisdiction so far as their laws were restrained by the usual limitation of not being in any wise ‘repugnant to the laws of the state.’” The rights of this “*voluntary society of founders*” were abrogated, and done so unnecessarily he alleged, given that the initial documents of the Academy allowed for freedom of religion and that “these constitutions were not altered by the CHARTERS which were afterwards obtained upon the petitions of *those founders*” (e.g. for official recognition from King George). In opposition to the Assembly’s original findings – and thus implicitly

⁵⁵ BF to Thomas Paine, 27 September 1785; BF to Jane Mecom, 4 November 1787 both quoted in *Ibid.*, 214.

⁵⁶ WS, “Address to the General Assembly of Pennsylvania in the Case of the Violated Charter of the College, Academy and Charitable School of Philadelphia &c.,” (Philadelphia: R. Aitken & Son, 1788), 13.

admitting at least that fault *was* alleged (as the record shows) – Smith maintained that such affirmations “stand in their books, and before their *first* CHARTER, as *fundamental laws*.”⁵⁷ For the Provost, the plight of the College was ironically intertwined with the very aims of the revolutionarily democratic 1779 Assembly. He concluded that:

If particular societies of men cannot make provision for the education of their children... and if the education of their children and all the provisions which they have made for that great and laudable purpose, can be taken out of their own hands, and given to the STATE, or to a party in the STATE – then all other *religious* or *civil liberty* is but an *empty name*!”⁵⁸

In pursuance of its protection of civil liberty, however, the 1776 Constitution had incorporated one element which worked in Smith’s favor: term limits.

Initially, there was no way that Smith’s constant petitioning was going to succeed. In the past, the Assembly was merely aligned with Franklin and had ignored Smith; now Franklin was not only once again a physical presence in Philadelphia (having spent less than four of the previous twenty-seven years in Pennsylvania) but in the leadership of the State House. Furthermore, as President of the Executive Council he automatically served as ex officio President of the University Board of Trustees, a body to which the Assembly of 1779 had explicitly named him anyway. Franklin wasn’t about to let his old enemy regain power. In October of 1788, however, having served three terms as de facto governor, Franklin was constitutionally barred from reelection, and left public service for good. Smith’s fortunes improved slightly thereafter.

Although Franklin would have surely won a fourth term if his election had been constitutionally permissible, there began in the mid-1780s indications that a College comeback was not out of the realm of possibility. Even with state backing the University

⁵⁷ Ibid., 9, 7.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 1.

struggled as much as the College had, suffering from a high rate of faculty turnover, safety concerns during wartime, increasing competition in the educational market, and continuing financial woes.⁵⁹ Moreover, while Franklin certainly blocked consideration of College interests, the old man was particularly apathetic regarding those of the University. While the faculty “expressed the hope that they might enjoy his approval and continued patronage” he inexplicably declined to take his seat on the Board, even in a purely ceremonial capacity. When his term on the Council expired, his name was finally dropped from the list of trustees for non-attendance.⁶⁰ Finally, by 1789 political conservatives had regained control of the Pennsylvania Assembly and forced a convention on the Constitution of 1776. The new assemblymen eschewed the document’s majoritarianism and sought to create a more limited democracy, adopting additional checks and balances with less power in the hands of the common voter. Their rejection of the revolutionaries’ political ideology also made these “Anglicans and wealthy merchants and professionals” particularly receptive to Anglican, professional Provost Smith’s overtures and “the restoration of the old College [became] their party policy.”⁶¹

Without Franklin around to block it, the new Assembly adopted Smith’s interpretation of the events of 1779, declaring that:

The provost, vice provost, professors and all other masters, teachers, ministers, and officers of the said College, Academy and Charitable School, were, without *trial by jury, legal process*, or proof of *misuser* or *forfeiture*, deprived of their said charters, franchises and estates... all of which is repugnant to *justice*, a *violation* of the constitution of this commonwealth”⁶²

⁵⁹ Wood, *Early History*, 92.

⁶⁰ Cheyney, 140; Wood, *Early History*, 95.

⁶¹ Wood, *Americanization*, 213; Cheyney, 149.

⁶² “State of Pennsylvania in General Assembly, Thursday February 26, 1789,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 4 March 1789 from *Accessible.com*, <http://www.accessible.com/accessible/text/gaz4/00000756/00075609.htm> (14 October 2006).

In 1789, the College of Philadelphia was re-formed and the Provost reinstated. This was Smith's final insult to Franklin, who published his own bitter pamphlet in response to the reinstatement. In these "Observations Relative to the Original Founders of the Academy in Philadelphia," Franklin recounted his version of events surrounding the foundation of the Academy.

While he strenuously avoided passing judgment on "the restitution of the charter" – perhaps recognizing that a renewal of open hostilities was behavior unbecoming America's first elder statesman – the document strikes at the heart of Smith's greatest accomplishment: the first modern college curriculum.⁶³ Franklin accused the "Latinists" who took over the administration of the College of betraying the original Trustees' "splendid promises [which] dazzled the eyes of the public" to "look on the students as in some measure their own children" by "neglect[ing]" the broadest education offered by the school, the "English education" of the Academy. Pointing to the record of Trustees minutes of the 1760s, Franklin maintained that the Academy was deliberately denied funds necessary to provide an adequate education, resulting in reduced enrollment and an inability for the school to "defray... the expense in supporting it" – which was then "offered as a reason for demolishing it altogether" and instead incorporating of the hallmark of English instruction, the practice of declamation, into the Classical curriculum.⁶⁴ Franklin had a point.

During Smith's tenure as Provost of the College, the Academy (or English School) suffered heavily. It was under-funded, under-staffed, and enrollment dropped precipitously. It was a virtual non-entity by the mid-1760s, but remained open in a modified form up until the

⁶³ BF, "Observations," 133. See chapter 1 for a discussion of the classical basis of Smith's curriculum.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 150, 142, 145, 152.

1772 death of its long-suffering master Ebenezer Kinnersley.⁶⁵ “If the insufficiency of the tuition-money in the English school to pay the expense,” Franklin snarled in 1789:

And the ease with which the scholars might obtain equal instruction in other schools, were good reasons for depriving the master of his salary and destroying the school, they were equally good for dismissing the Latin masters, and sending their scholars to other schools; since it is notorious that the tuition-money of the Latin school did not pay much above a fourth part of the salaries of the masters. For such reasons the trustees might equally well have got rid of all the scholars and all the masters, and remained in full possession of all the college property, without any future expense.

This sarcastic insistence on a full education or no education at all ironically reflects back on Franklin’s earlier determination to financially starve the College by discouraging British contributors. His irony here implies a value in the institution’s *general* educational mission of the College (i.e. that it would be just as ridiculous to abandon the Latin pupils as it was to abandon their English counterparts), but precisely like those he now attacked, he had sought to under-fund that part of the mission with which he did not agree. In this case, as in other aspects of their lives, Franklin and Smith’s behaviors paralleled each other. The old man’s indignation would be more authoritative if he had not conducted himself equally as bad.

“By refusing any longer to support... the English school,” Franklin continued, “they shamefully broke through and set at nought [*sic*] the original constitutions.... Had the Assembly, when disposed to disfranchise the trustees, set their foot upon this ground, their proceeding to declare the forfeiture would have been... just.”⁶⁶ This expression of hostility would be one of Franklin’s last; he died in April of 1790. Just as Franklin penned these words, Smith was returning to Philadelphia and preparing to reconstitute the College. Ironically, Smith allowed his old enemy to be unanimously elected president of the new College of Philadelphia Board of Trustees. In consideration of his weak health, the College

⁶⁵ Montgomery, 244-251 passim.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 152-3.

Board actually initially met in Franklin's own home – meetings he, unsurprisingly, did not attend.⁶⁷

To do justice to the record, until August 1789 Franklin *is* listed as present at the meetings of the College Trustees. However, the accuracy of these records is questionable. First, they were written in William Smith's hand. It is clear that Smith had an interest in portraying Franklin as endorsing the rebirth of the College – he could use the approval to legitimize the project and as a fundraising tool. Second, Franklin's illness *did* confine him to his home; Smith could thus technically state that Franklin was present at the meetings without his active participation – which is not noted at all. It is plausible that out of respect for the other Trustees and in his position as elder statesman Franklin realized he could not refuse a request to house the meetings, whatever he thought of them. Third, written long after the fact, Cheyney's history has none of Smith's obvious biases.⁶⁸ Fourth, given the deep animosity between the two men, and Franklin's history of retaining long-term grudges (e.g. against his son William who was a Loyalist during the Revolution) it seems particularly implausible to me that Franklin would lend any more support to any Smith project than was necessary to keep up appearances, or for that matter that Smith would give Franklin anything more than the publicly recorded lip service he needed to re-establish himself. Both were simply too proud. Finally, there is absolutely no record of reconciliation – even a tepid one solely in the public interest – between them. Beginning in August, the meetings were moved to the College buildings, a new secretary took over, and Franklin's name disappears.

⁶⁷ Trustees, *Minutes vol. 2*, 9 March 1789, UARC, 167; Cheyney, 171.

⁶⁸ If anything, as a representative of the University in the modern era, Cheyney should portray Franklin in a particularly rosy light – something to which the University could point to as evidence of Franklin's crucial involvement in its foundations. That he mentions an unfavorable action nonetheless, should give at least some pause.

While Smith's behavior here seems perplexing – given their history and especially the concurrent insults, why would he grant Franklin such an honor? It is not so confusing however, if one takes into account the likelihood that in the midst of rebuilding his reputation, Smith could not afford a similar public insult on Franklin. The man was just too influential. The *appearance* of conciliation was required if the College were to develop the popular support it needed to reestablish itself. At any rate, it had to have been obvious to the Provost that Dr. Franklin would recoil from involvement in any Smith project. The school had the same name as Franklin's old institution, but it was now Smith's establishment more than ever.

The concept of Smith's assiduous avoidance of antagonism is borne out by his agreement to eulogize Franklin on behalf of the American Philosophical Society. His underlying animosity becomes apparent however, when one learns that it took Smith nearly a year to prepare, what was according to one historian, a "half-hearted, colorless... artificial, uninspired, rhetorical exercise."⁶⁹ Indeed, a later Smith family anecdote had one of the Provost's young daughters questioning the sincerity of his words. "And how did you like the eulogy?" he was said to have asked her after it was delivered. "'Oh Papa,' said the daughter, looking archly into her father's face, 'it *was* beautiful... only... I don't think you believed more than one-tenth part of what you said of old Ben Lightning-rod. Did you?'" Smith, "without either affirming or denying, laughed heartily."⁷⁰ Delivered on 1 March 1791 the speech ostensibly celebrated the departed Founder but downplayed Franklin's stature vis à vis other Founding Fathers and his rise from obscurity to prominence. It is not likely that

⁶⁹ Alfred Owen Aldridge, *Franklin and his French Contemporaries* (New York: New York University Press, 1957), 234.

⁷⁰ Horace Wemyss Smith, *Life and Correspondence of the Rev. William Smith D.D.*, Vol. 2, (Philadelphia: George & Ferguson, 1879-80), 344.

Smith had access to a manuscript of Franklin's *Autobiography*; however, being the central conceit of the work, clearly Franklin himself deemed the latter an important aspect of his life, making Smith's omission of the Horatio Alger-like storyline particularly ironic. Smith also summarily addressed Franklin's contribution to the Revolution and "imply[ed] at times that Franklin did not know what he was doing" admitting only "backhanded praise" of his diplomatic and scientific accomplishments.⁷¹ Of their personal enmity Smith observed only that:

The unhappy divisions and disputes which commenced in the Provincial Politics of Pennsylvania, in the year 1754 obliged [Franklin] soon afterwards to chuse his party. He managed his weapons like a veteran combatant; nor was he opposed with unequal strength or skill. The debates of that day have been read and admired as among the most masterly compositions of the kind, which our language affords; but it is happy for us, at the present day, that the subject of them is no longer interesting; and if it were, who now addresses you was too much of an actor in the scene to be fit for the discussion of it.⁷²

A careful reading of this passage reveals Smith using the memorial as an opportunity for self-promotion – an act entirely consistent both with his character and the uncomfortable position in which he found himself. Smith was gingerly climbing back to prominence. Unfortunately, he would never return to the summit of his power. The College may have been reborn, but Smith's victory would prove ephemeral: Franklin's ghost would remain triumphant.

Merger and Obscurity

Restoration of the College of Philadelphia did not result in the dissolution of the University of the State of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia may have been the largest city in the

⁷¹ Wood, *Americanization*, 233-4.

⁷² WS, "Eulogium on Benjamin Franklin, L.L.D, Delivered on March 1, 1791," quoted in Gegenheimer, 155. It should be noted that Gegenheimer's analysis of the speech differs from my own, asserting that "Certainly Smith had made much more than an *amende honorable* for anything he might have said of Franklin thirty years earlier." Gegenheimer's biography is from the outset however, an overwhelmingly uncritical analysis of Smith. *Ibid.*, 156.

new United States, but it remained virtually a village compared to London or Paris, and both the College and the University had found maintaining adequate enrollment difficult when each had been the only available option. Yet now, incredibly, Philadelphia found itself supporting *two* competing institutions of higher learning within a stone's throw of each other, the College simply returning to its old buildings at Fourth and Arch Streets and the University occupying the new Philosophical Hall at Fifth and Chestnut. Naturally, the performance of both schools was "languid."⁷³ Each existed legally, but the Assembly was divided over their respective legitimacy and so denied either school necessary state subsidies. Similarly, there existed little private sector support for higher education among Philadelphians still recovering from the destruction and financial deflations of the American Revolution.⁷⁴ For two years the schools stumbled along, scholastic excellence steadily decreasing along with their coffers.

Finally, in early 1791, the College Trustees tested the waters for a union and were favorably received by University officials. Conferences were held, terms agreed upon and on 30 September 1791 the Assembly passed an act uniting the University and the College, creating a private institution styled simply, the University of Pennsylvania.⁷⁵ The twenty-four Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania were divided equally between the University and the College, with the governor of Pennsylvania presiding over the Board *ex officio*; and professors from both institutions comprised the faculty. Only two professors were left off the new staff. Samuel Magaw of the University (a 1757 College graduate) voluntarily declined a

⁷³ Wood, *Early History*, 97.

⁷⁴ Cheyney, 162.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Wood, *Early History*, 106; Trustees, *Minutes vol. 2*, 20 September 1791, UARC, 240. This was provided for over the objections of College trustees who wished the new school to be named the University of Philadelphia, a move which surely would have saved many a Penn grad from queries on the weather in State College.

nomination, while Smith, though supported by some Trustees, was simply passed over.

Presbyterian Rev. John Ewing – protégé of Francis Allison, former College professor and the University of the State of Pennsylvania provost – was chosen to lead the new University instead.⁷⁶ Smith was understandably livid and continued to lobby for a job through April of 1793, writing to Trustee William White:

Having been inform'd that the Trustees of the University are to meet this Evening, I must entreat You to lay my Request before them that I may be *duly* and *officially* notified whether by their present Arrangement they consider that, after all my Services, for near forty Years, in the Cause of Learning in Pennsylvania, I am now absolv'd from all future Duties and Connexion with the Seminary, in Consequence of, and agreeably to the Terms & Spirit of the *Act of Union*.

If this should be their Opinion, and that not voting *in*, is the same as actually voting *out*, and is to operate as a *Discharge*, even if more Professors were immediately necessary, it will be proper in the next place, for the honor of the *Trustees*, as well as mine, and the Reputation which I have long had the Happiness to sustain as an Instructor of Youth, that such Discharge, if not accompanied with any direct Acknowledgement of my past Services, should at least bear no Marks of a Discharge for Incapacity, or Want of Will to be further useful in that Way to which my Life has been devoted, and at a Stage of it too, when I can seek no other Employ.⁷⁷

Rough minutes of the Trustees meeting show that a movement *was* made to add an additional professorship to the school after the initial election of teachers. Smith's name was entered, but he lost to James Davidson, another former College professor, thirteen ballots to eleven. The absent member, Colonel Samuel Miles, was initially allowed an absentee vote, but this was later disqualified and his vote left unrecorded. At any rate, even if Miles had voted in favor of Smith, he would still not have joined the faculty.⁷⁸

Smith's pathetic pleas were pointless, and when he realized the Board would have none of it, Smith began to pursue financial claims against the school instead. The Board had

⁷⁶ Wood, *Early History*, 121.

⁷⁷ WS to William White, 16 April 1792 quoted in Gegenheimer, 91-2.

⁷⁸ [Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania], *Rough Minutes of the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania: November 8, 1791 to February 5, 1793*, 5 April 1792, UARC.

already recognized his services by approving a £100 annuity for the rest of his life, but Smith made further claims of back salary (with interest) and other miscellaneous expenses totaling more than £1,332. His claims were not settled until 1795, when the University agreed to a lump sum of £900 plus the continuing £100 annuity. This is his final appearance in the minute books. As Gegenheimer noted, “by what chance or design it happened that Smith was not chosen to the new faculty it would now be almost impossible to say,” but he remained a politically divisive figure, “personally objectionable” to many Philadelphians. Essentially, the old Provost was “admired but... neither loved nor trusted, and he had few if any intimate friends.”⁷⁹ After the rough waters of the Revolution and the period of dual institutions, unity among the Trustees was essential if this institution aspired to regain stature within the community. Moreover, Smith was, by the end of the eighteenth century, an elderly, feeble man whose future contributions to the University of Pennsylvania could not hope to match what he had given to the College of Philadelphia. Perhaps the Trustees simply decided that the University would lose too much and gain too little by indulging the old Provost.

In his old age, Smith generally dropped out of public life. He occasionally preached at Christ Church and other places around the city, developed an interest in the burgeoning canal industry (spurring a few minor publications), and remained involved in the activities of the American Philosophical Society, but spent most of his time preparing his collected works for publication. Eventually, two volumes were printed, but he would not live to see it.⁸⁰ Smith’s health rapidly declined in the early months of 1803 and he died alone and unmemorialized on 14 May, overshadowed by America’s burgeoning veneration for Franklin, the man he fought so hard to bring down.

⁷⁹ Gegenheimer, 93; Cheyney, 170.

⁸⁰ Cheyney, 217-20.

Losing the services of Provost Smith marked the end of an era for the University. Writing just over thirty years later, historian George B. Wood lamented that Smith was “now finally separated from an institution, with the infancy of which he had become associated in early life, whose youth he had strengthened and adorned in the vigor of his age, and whose untimely decay, now in his declining years, was another link in the chain of sympathy by which it had so long been connected with his fortunes.”⁸¹ Wood’s determination of the school’s “decay” in the wake of Smith’s departure was clearly hyperbolic, but it does contain a kernel of truth. The undergraduate education Smith had worked so hard to build up would be a low priority for University Trustees for the next century. Under Smith’s auspices, though without his guidance, the College of Philadelphia had been gaining national recognition through the particular success of its medical department. Founded in 1765, it was America’s first formal medical school and attracted the attention of such notables as Thomas Jefferson (who sent his grandson to study there). In desperate need of the clout and pupils this respect encouraged, the post-revolutionary Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania invested heavily in medical education. Without the Provost’s counterbalancing interest in undergraduate education, the College of Arts and Sciences suffered a diminution in status over the ensuing century. It attracted few pupils, and those it did were generally Philadelphians. While Harvard and Yale became nationally and internationally prominent, the University – outside of the medical community – took on a distinctly provincial flavor. The Wharton School has done much to change this perception since its establishment of undergraduate business studies in 1881, but even today the University’s frustration over a lack of recognition is evidenced through its obsessive kitschification of Franklin.

⁸¹ Wood, *Early History*, 112-3.

Ironically, the memory – the symbol – of Benjamin Franklin is now used to recreate William Smith’s original vision of “a great national university.”⁸² The University’s reclamation of a man of great, but unrealized potential for its cause betrays the history of alienation, political wrangling, and personal animosity at the heart of his relationship to it. In doing so, it also deprives a man of true devotion to the school his rightful place among its luminaries.

⁸² Gegenheimer, 90.

CONCLUSION

THE CAPRICE OF HISTORY

In the end, the University of Pennsylvania must be seen as the child of not one, but two parents. Franklin was the idea man, the man with a witty line and turn of phrase, but a man who left the minutiae of those plans to others. He was clearly interested in the school he helped create, but it was by no means his life's work. He had after all, his printing business, his science experiments, and his diplomatic efforts to keep him busy. Other than the University's emphasis on undergraduate vocational training – which lay dormant under Smith and was not resurrected until the mid-nineteenth century – little of the printer's imprint can be found in the University, other than that retroactively added by deferential historians.¹ Smith on the other hand, spent the majority of his life overseeing the school, devising its program of study and nurturing its talent.

The Provost plainly arrived in Philadelphia with a clear impression of the school he wanted to lead; and although in bringing the dream of *Mirania* to life he may have changed the aims laid out by the 1749 Trustees, Smith *did* ensure that education forevermore would be central to life in Philadelphia. Smith's push towards classical education ensured that the school was taken seriously as an institution of higher learning, without which it is doubtful the Academy of Philadelphia would have become anything more than an urban Exeter or Andover; and surely not the internationally known research university it is today. For that at least, he should not be whitewashed out of history.

¹ The University kept a classical based undergraduate curriculum well through the nineteenth century, but the 1852 founding of the School of Mines, Arts, and Manufactures (eventually evolving into today's School of Engineering and Applied Science) as well as the first granting of Bachelor of Science degrees would likely have pleased Franklin, as more practical and useful than Latin and Greek-based curriculum of the College.

Interestingly, the whitewashed man was not always so. The *University Catalogue*'s historical sketch – which as mentioned in the Introduction, was the public face of Penn – first appearing in expanded form in 1885 (and maintained substantially the same through the publication's history) matter-of-factly retells William Smith's contributions to the school and key elements of his story, including his “vehement” opposition to the Pennsylvania Assembly, his success “in raising a very considerable endowment for [the] College, and the Assembly's perception that he sought a “narrowing of the foundation” which was used “as a pretext for confiscating all the rights and properties of the College.”² These early sketches not only place Smith on par with Franklin – “the University of Pennsylvania... was founded chiefly through the influence of Dr. Benjamin Franklin *and* Dr. William Smith” – but appear, incredibly, to be apologia for his troubling political behavior.³ Thus, while University historians Montgomery and Cheyney, writing during the period of *Catalogue* publication, undoubtedly glorify Franklin, they express much the same story that the primary documents reveal. Smith *is* an important character in their discussions, and most importantly, so is the fight for control of the University.

Excluding the Unacceptable

The most recent history of the University, former President Martin Meyerson's 1978 *Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach*, admirably profiles William Smith as a key figure in Penn's past, but he curiously omits in its entirety the hostility between Smith and Franklin and portrays Franklin as a more potent force in University history than he was. For example,

² University of Pennsylvania, *Catalogue of the University of Pennsylvania, 1918-1919* (Philadelphia, 1919), 20, 22. The sketch was maintained except for an experimental period from 1919-1923 when it was omitted, although the historical chronology was retained.

³ Idem, *Catalogue 1879-80*, 11. Emphasis mine.

Meyerson attributes to Franklin the resurrection of the College's old Board of Trustees after returning to Philadelphia in 1785 – something other University historians and the historical record itself emphatically deny.⁴ Portraying simplistic, harmonious origins might be useful propaganda, but smoothing over the rough edges of history puts academic integrity at risk and does no justice to the reputation of a world-renowned research university. Reading this text in the course of my original research in the Archives, I was perplexed. If Cheyney and Montgomery saw no harm – as indeed, they should not have – in including Smith and admitting his competition with Franklin, why should Meyerson demur? Ultimately, the essay I wrote for the Franklin tercentennial was an attempt to fill in Meyerson's gaps and resurrect the memory of Smith for the modern University community. It was never published by the Archives, but it became the nucleus of this thesis.

In his discussion of political kitsch, Milan Kundera makes the point that “kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence.”⁵ In other words, kitsch seeks to portray harmony and simplicity – the effects of Meyerson's history. The changes and motivations driving the kitschification of Franklin in the thirty-eight years between Cheyney's intricate account and Meyerson's glossy one deserve a study on their own; although the intended normative and naturalizing effects of kitsch have embedded the mythology of Franklin so deep into University culture that it may be impossible to establish anything more than simple generalities. My own suspicion is that it is linked to the evolution of the Ivy League in the second half of the twentieth century. The expansion of educational opportunities and the increased importance placed on a college degree in America since the end of World War II has resulted in expanding enrollments and

⁴ Martin Meyerson, *Gladly Learn and Gladly Teach* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 31.

⁵ Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper & Row, 1984; Harper Perennial Classic, 1999), 248.

an exponential rise in applications. Always exclusive, a degree from the “Ancient Eight” gained more cachet than ever.

Despite membership in this elite group however, the University of Pennsylvania branding problem must have become acute. When the University’s base of pupils was Philadelphia and its environs, name recognition was less of a problem. As Harvard, Princeton, and Yale expanded recruitment nationwide and Penn attempted to follow, however, the University had one big problem: Pennsylvania State University. As a new student orientation leader and a pre-freshmen host, I know too well the Penn tradition where nervous freshmen bond over horror stories of misunderstandings with guidance counselors, teachers, friends, and even family. Everyone has had a moment where they took a deep breath to steel themselves and explained (yet again), that no, it’s not *that* Pennsylvania institution.

While the other Ivies ran away with the public imagination, I believe that Penn looked to the spirit of Benjamin Franklin for salvation. Utilizing the image of Franklin has no downsides for the University. Franklin is: (1) an easily recognizable and undoubtedly venerated American icon; (2) well-known for his scientific exploits – thus seeming cutting-edge and modern which dovetails nicely with the distinctive presence of Wharton and the Engineering School; (3) as antique – in other words, legitimate – as those established schools in New England; and (4) completely unconnected to Penn State. Moreover, the University could *justifiably* link itself to him. Penn could be “Franklin’s University” and thus finally find the unique persona it desperately needed. Unfortunately for William Smith, recognizing his contribution or his relationship with Franklin would unnecessarily complicate the old man’s sanctification. So Smith disappeared; but it did not have to be that way.

A Tradition of Franklin

Franklin and Smith were two of the same type. Each had an appreciation for the value of education, though with differing interpretations of just what a “good education” meant. Each was a loyal British subject, though they chose different interpretations of how to express such allegiance. Most importantly however, each was an ambitious, charismatic, and determined politician. What distinguishes Franklin from Smith in the collective imagination of the University is a caprice of history. By staking his claim with the Proprietary faction in the disputes of the 1750s and 1760s (thus choosing to work against Franklin’s influence in the College and establishing his own imprint on it) William Smith earned the ire of Benjamin Franklin. The dispute ran hot for decades, each trying to position himself to the disadvantage of the other. Thus, Smith’s star rose and fell at the eclipse and climb of Franklin’s. The story of Franklin’s miraculous transformation from the epitome of the Englishman to the embodiment of the American is a story for another study;⁶ but because Franklin did and because Smith did not have the foresight (or the luck) to move in a similar direction, the Provost became isolated from all influence and stood at Franklin’s mercy. With the last word on their relationship, Franklin repaid Smith’s ruthlessness by ripping from him the only thing he had left, the College, practically expunging the Provost from the popular history of the school he led for more than twenty years.

“The influence of Franklin,” University historian Edward Potts Cheyney admits, “has probably been greater since his death than during his lifetime, greater on the University than on the colonial college. After it and he [and it should be noted, Provost Smith’s influence]

⁶ For a good analysis of this angle of Franklin’s life see Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

passed away there grew up a tradition of Franklin.” This “tradition” of veneration for Franklin, Cheyney notes, has been at its most potent in University history when the institution’s “ambitions” ran high.⁷ The current millennial University must be counted as such a period, and today, the reverence for Franklin has soared into kitsch. The tightly-scripted, politically-correct “spirit of Franklin” has become an unquestioned talisman against which the University of Pennsylvania measures and aligns itself. Despite the fact that – as Cheyney admits – Franklin “did not dominate [the University] through a long period of minute control as did Provost Smith, nor give or obtain for it any large endowment, or define its curriculum or its religion” the University still insists that “he has been on the whole the strongest individual influence on its history.”⁸ One wonders, if the roles were reversed and Franklin universally mistrusted while Smith ascendant as a figure in the revolutionary movement, that the University of Pennsylvania might not be touting itself as “Smith’s University.” As history stands however, William Smith’s obscurity was sealed the moment he aligned himself against the politics of Benjamin Franklin.

⁷ Edward Potts Cheyney, *History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1740-1940*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940), 174.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 172, 175.

APPENDIX

ILLUSTRATIONS



Figure 1. (left) Young Franklin statue, on 33rd Street in front of Weightman Hall. Sculpted by Robert Tait McKenzie, 1914. The statute was a gift of the Class of 1904, who believed “there was nothing on campus which indicated that Penn has been founded by Benjamin Franklin.” [Courtesy of UARC; “Young Franklin Statute,” 2005, *UARC Website*, <http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/statues/youngfranklin.html> (10 February 2007)].

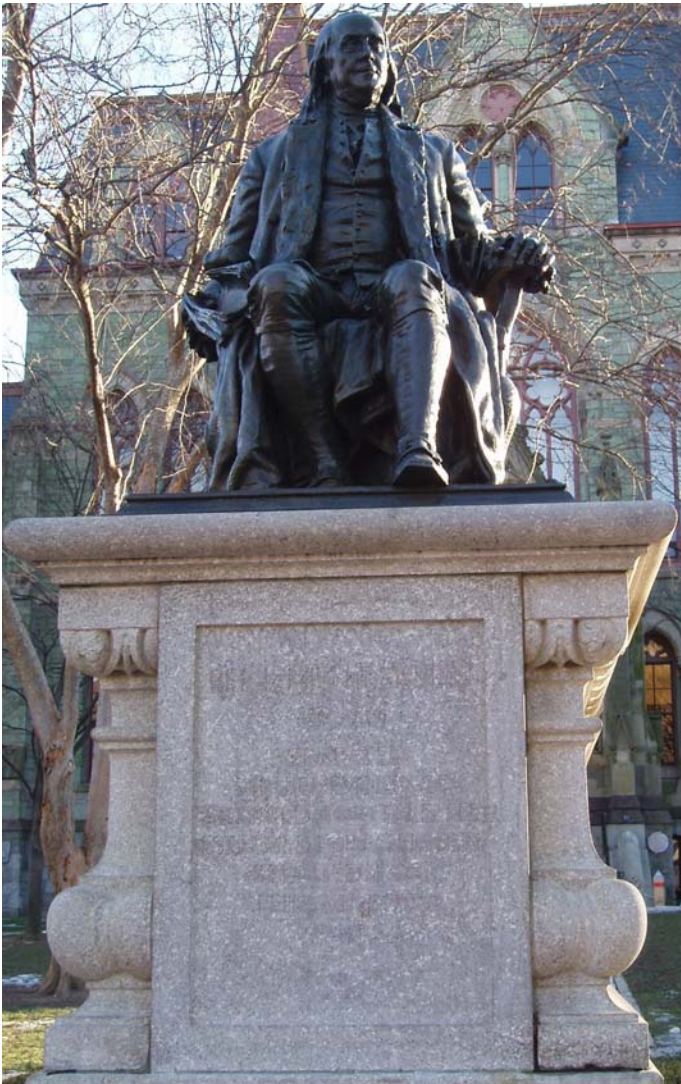


Figure 2. (left) Benjamin Franklin statue in front of College Hall (Author’s Collection).



Figure 3. (left) “Benjamin Franklin on Campus,” a gift of the Class of 1962 which stands at the intersection of 37th and Locust Streets (Author’s Collection).

Figure 4. (right) Another McKenzie sculpture, “The Youthful Franklin” (1914) which now greets shoppers who enter the 36th Street entrance to the Penn Bookstore (Author’s Collection).

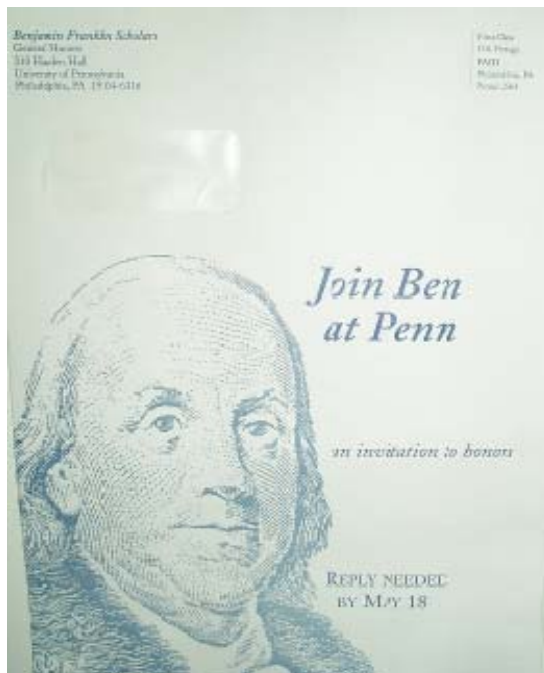


Figure 5. (left) This mailer (ca. 2003) from the Benjamin Franklin Scholars honors program makes the linkage between Franklin and the University explicit (Author’s Collection).

Figure 6. (below) Likewise, the kitschy neon profile of Franklin which decorates the College Office in Logan Hall clearly suggests a tight association between the concept of Penn and image of Franklin (Author's Collection).



Figures 7 and 8. Clash of the Classes shirts (2007) relates Penn's Franklin "brand" to that of Nike's "Air Jordan" franchise (Author's Collection).

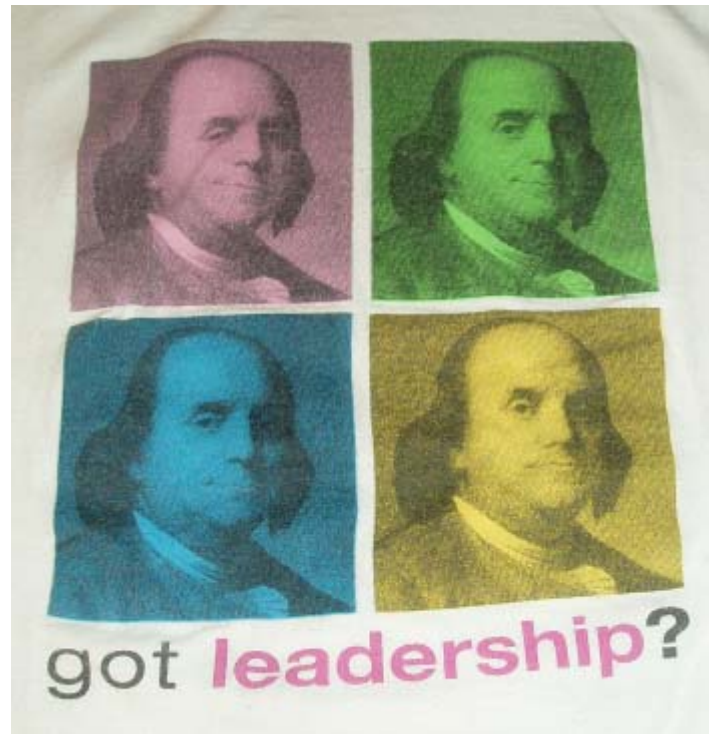


Figure 9. (above) Similarly, the Robert A. Fox Leadership Program of the School of Arts and Sciences links Franklin – and therefore Penn – with the Pop Art of Andy Warhol as well as the dairy farmers’ association slogan “Got Milk?” on this shirt (2003). This kitsch pointedly tries order to sell Franklin as “cool.” This approach is only effective for advertising the program if one assumes that Franklin (and his leadership qualities, presumably at Penn) is a stand-in for the University and its programs (Author’s Collection).



Figure 10. (left) Reproduction of Franklin’s original printing press commissioned by the Class of 1937, now decorating the fifth floor of Van Pelt Library. The inscription emphasizes Franklin’s leading role in the formation of the University, noting the class “designated its reunion gift for the purchase of books, recalling Franklin suggested an excellent Library” (Author’s Collection).

Figure 11. (right) The kitschified appearance of Benjamin Franklin as an emblem of the University on a Hey Day shirt gives the item specificity to Penn (Author's Collection).

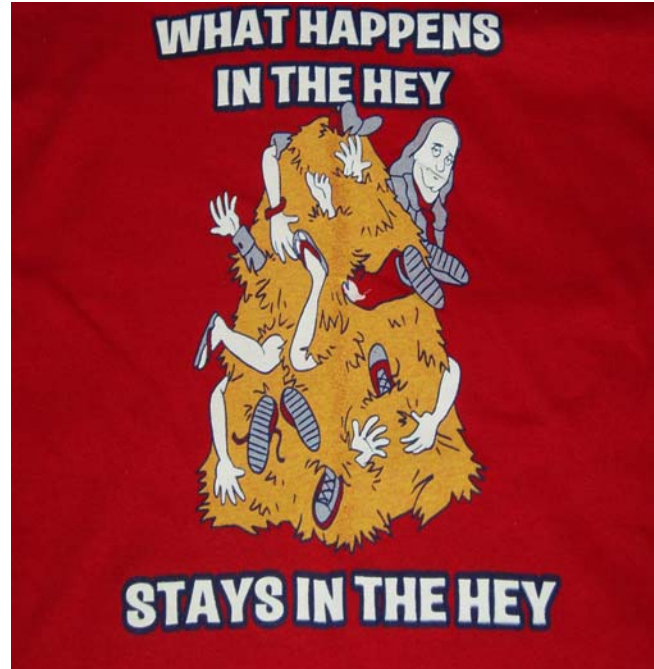


Figure 12. (below) Franklin Field (built 1904, rebuilt 1922) c. 1945. One of two major buildings on Penn's campus, in addition to the Franklin Building at 36th and Walnut Streets, to be named for Benjamin Franklin (Courtesy of UARC).



Figure 13. (right) Provost Smith's building in the Quadrangle, part of Fisher-Hassenfeld College House and the only evidence of Smith on Campus (Author's Collection).



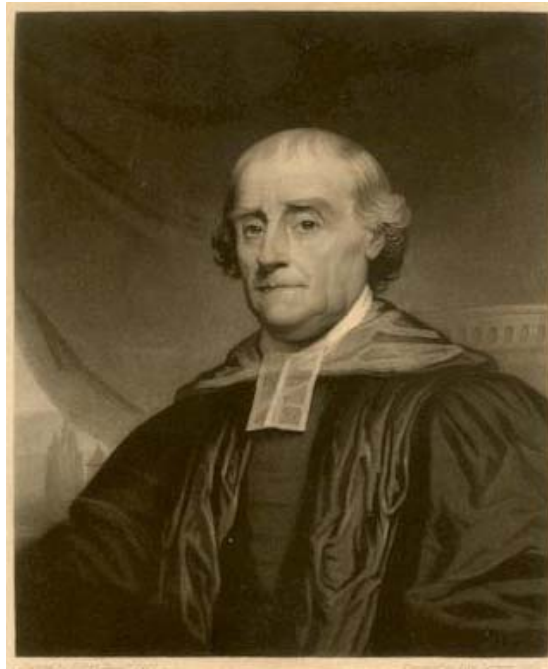


Figure 14. (above) Rev. Dr. William Smith, first provost of the University of Pennsylvania. Engraving by John Sartain (1880) after a painting by Gilbert Stuart (1800). Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Archives and Records Center (hereinafter cited as UARC).



Figure 15. (left) Provost Edgar Fahs Smith (1854-1928) at his desk the morning after his election as Provost of the University on January 1, 1911 (Courtesy of UARC). E. F. Smith has a prominent statute, walkway, and Quadrangle building named for him on campus, as well as a classroom building which has since been demolished. Provost William Smith is unrelated to and should not be confused with this later Provost Smith.

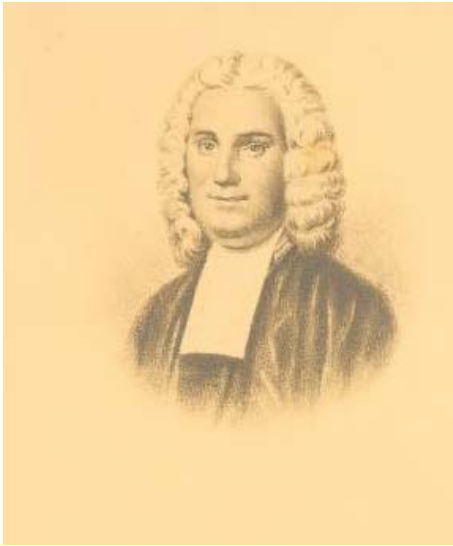
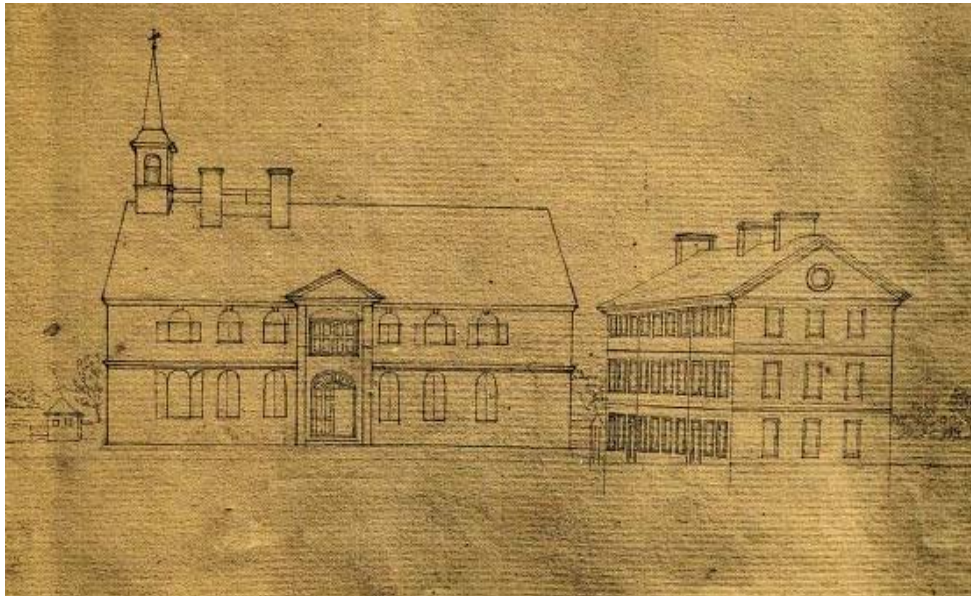


Figure 16. (above left) Reverend Richard Peters (1704-76), Proprietary Party leader and University Trustee, 1749-76 (Courtesy of UARC).

Figure 17. (above right) Justice William Allen (1704-80), Proprietary Party leader and University Trustee, 1749-80 (Courtesy of UARC).

Figure 18. (below) Original College of Philadelphia Fourth Street Campus: Academy and Dorm, c. 1780. Reproduction of a sketch by French artist Pierre Eugene DuSimitiere. Original is in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Courtesy of UARC).



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