

## Chapter 2

# THE FOUNDATION

1740-1755

### THE INFLUENCE OF WHITEFIELD

THE arrival in Philadelphia in November 1739 of George Whitefield, a young Anglican clergyman, on a preaching mission, proved to be an event of much influence upon the early stages of this development. He was the greatest of all revivalists. His energy, his zeal for the conversion of souls, his native gifts of eloquence carried him like a rushing wind through all the colonies. "In journeyings often," like Paul, through eight years of impetuous activity he awakened and divided his own and other denominations, and stirred to spiritual concern thousands of men and women who had previously had no religious interest. Cowper said of him:

Paul's love of Christ and steadiness unbribed  
Were copied close in him and well transcribed;  
He followed Paul, his zeal a kindred flame,  
His apostolic charity the same.  
Like him crossed cheerfully tempestuous seas  
Forsaking country, kindred, friends and ease.<sup>1</sup>

On his first arrival in Philadelphia, at the invitation of the rector of Christ Church he read the service on Sunday and preached there daily to crowded congregations. After the first few days, the church being overfilled, he preached a second time each day from the steps of the Court House, in the middle of Market Street at Second, to crowds that filled the streets. Ten days of this

<sup>1</sup> "Hope," lines 580-87.

had to suffice for Philadelphia for the time, and he passed on through New Jersey, New York, and all the settled back parts of Pennsylvania; then back to England, to return again to the colonies in successive missionary journeys. Philadelphia was the port at which he usually landed after his visits to England, and it was to Philadelphia he returned after his preaching journeys by land. He said of Philadelphia after passing through all the other colonies, "It seems to me the garden of America."

The numbers of his audiences in England and America are perhaps exaggerated; they are placed by contemporary newspapers and his own *Journal* at six thousand, twelve thousand, and even eighteen thousand. He was reported to have preached to twenty thousand at Moorfields and to thirty thousand on Kennington Common. Franklin, listening to him from the outskirts of a crowd in Philadelphia, with his usual ingenuity calculated that he could have been easily heard by thirty thousand. He was without doubt a great orator, wringing the hearts of his auditors, and drawing them again and again to listen "in awful silence" to the magic of his voice and to submit their minds to the spell of his eloquence. Franklin, who knew and, curiously enough considering the contrariety of their natures, liked him, said of him with unusual warmth, in a letter to his brother, "He is a good man and I love him"; and at a later time when Whitefield's motives had been questioned, "He was in all his conduct a perfectly honest man; our friendship was sincere on both sides and lasted till his death."

He bears witness to the power and clearness of his voice, the distinctness of his enunciation, and the fact that, especially in sermons he had preached repeatedly, ". . . every accent, every emphasis, every modulation of voice was so perfectly well toned and well placed that without being interested in the subject one could not help being pleased with the discourse; a pleasure of much the same kind with that received from an excellent piece of music." As to his persuasiveness Franklin tells a humorous story. Having determined not to subscribe to one of Whitefield's charities, he changed his mind while listening, deciding to give the copper in his pocket, then the silver, and finally, he says: "I emptied my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and

all." His friend Thomas Hopkinson, who with a like determination had taken the precaution of emptying his pockets before leaving home, tried to borrow from a neighbor in the crowd, who refused his request with the assurance that at any other time he would lend him freely but perceived that he was now out of his senses.

Temporary aberration under the influence of passionate oratory is not unknown, but seldom does oratory have such cool material to work on as the narrator of this anecdote. Moreover, while a deist like Franklin might listen to Whitefield with enjoyment of the cadences of his speech or with a half-amused acknowledgment of his powers of persuasion, to others his preaching was part of that "Great Awakening" that worked like a ferment in the colonies in the middle years of the eighteenth century. The great body of those who heard Whitefield were stirred to their depths. The "awe, the silent attention" of his auditors, described by an attendant at one of his sermons, must often have masked a heart filled by his warnings with dread and foreboding of eternal condemnation. He insisted on the necessity of conversion, that every Christian must go through a dark crisis of conviction of sin, to be followed by a joyful assurance of salvation. A certain thread of Calvinist "election" must have awakened doubts in the hearts of many whether such assurance in their case might be possible.

He is said by his friends to have deprecated outward show of religious feeling, yet his *Journal* is full of evidence of its display by his hearers.

The Holy Ghost enabled me to preach with such power to them and some others in the evening that one was thrown into strong convulsions by the violence of her convictions. Others were in great agonies. All, I believe, were melted.

Preached twice here this day—there was one cried out and shrieked most piteously and would not be comforted.

Several cried out in different parts, and others were to be seen wringing their hands and weeping bitterly.

Most of the people were drowned in tears. The word was sharper than a two-edged sword. The bitter cries and groans were enough to

pierce the hardest heart. Some of the people were as pale as death, others were wringing their hands, others lying on the ground, others sinking into the arms of their friends, and most lifting up their eyes to heaven and crying to God for mercy.

There was an affecting meeting, and several who had been in Bondage before at that time received Joy in the Holy Ghost.<sup>1</sup>

This emotional excitement was strongly disapproved of by the more conservative clergy, many of whom realized that they themselves had undergone no such experience. They denied the necessity of such a crisis in the life of a Christian and doubted its profitableness. They may also have resented the decline in attendance at their own services. Umbrage may likewise have been taken at his practice of carrying money away from the city, for at one morning service he collected £110 and at the evening service in the same day £80 for the use of his orphan house in Savannah, Georgia.<sup>2</sup> His rigorous moral code was disturbing. The owner of the building in Lodge Alley in which the Assembly, a dancing school, and concerts were held, coming under the new influence, handed over the keys of that building to one of Whitefield's companions, who locked it up on the ground that its objects were "inconsistent with the Doctrines of the Gospel." The "Gentlemen of the Assembly" caused the door to be broken open again and threatened to cane the man who had locked it up. A controversy broke out in the newspapers, and it is recorded that at the next Assembly night "no company came."

Many others were displeased with his appeal to the emotions, opposed to his doctrines, and offended by his bitter denunciations of those who differed with him. "Remarks upon Mr. Whitefield, showing him a man under Delusion" was one of the mildest of the many critical publications that began to appear.<sup>3</sup> The vicar of Old St. David's at Radnor writes home in July 1740 to his patrons, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts:

<sup>1</sup> *Whitefield's Journal*, May 15; Nov. 17, 20, 21; Dec. 1, 1740.

<sup>2</sup> *Whitefield's Journal*, April 20, 1740; William Seward, *Journal of a Voyage from Savannah to Philadelphia . . .*, London, 1740, p. 5; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Sept. 29, Oct. 11, 1744; Luke Tyerman, *Life of the Rev. George Whitefield*, London, 1876, I, 388.

<sup>3</sup> George Gillespie, Minister of the Gospel, *Remarks, etc.*, Phila., 1742.

It may perhaps be somewhat surprising to the Honorable Society to find so great a difference between this and the last account I sent you; but did they know how much pains and labor the Rev. Mr. Whitefield has lately spent among us to rob us of our characters and then of our hearers, their wonder would immediately cease. This thrilling preacher, what by a musical voice, by an agreeable delivery, a brazen forehead, impertinent asseverations, uncharitable assertions, and impious imprecations upon himself, if what he says be not true, has raised such a confusion among the people of this province as I believe will not be laid in haste, and (which I am troubled about) has made a very great rent in all the congregations belonging to the Church of England. The generality of my hearers not only run after, but adore him as an oracle from heaven. They look upon all he says to be the immediate dictates of the Holy Ghost. Only because he confidently asserts it to be so, and imprecates the most dreadful curses upon himself, if what he says be not true. There is a very large church abuilding for him in the City towards which all sorts of people have contributed.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Whitefield's ministrations brought not peace but a sword into the conventional religious and social life of Philadelphia. When, therefore, in April 1740, he returned to the city from the second of his preaching journeys he found a serious change in his position among the more conservative elements of the city. He was met on the street soon after his arrival by the rector of Christ Church, who told him that he could no longer preach there; and this reception was typical of many. Although before his American journeys were over he was invited back even by the most conservative churches, for the next few years he was excluded from Episcopal and from many Presbyterian pulpits, and became almost entirely a "preacher in the fields," to use Franklin's words. He was received as a guest by the Quaker schoolmaster Anthony Benezet, and was welcomed by one faction of the Presbyterians, by the Baptists, the Moravians, and the German sects. He preached to great assemblies from the Court House steps, from the balcony of the Loxley house at Second and Spruce streets and at one time, from a platform built for the purpose, to thousands of hearers facing him on the slope of Society Hill. Among the masses, admiration and affection for

<sup>1</sup> Henry Pleasants, *History of Old St. David's Church*, Phila., 1915, p. 105.

him were still unbounded. It was obvious that if his preaching was to continue in the latitude of Philadelphia a place must be provided for it where there would be protection from the weather. The religious revival must have a home.

It will be remembered that there were in Philadelphia at this time a group of advocates of the establishment of a free or charity school. A movement for the establishment of charity schools was now at its height in all English-speaking countries.<sup>1</sup> There is no more characteristic phase of the "Age of Benevolence," as the eighteenth century has been called, than the opening of schools for the poor. Along with missions at home and abroad, the alleviation of the lot of Negro slaves, foundlings, factory children, chimney sweeps, and the aged and infirm, the improvement of prisons and of the criminal law, literally thousands of free schools were founded in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales; the fringes of the wave spread to the colonies. There were said to be at one time 1,329 such schools in England, with more than twenty-three thousand scholars. "Charity Schools" was the general term applied to these institutions, though they were of great variety, alike only in their pious purpose, the elementary English content of their teaching, and their establishment among the children of the poor. Many of them were established by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, an Anglican organization, but most were set up by the Methodists or by other religious groups or persons of more ardent piety. It is not a matter of surprise therefore that the religious revival accompanying Whitefield's preaching should suggest the foundation of such a school among the poor in Philadelphia. Those who initiated it were a group of plain men, mostly mechanics; and several of them Moravians, who were both pious and interested in education.

Whitefield himself had been much interested in charity schools in England and Wales. While a student at Oxford from 1732 to 1736, as he says in his *Journal*, "two or three small Charity schools maintained by the Methodists were under my more immediate inspection." Early in 1739, the year in which he first came to Philadelphia, he laid the corner stone of a charity school

<sup>1</sup> See M. G. Jones, *The Charity School Movement*, Cambridge (England), 1938.

being built by the colliers at Kingswood near Bristol. He was on friendly terms with Griffith Jones, who busied himself organizing a group of such schools in Wales. He was constantly being appealed to in England by churchwardens and school managers, as he was afterwards to be in America, to preach for the benefit of the children. The institution he set up in Savannah, Georgia, and for which he collected the £190 sterling was a charity school, though it was also an orphan asylum and, in his dreams, was ultimately to include a college for the planters' sons of the South. He started another at Darien in Georgia.

In Philadelphia the two objects, a free school and a building for Whitefield and free preaching, were now combined; land was procured and in the early months of 1740 building was begun. The two oldest pieces lying among the archives of the University are a bill for some building materials, [£5 6s. 8d.] for a "Bill of Scantlinges," dated June 1740, and a faded piece of copy for an advertisement in the newspapers, dated July of the same year. The advertisement, reads, after a pious introduction laying stress on toleration:

With this view it hath been thought proper to erect a large Building for a Charity School for the instruction of Poor Children gratis in useful Literature and the Knowledge of the Christian Religion; and also for a House of Public Worship, the Houses in this place being insufficient to contain the great numbers who convene on such Occasions; and it being impracticable to meet in the open air at all times of the year, because of the inclemency of the weather. . . . The Building is actually begun . . . and the Foundation laid . . .<sup>1</sup>

The names of those in charge of the plan soon appear and should be commemorated. They are our first Trustees. In ac-

<sup>1</sup> Those who are interested in historical analogies may be struck with the parallel between these events and a similar series of occurrences that took place in Bohemia three hundred and fifty years before. Just as this hall providing for Whitefield's preaching was put up by a group of citizens in Philadelphia in 1740, so the "Bethlehem Chapel" was built at the expense of two city merchants of Prague in the year 1391 as a place for public preaching in the native language. It was independent of the cathedral and the parish churches of the city, just as this was independent of the denominational churches of Philadelphia. Here John Huss and a series of revivalist clergymen preached for twenty years till their teachings were condemned as heretical, along with the preachers themselves, at the Council of Constance in 1414.

cordance with the legal practice of the time there were two groups of Trustees. The first group, of four, were the holders of the land and building. They were, as has been said, mostly very plain men. They were Edmund Wooley, carpenter, John Coats, brickmaker, John Howell, weaver, and William Price, carpenter. The second group, of nine, known as "Trustees for Uses," were responsible for seeing that the objects of the trust were carried out. They were of somewhat higher social position. They were Whitefield himself, William Seward, his English traveling companion, John Benezet, Robert Eastburn, and James Read, all Philadelphia merchants, Samuel Hazard and John Noble, merchants of New York, Edward Evans, a shoemaker, and Charles Brockden, a well-known Philadelphia conveyancer to whom Franklin often refers. This was an entirely non-sectarian group, though as a matter of fact five of the thirteen were Moravians, a denomination which had recently been making many converts. They were evidently religious men, for the children in the school are to be trained in Christian doctrine, the ministers who preach in the hall must be "sound in principle and acquainted with experimental religion in their hearts"; and the whole project is repeatedly described as a pious work.<sup>1</sup>

At Fourth and Arch streets was a tract of land, bought in 1703 from Penn's land commissioners by John Chandler. It was at that time bordered on the south and west by open lots. It had been inherited from Chandler by his daughter Mary, wife of Jonathan Price, a carpenter; both she and her husband became interested in the plan for putting up a building for a school and for popular preaching; and from them the four Trustees who were to hold the property obtained in 1740 a portion of this ground fronting on Fourth Street and extending back, approxi-

<sup>1</sup> Franklin's statement in the latter part of his *Autobiography*, written more than forty years later, that "if the Mufti of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach Mohammedanism to us he would find a pulpit at his service" is an exaggeration due to an old man's lapse of memory. None but orthodox Christian clergymen could preach in the building. Franklin was no doubt confused by his strong impression of the non-sectarian character of the trust. Nor does there seem to be any basis for his statement that he was himself elected one of the Trustees. The list is given in various contemporary records but nowhere includes his name.



mately 250 feet, to Christ Church burial ground. The land was obtained by the Trustees at no initial cost, but it was burdened, like so much property in Philadelphia, with a ground rent—in this case £15 a year. Some money was collected, building, as already noted, was begun early in 1740, and by November of that year when Whitefield returned to the city, foundations had been laid for a structure of ambitious size, one hundred feet by seventy, larger than any building then in the city, and the walls had been raised shoulder high. Shift was made for a floor and seats, and he preached in the still roofless building to crowded congregations every day of his stay. Renewed efforts were made for subscriptions, and another year found the "New Building," as it continued long to be called, roofed and completed. Whitefield preached there at each subsequent visit, as in 1745, when at the height of his popularity he was met outside the city and conducted into town by fifty men on horseback. More than a hundred years later, in 1855, some religious people still called it "Whitefield Chapel."

The New Building became one of the show places of Philadelphia; it appears conspicuously in at least one contemporary plan of the city and is frequently mentioned. A Presbyterian clergyman in June 1741 baptized there eight persons "who had been of the people called Quakers." A young diplomat from Maryland passing through Philadelphia in 1744, as secretary of a commission on its way to make a treaty with the Indians at Lancaster, records in his diary that he visited it on a Sunday afternoon and heard the preacher, "a disciple of the Great Whitefield . . . split his text . . . turn up his eyes" and "cuff his cushions" as well as his master could have done. In 1745 some mischief-makers broke into the building and damaged the pulpit, cushions, and benches. It is mentioned by the Swedish botanist Kalm on his visit in 1747. We hear of its being used for other than its originally intended purposes; when late in the year 1747 an "association" was being formed for the military defense of the city, a meeting was held there which Franklin addressed, and there were laid out for signature blank forms of agreements to serve. The group of dissident Presbyterians who had formed a congregation under

Gilbert Tennent in 1743 but had no place of worship of their own provided the major portion of the funds for its completion and regularly used it for their services.

Its educational use, however, lagged. Whitefield, as one of the appointed Trustees for Uses, at first took his share of responsibility seriously. On November 20, 1740, writing from Salem, New Jersey, to a New York friend as he was about to start for Georgia, he described with enthusiasm the New Building in which he had just been preaching, and declared his intention of seeking a suitable master and mistress for the Charity School.<sup>1</sup> But constantly "evangelizing," and involved in religious disputes in England and America, he took no steps toward the organization of the school. Three of the Trustees died within the next few years. The Moravians, who were so largely represented among its sponsors, seem to have found other interests. In 1741 the Moravian leader, Count Zinzendorf, arrived in Philadelphia and played a part among the German-speaking people not dissimilar to that of Whitefield among the English. A year later, under his influence, and doubtless largely by his means, a Moravian church building was erected in Race Street only a block or two from the New Building, and soon afterward a school was opened there. There is abundant evidence also that the tide of religious excitement was receding, and it may have carried with it the pious interest in the education of the poor. It is possible that the original non-sectarian subscribers were annoyed at the regular use of the building by Gilbert Tennent's Presbyterian congregation; a visitor in 1747 speaks of it as their meeting-house. Whatever the cause, the years passed and the primary purpose for which the New Building had been erected remained unfulfilled. There was as yet no school. There were unpaid bills as well as unfulfilled engagements.

When the group of Trustees for Uses who were legally responsible for carrying out the object of the trust had taken no action for seven years, the two surviving members of the group named to acquire and hold the land and building, with a number of the original subscribers, laid before the Provincial Assembly a petition calling attention to the failure to establish the school.

<sup>1</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Dec. 4, 1740.

They asked the Assembly to require the Trustees either themselves to pay outstanding bills and refund subscriptions or to allow the sale of the building and the land on which it stood for these purposes. This petition twice was laid on the table and then the matter was postponed to the next session. Two of the Trustees for Uses, Brockden and Read, then replied that they intended to lay before the Assembly a full defense for their acts, but asked delay on account of the absence of some of their number from the province; action was again postponed. The explanation of the Trustees, which would have been so helpful to the historian, was never made, and two years later, July 6, 1749, Franklin wrote to Whitefield that the affair of the building was still *in statu quo*.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE ACADEMY

However, this ninth year of delay was to prove the last. A sudden opportunity for escape from their difficulties now presented itself to the Trustees. A group of men of position and wealth offered to buy the New Building, to pay all outstanding debts, and to agree to carry out the trusts incumbent upon it. These men had a new plan, largely inspired by Franklin, to meet the long-standing need of Philadelphia for an institution of higher learning, and they required a building in which it could be established.

Thus Franklin steps on the stage to assume in the eyes of posterity the rôle of principal founder of the University. The term "founder," notwithstanding its increasing use in modern times, is not a well-chosen one. There were no individual "founders" of colonial colleges; neither Benjamin Franklin nor John Harvard nor Elihu Yale were in the modern sense founders of the institutions with whose early careers they are so closely associated. No one of them gave any substantial amount of money. Only men with the great fortunes of modern times have been individual founders of American colleges and universities. Great as was the rôle of Franklin in the development of the in-

<sup>1</sup> Votes of the Assembly, IV, 55, 56, 59, 62; A. H. Smyth, *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, N.Y., 1905-7, II, 377.

stitution about to take shape, it was not that of a founder in a financial sense. He gave it his services and a moderate subscription, but no endowment; nor was its curriculum his, but rather a compromise with the ideas of others in which his were original but persistently subordinated to theirs. A generation afterwards the Trustees of 1779 defined the term and claimed the title of "Founders" for their predecessors. "Twenty-four gentlemen of Philadelphia voluntarily united themselves as Founders."<sup>1</sup> It would be fairer to say that Academy, College, University, grew up in response to community needs, of which Franklin was the spokesman. It was a product of its native soil; it was a legitimate child of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, although its claims to inheritance, to responsibility, and to trust have been through all its history but inadequately acknowledged.

Yet during the next eight years, from 1749 to 1757, when he left for his first prolonged stay abroad, Franklin's hand was felt on the young institution at every turn. He was already in a certain sense the leading citizen of Philadelphia; we have his own assurance of it, although if William Allen, Tench Francis, Richard Peters, and certain other citizens had written autobiographies, he would perhaps not seem to occupy a position so nearly unique. The long public career which was to raise him to national and international eminence was in 1749 still ahead of him, but in his own city he had become well-to-do, the successful publisher of a newspaper and of the most popular of all almanacs, had been more than once elected Grand Master of the Philadelphia Lodge of Freemasons, was a pewholder in Christ Church, Deputy Postmaster of Philadelphia, a common councilman of the city, and Clerk of the Provincial Assembly of which he was next year to become a member. He had already begun that series of observations in the new and popular field of electricity that was to bring him into the notice of the whole intellectual world. He touched the life of his city at a score of points. No doubt or question of his essential greatness can diminish the impressiveness of that series of civic improvements of which he had already sown the seed, or of the course of political beneficence on

<sup>1</sup> Report of Trustees of the College, Academy and Charity School of Philadelphia to the State Legislature, 1779, Minutes of Board of Trustees, Vol. II, p. 122.

which he was about to enter. After the experience with the little group of plain but book-loving and discussion-loving companions that made up his Junto, he had brought about the establishment of the first colonial subscription library and the first American learned society. He aided Philadelphia physicians in the establishment of the first hospital in the province. He was now about to exercise his organizing genius upon education.

Just what were Franklin's ideas with respect to education it is hard to discover, for those he had formulated in 1743 he had not published, those in the *Proposals* of 1749 were a compromise between his own and those of others. As he tells us in regard to the proposed curriculum, "Mr. Allen, Mr. Francis, Mr. Peters and some other persons of wealth and learning whose subscriptions and countenances we should need, being of the opinion that it should include the learned languages I submitted my judgment to theirs." His *Account of the Academy* laid before City Council in 1750, and his *Idea of the English School* published in 1751, had the same practical object. His views expressed in his *Observations* forty years later bear the evident marks of bitterness and conflict. His main ideas are, however, pretty clear. He would have had an education utilitarian rather than cultural, entirely in the English language, though following the best models in that language, devoting much attention to training in thought and expression. It should include mathematics, geography, history, logic, and natural and moral philosophy. It should be an education for citizenship, and should lead to mercantile and civic success and usefulness. It is unfortunate that it was never tried.

As a matter of fact it was not the educational ideals of Franklin so much as his energy, originality, astuteness, and civic influence that gave him leadership in the advanced step in education that was now about to be made. Franklin was no dogmatist and, reluctant as he may have been to give up some of his ideas, after consultation with some of his friends and accepting their advice, he printed his well known pamphlet *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*, sending it gratis along with his newspaper to all his subscribers. In accordance with his usual method of striking while the iron was hot, immediately

after the circulation of the *Proposals*, subscriptions were asked for among the more influential and well-to-do men of the community. Some fifty or more citizens pledged larger or smaller amounts and for longer or shorter periods. Franklin and Tench Francis, Attorney-General of the province, were appointed by these contributors to draw up a set of "Constitutions for a Public Academy in the City of Philadelphia," and twenty-four of the largest subscribers agreed to serve as Trustees for the proposed foundation. These Trustees met November 13, 1749, signed the "Constitutions" laid before them by Franklin and Francis, elected Franklin their president, and another of their number, William Coleman, treasurer.

They were a strikingly different group from the Trustees of the New Building. They were the most prominent men in the city—"the principal Gentlemen in the Province," as Franklin describes them. The names of more than half of them are followed by the title "Esquire" which, in the practice of the time, indicated the holding of some provincial or city office, prominent legal standing or, occasionally, merely social distinction. Eight of this body were notably wealthy merchants, four were prominent physicians, several were or had been judges, and most of them were also members of the Provincial Assembly or City Council. The only two who were in any sense artisans were Franklin who, with the pride of the self-made man, signed himself "Printer," and Philip Syng, "Silversmith." Syng was an artist in his craft, a scientific observer, member of the Junto, and director of the Library, a man of good social standing, and a vestryman of Christ Church. Franklin's old associates of the Junto, or such of them as had risen in the world, were largely represented, along with vestrymen of Christ Church and Masons, all of whom were wealthy and prominent. For better or for worse this close connection of the institution with the old aristocracy of Philadelphia was destined to continue through the greater part of two centuries.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Constitutions the Trustees were to be an unpaid body, self-perpetuating, electing their own officers, meet-

<sup>1</sup> For biographies of the early Trustees see T. H. Montgomery, *A History of the University of Pennsylvania*, Phila., 1900, pp. 53-108.

ing monthly or oftener, collecting and spending funds, "contracting" with masters and appointing tutors, deciding what subjects should be taught and to a considerable extent the methods of teaching. They were to set the rates for tuition and "No scholar shall be admitted or taught within the Academy, without the consent of the major part of the Trustees in writing, signed with their names"; a provision soon abandoned.

Franklin's influence must have been subordinated, as it was in the framing of the original proposals, to that of his classically trained colleagues, for in the first paragraph of the Constitutions the school is described as "An Academy for Teaching the Latin and Greek languages," with the teaching of "the English Tongue grammatically and as a language" given second place, and the mother tongue generally relegated to a subordinate position. Moreover the master who is to teach Latin and Greek is to be the "Rector" of the Academy, with oversight of all teaching, to have a salary twice that of the English master, and to have the assistance of a tutor when teaching more than twenty students, while the English master is to teach up to forty without assistance. Apart from these discrepancies the position of the English master, due perhaps to Franklin's insistence, is an honorable and important one—an innovation in formal education. History, geography, mathematics, and rhetoric are to be taught by each of the masters to his own group of students. Except for the variety of subjects mentioned and the inclusion of English, albeit somewhat hesitantly, as an academic subject, the plan of studies hardly differed from that prevailing at the time in the Latin schools of Europe and New England.

Curiously enough the powers in England seem to have agreed with Franklin in his preference for English over the classics. Thomas Penn in a letter to Governor Hamilton, dated February 12, 1750, when he must have just received the *Proposals*, says:

Your proposal for the education of youth is much more extensive than ever I designed, and I think more so than the circumstances of the Province require. The best of our people must be men of business which I do not think very great public schools or universities render youth fit for. . . . I find people here think we go too fast

with regard to the matter and it gives an opportunity to those fools who are always telling their fears that the Colonies will set up for themselves.

There was little mention of religion in either the *Proposals* or the Constitutions. It was understood that there should be no sectarianism; it was claimed that the Trustees were selected "without regard to difference of religious persuasion," although three-fourths of them were Episcopalians, several of them vestrymen of Christ Church. Two were Quakers, one a prominent Presbyterian. The original selection was doubtless made on grounds of wealth, liberality, and social influence, the preponderance of Anglicans merely reflecting their predominance among the wealthy classes. Nevertheless this Anglican tinge colored the institution during the whole colonial period.

It was anticipated that the Trustees would visit the institution frequently "to encourage and countenance the youth, countenance and assist the Masters," that they would "look on the students as in some measure their own children, treat them with familiarity and affection," and when they completed their studies and were ready to go out into the world would "make all the interest that can be made to promote and establish them, whether in business, offices, marriages, or any other thing for their advantage, preferably to all other persons whatsoever, even of equal merit." These would be no unimportant services when offered by the most influential men of the city.

The ideal in the minds of the Founders was, evidently, of a group of interested and self-sacrificing Trustees, exercising their proposed educational functions through teachers and students under their constant and detailed management, much as they carried on their business affairs. The profits were to be the material, intellectual, and moral benefit of the students which would in turn enhance the prosperity and good order of the community. The practical advantages of preparing young men for local magistracies and "the poorer sort" for country school teaching, and the enrichment of Philadelphia by drawing from neighboring provinces students "who must spend considerable sums among us in payment for their lodging, diet, apparel, etc." were



dilated upon in a memorial drawn up by Franklin and laid before City Council the next year.

The *Proposals* and the Constitutions were something new, not only in Philadelphia but in all higher education. Educational institutions had in the past been established by groups of masters or of students for the mere love of learning, as were the medieval universities, or by religious societies for training their ministers or educating the young within their own fold, or by sovereigns to increase their prestige. The Philadelphia Academy was different from all these. It was established by a "voluntary society of founders," as they long afterward called themselves, for purely secular and civic purposes, without the support of any religious body or the patronage of any person or government. It was to owe its continuous existence to a self-perpetuating Board of Trustees carrying out these purposes with such constancy and wisdom as they should prove to possess. It was an experiment that might or might not succeed.

It had several doubtful factors. The close, continuous, and exclusive control exercised by the body of twenty-four Trustees made all its affairs, legal and educational, dependent on their sole judgment. One hundred and sixty-six years after their organization one of the Trustees could still say, "We are answerable only to our own sense of duty and responsibility. No one has the right to question us"; and another, when asked about a matter that had aroused public interest, could ask in turn, "Why should we explain?"

The requirement of frequent meetings and detailed oversight made it necessary, as indeed was recognized in the Constitutions, that the Trustees should be chosen from Philadelphia; and the provision for filling their own vacancies made it practically certain that they would, as in fact they did, continue to draw their members from among the prominent men of the city and of their own class, often of their own families, foregoing such vivifying influence and support as might come from drawing on other regions and other classes in the community. Except for a short period after the Revolution, until very recent times through all its history the Academy and its successors have had the advan-

tages and the disadvantages of control by a Board of Trustees of individual ability, eminence, and social position, but drawn from a narrow geographical radius and a closed social circle. This form of organization under a minutely governing body of Trustees under its own presiding officer deprived the Academy and College and later the University of the effective activity of that typical American administrator, the college president. Not until the present generation has the institution had, at first in power, later in name, a president.

The term "Academy" was applied to the new institution both in the *Proposals* and the Constitutions, though Franklin had always spoken of the desirability of founding a college, and, as an ultimate plan, that was probably in the minds of all participants in its establishment. As a matter of fact the names of institutions of learning were not clearly differentiated on the continent of Europe, in England, or in the colonies. Eton and Winchester, Exeter and Balliol, were alike "colleges," though the former were detached high schools, the latter parts of a university. Some further descriptive term—"school or college" as at Harvard, "collegiate school" as at Yale, "seminary of learning" as at Princeton—was necessary to indicate the higher grade of studies. The Philadelphia institution was, however, in its first two or three years only an Academy.

The Trustees had to find for their Academy a local habitation as well as a name. Franklin's idea of placing it in some village in the country, where there would be fields and a river and abundant room for the students' exercise, was abandoned, even by him, when it was realized how inconvenient such a location would be for the visits it was anticipated would be made by Trustees engaged daily in city affairs. At their first meeting two possible sites in the city suggested themselves for consideration; one was a lot on Sixth Street, opposite the State House Square.<sup>1</sup> It was offered without cost by its owner, James Logan, himself a Trustee. It was next to the building housing his library, the use of which had been already offered in the *Proposals* to the masters and scholars of the Academy. But a still better proposal was made.

<sup>1</sup> It is the lot on which now stands the building of the Curtis Publishing Company.

This was for the purchase of the New Building, standing unused save for occasional religious services, and already dedicated to educational uses. A committee was appointed to negotiate with its Trustees, and at their second meeting, on December 26, 1749, the Trustees of the Academy had before them an offer for its sale.

The great parchment deed, with all its seals and signatures intact, that lies among the University archives bears witness to their acceptance of the offer. February 1, 1750, a joint meeting of the seven surviving Trustees of the 1740 trust and twenty-one of the Trustees of the Academy was held in Mrs. Roberts' Coffee House, and all present signed this deed transferring the possessions and the duties of the old Trustees to the new. It must have been a picturesque gathering; the carpenter, the brickmaker, blacksmith, and cordwainer who were relinquishing their ownership and responsibilities discussing terms with the distinguished gentlemen who were assuming them; men who still talked of "soundness in the faith" in the spirit of Whitefield, treating with deists and sophisticated men of the world. The Trustees of the Academy paid £775. 16s. 1¾d. in full, in satisfaction of all outstanding financial claims against the building, which Franklin described to a friend as less than half what it cost. More than half of this went to the group of Presbyterian contributors who had been responsible for the completion of the New Building in 1750; £100 was for the repayment of an old loan, more than £100 was arrears of quit rents owed to the original owners of the property; a number of smaller sums were due to lesser creditors; there were even some mechanics' liens only now satisfied.

In taking over the trusts associated with the purchase of the building the Trustees of the Academy were accepting religious requirements and implications of which they had thought little. From the time of Whitefield, stress had been laid upon the pious character of the old foundation. It will be remembered that it was for instructing poor children "in useful literature and the knowledge of the Christian religion," and for "a House of Publick Worship" for preaching by such Protestant ministers as were "sound in doctrine, acquainted with the religion of the heart." The equality of all denominations in its use was one of its fundamental requirements. All of the "good and pious uses originally

intended" were insisted upon by the old Trustees and were repeated in great detail in the deed of sale. Indeed, with a curious intrusion of religious requirements into a civil transaction, the beliefs that must be held by the ministers appointed to preach in the building were incorporated in the deed. They constituted a long and detailed creed, bringing in much astonishing theology but closing on the more moderate note of assent to the ninth, thirteenth, and seventeenth articles of the Church of England, "as explained by the Calvinists in their literal and grammatical sense, without any equivocation whatsoever." It may be suspected that of the various clergymen who have been invited or allowed to preach in the building few if any have read this cryptic statement of belief.

This was not the formal religion of 1749, but the warmer and earlier piety of the Great Awakening. Nevertheless of all the religious requirements of this document only one survived to later times; this was the freedom of the institution from control by any one religious body, the tradition that among its Trustees no denomination should predominate. This was common to both periods and to both groups. It was a tolerant age.

To provide immediate payment for the building the Trustees borrowed £800 from the managers of the provincial lottery then in progress, giving their personal bonds for repayment of the loan. The financial scene at the beginning was fairer than it became later. There was general approval of the foundation of the Academy. The original subscriptions of the twenty-four Trustees and the forty or fifty general subscribers amounted to about £700 a year for three or four years. In 1750 the City Council, liberally inclined toward the Trustees of the Academy, since the two bodies were interlocking directorates, gave £200 for alteration of the New Building to serve its new uses, and £50 a year each to the Charity School and the Academy, for the next five years, with reservation of the right to send each year one scholar from the Charity School to the Academy to be educated gratis—our first free scholarship. Mayor Lawrence, with the approval of the City Council, contributed £100 of his salary for the year 1750 to the Academy instead of giving the usual mayor's

entertainment. A London banking firm made the Academy a present of £100 sterling.

On these funds there were of course many demands. The New Building was rapidly but at considerable expense transformed for its new uses. Most of the year 1750 was used in these alterations made under the charge of a committee of the Trustees, of which, as was inevitable, Franklin was the most active member. The treasurer's accounts are burdened with payments for bricks, lumber, plaster, wages, and such familiarly recurring items of that day as "drink for the brick-layers, 2s. 3d.," "laborers for drink 5 shillings," "carpenters for drink 7s," "provisions at raising of the belfry £4. 8s. 2d." all of which doubtless helped to get the work completed within a year from the purchase of the building. More ground was gradually bought, adjacent to the first tract, until the Academy had at Fourth and Arch streets an adequate setting which will be described in detail later.

It remained to find teachers and students and books. This was largely achieved within the same year, 1750. With an appropriation of £100 sterling, some books and equipment were secured from London. The hand of Franklin is probably recognizable in the spending of more than one half the sums for "mathematical and philosophical" apparatus. Masters were recruited, mostly among school teachers in and around Philadelphia. The Rector sat through August at the post office to receive applications for admission. We hear that boys are enrolling daily, and in the middle of September Franklin writes to a friend that the Academy has more than a hundred students. The four earliest pupils enrolled seem to have been two nephews of Rev. Richard Peters, George Lea, and John Potts.<sup>1</sup>

On December 18, 1750, the Trustees gave notice that the classes would be opened January 7, 1751. On that day with great ceremony they walked in procession, the Governor of the province at their head, the six blocks from his house on Market Street to the reconstructed New Building, where before a

<sup>1</sup> It may be remarked, parenthetically, that this John Potts, son of a Chester County ironmaster, was the great-granduncle of the present writer, who entered Pennsylvania 130 years later.

crowded audience one of their number, Rev. Richard Peters, preached a commemoration sermon. This historical address was afterwards published, and has since served historians as a principal source of information concerning the early institution.

The classrooms were not quite ready, so the boys met for a few weeks or possibly months in a warehouse belonging to William Allen, at Second and Arch streets. Not long after the opening we know from the treasurer's records that 145 pupils had been enrolled and had paid their fees.

The agreement with the old Trustees to open the long delayed Free School weighed on the minds of the Trustees. Apart from the trust incumbent on them, they, like many other citizens of Philadelphia, shared the general eighteenth-century concern for the education of the lower classes. This was reflected in the statement of many of the old creditors of the New Building that they willingly remitted or reduced their claims in consideration of its approaching use for that purpose. It was indicated also by the generous collections after sermons delivered at various times by Mr. Peters and Mr. Whitefield for the same object; these amounted altogether to some £300. Therefore in September 1751, ten years after it had been first proposed and four months after the opening of the Academy, the Free School was inaugurated in the building originally planned for it. It was now, however, but the stepchild in the family, although its few and scattered records show that it filled from the beginning quite as great a demand as the Academy itself. It began with twenty boys; a year later the number admitted was sixty. Its master was a George Price, who unfortunately had to be removed three years later because of his "intemperate drinking of strong liquors" and his "unjustified severity to the children"; he was aided by a tutor. The Trustees obtained much popular credit for the establishment of this philanthropy. In the fall of 1753 a Mrs. Frances Holwell, keeper of a dame school for little children in the city, was engaged to take charge of thirty girls, somewhat later of fifty, with an assistant to teach them reading, sewing, and knitting. They were established in one of the upper rooms of what was now known as the Academy Building, and an appropriation of

£3 was made to buy books, canvas, and "cruels," doubtless that they might work samplers like their well-to-do sisters.<sup>1</sup>

The Academy was now fully organized and in running order, with the provisions of the Constitutions and of the earlier trusts being carried out. To give the institutions recognition and permanency a charter from the Proprietaries seemed proper. Steps toward this were taken by the appointment of Attorney-General Francis by the Trustees at their meeting of June 9, 1752, to draw up a form of charter to be sent to England to obtain official approbation. Consent was readily given by Thomas and Richard Penn, the Proprietaries, along with a donation of £500 to show their interest in the project. The ordinary delays of ocean travel and official procrastination postponed the completion of the negotiation to the next year. In April 1753, however, word came through Secretary Peters that the Penns had ordered the signature of the Charter. In July the Trustees in a body went to the Governor's house and received at his hands and with his congratulations the engrossed Charter and the warrant for attachment of the provincial seal and registry at the Rolls Office. The Charter was made out to "The Trustees of the Academy and Charitable School in the Province of Pennsylvania." This recognition of the Academy from the source of authority was considered a great event in its history and called forth a series of four declamations delivered at the Academy by four boys of the Latin School—Francis Hopkinson, John Morris, Josiah Martin, and William Mather. The drafts of these speeches, rather remarkable, if somewhat stilted, productions for boys of fourteen to sixteen years of age, were duly sent to England and in turn were brought back to this country along with other Penn papers and are now in the Pennsylvania Historical Society library. On one of them is the suggestive endorsement, "Neither masters nor any other person that we know of gave any assistance."<sup>2</sup>

The Academy once instituted might be used for various purposes. It might serve as a training school for the schoolmasters

<sup>1</sup> Treasurer's Reports; Trustees' Minutes; *Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 19, 1753, Oct. 18, 1754.

<sup>2</sup> Two of them are printed in T. H. Montgomery, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

to be established by the British Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge among the Germans on the Pennsylvania frontier. It was in fact so used to train Samuel Magaw for his position in Lancaster. When the granting of degrees was authorized, there was a proposition, in 1755, to "ingraft a seminary upon the Philadelphia College" by which half a dozen or more students should be maintained there, at the same time reading divinity under the minister of the First Presbyterian Church in the city, till they took their degrees, and thus avoid being subjected to the objectionable influence of the "New Lights" who controlled the "seminary called Jersey College."

The most picturesque of the early recruits for the varied population of the new Philadelphia institution were some Indian boys. Two of them, Mohawks, known under their English names as Jonathan and Philip, sons of Jonathan Gayienquitigoa, were sent down to Philadelphia in the spring of 1755 by Conrad Weiser at the request of their father to be taught to read and write English. They were at the Academy for two years and had acquired at least that much of an English education when unfortunately in the fall of 1756, during an epidemic of smallpox, the older, Jonathan, died. John Montour, son of Andrew Montour, scion of the notable half-breed family of Montours so famous as interpreters in the colonial Indian history of Pennsylvania, was a student at the English school of the Academy in 1756 and 1757. The Montour children were in Philadelphia as wards of Governor Morris.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE COLLEGE

The Governor's mansion played a large part in the life of the young institution: there was one more step to be taken of which it was to be the scene. To the modest powers of the Academy under the Constitutions and the Charter of 1753 was to be added the right to give the usual collegiate and honorary degrees. Franklin had spoken of his plans for "an academy or college," and anticipated the Academy soon becoming "a regular college."<sup>2</sup> In

<sup>1</sup> *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, VII, 454.

<sup>2</sup> Franklin to Dr. Johnson, August 9, 1750.



the deed of 1750 the old Trustees, in turning over their building and trusts to the new, authorized them to use the building for a "college or academy" as well as for the free school. The studies that usually led to the grant of a degree had already within the first two or three years of its existence been introduced into the Academy. It was only the dread of expense and perhaps some fear of the disapproval of the Proprietor that held back the Trustees from asking an extension of their charter and undertaking a more ambitious plan of education. The taking of this next step was largely due to the appearance of a new and vigorous figure in Philadelphia.

Among the many instances of Franklin's influence on the Academy and the College, and indeed on the city and state, there were few more pregnant than his introduction into that society of Dr. William Smith. There were unquestionably times afterward when he came to doubt his own astuteness in having done so. When William Smith entered on the scene, however, in 1753, he seemed a man after Franklin's own heart. He was a young Scotchman, twenty-five years of age, of remarkable vigor of mind, positiveness of opinion, and fertility of production. In his long life there was scarcely a subject with which he came in contact on which he did not write a pamphlet or a letter, or deliver an address or a sermon, or produce a poem. He was born in or near Aberdeen, was educated in one of the good primary schools of Scotland, and studied, but apparently was not graduated, at the University of Aberdeen, which, however, subsequently gave him the honorary degree that led to his always being spoken of as Doctor Smith. He was in 1750 tutor to the two sons of a gentleman in London, and in 1751 came with this family to the vicinity of New York, where his active mind drew him immediately into the ecclesiastical and educational disputes that then enlivened that city.

He must have seen Franklin's *Proposals* of 1749 and *Idea of the English School* of 1751, and have known something of the foundation of the Academy, for in a pamphlet published in 1752 he speaks of the "neighboring colleges of New England and Pennsylvania." Later in the same year he threw his own ideas on education into the form of a description of a supposititious academy,

which he called the *College of Mirania*. In this he refers to Franklin's *Idea of the English School* as a model for the more utilitarian section of his proposed college. It was doubtless through this essay, a copy of which he sent to Franklin, that the two men were brought together. There was another opportunity for personal contact when in the next year Smith brought his two charges, the sons of Mr. Martin, to Philadelphia to enter them in the Academy. He was complimented on this visit by the recitation of a poem of his by one of the students, and returned the compliment some months later by publishing a poem "On Visiting the Academy of Philadelphia, June 1753." In it he appeals to the college in New York which was to become Columbia, then just struggling into existence, to rival the Philadelphia institution:

For can I celebrate such wisdom here  
 O much loved York, nor drop a duteous tear?  
 Rise, nobly rise! Dispute the prize with those  
 as Athens, rivaling Lacedaemon, rose.

. . . . .

This nobler strife, ye nobler sisters feed!  
 Be yours the contest in each worthy deed!

He prepared also, as a memorial of his visit, a little tract, *Prayers for the Use of the Philadelphia Academy*, which was published by Franklin later in the same year.

In the meantime a series of letters exchanged between him and Franklin made clear their mutual desire that he should be attached in some way to the new Academy. Franklin had long held the belief, notwithstanding the close control of the Trustees, that a strong personality should be placed at the head of the Academy, at least on its teaching side. This was evident from his proffer of a directing position to Mr. Peters in 1743, and from his long but futile correspondence with Dr. Johnson of Connecticut in 1750 and 1751 in an effort to secure him as the first Rector of the Academy. William Smith was just such a man as he had in mind, well educated, vigorous, interested in education and himself anxious for a connection with the Philadelphia institution. Franklin therefore used all his influence with the Trustees to secure his service, assuring them that "a good teacher of the higher branches

of learning would draw enough new scholars to the Academy to pay a great part, if not the whole of his salary." Even the hard sense of Franklin held the delusion that higher education would pay its own way.<sup>1</sup>

So in May 1754 the Trustees boldly engaged William Smith as an additional master to teach "Logick, Rhetorick, Ethicks and Natural Philosophy." His appointment was at first "upon trial" and without agreement as to salary, but was soon made definite and his salary established at £200 per year, in addition to a grant of £50 a year made by the Proprietaries. Their suspicions of the ambitious young institution had been allayed. They were led to believe, justifiably as it proved, that the appointment of Dr. Smith would favor their interests in the colony; so they had responded favorably to the appeal of the Trustees for financial help in adding these courses in the higher branches of the arts and sciences to its offerings. The new appointee came to Philadelphia and entered in his diary, "25 May, 1754, commenced teaching in the Philosophy class, also Ethics and Rhetoric to the advanced pupils. I have two classes—a Senior and a Junior one." It was the beginning of a career of fifty years of teaching these subjects and seemed to him a justification of the advancement of the Academy to college grade.

This step came six months later when Smith and the Rector laid before the Trustees a recommendation that the Charter should be so amended as to authorize the grant of the usual college degrees. Negotiations during the next few months led not merely to an amendment, but to the drawing up of an entirely new though frequently called an "additional" or "supplementary" Charter. In June 1755 there was again a procession of the Trustees to the Governor's mansion, this time accompanied by the Provost and Vice-Provost, as under the new Charter they were to be called, and the delivery to them of a formal document incorporating "The Trustees of the College, Academy and Charitable School of Philadelphia in the Province of Pennsylvania." The newspapers promptly reported that a "College in the most extensive sense of the word is erected in this city and added to that collection of Schools formerly called the Academy," and a

<sup>1</sup> Franklin to Smith, Nov., 27, 1753.

printed form of the "Additional Charter" soon appeared from the press of Franklin and Hall.

From the verbiage and repetitions of this document emerge five points: the appointment of a Provost teaching the philosophic branches and having general oversight of the students, and of a Vice-Provost who is to be head of the Latin School and also Rector of the Academy; the application of the higher title of "Professor" to all the old masters; the organization of a "Faculty" with at least some unity and influence; the grant of power to the Trustees, acting through the Provost or Vice-Provost, to admit students in the College and Academy and other persons to any degrees to which persons are usually admitted in either or any of the universities or colleges in Great Britain; and lastly the requirement, destined to make trouble later, that the Provost, Vice-Provost, Trustees, and professors must take the oaths of supremacy and allegiance to the British Crown.

One is struck by the adoption of the title "Provost" for the head of the College. The term was not used elsewhere in America, nor in Scotland, from which Smith came, at least in any educational sense, though it was the traditional title for heads of certain colleges at Oxford and in Ireland. The most likely explanation is that it was borrowed from Smith's *General Idea of the College of Mirania*, where it is used rather casually of the "head, whom they call Provost or Principal."<sup>1</sup> "President" was already appropriated to the head of the Board of Trustees, whose supremacy under their organization the Trustees might not wish to depreciate, and "Rector," familiar in early academic use, was attributed to the head of the Academy. Whatever the source of the title, the choice of William Smith to bear it was a critical decision. His prominence made it familiar, and gave it a distinction which it has never since lost.

The immediate effect of obtaining the new charter with the new name and the new powers it conveyed seems to have been a sense of exaltation, for almost immediately £500 was expended in rearranging the upper hall for the better accommodation of audiences of distinction; and £150 was appropriated for pur-

<sup>1</sup> This is the form in the first edition. In later editions, after Smith had himself become a Provost, the term was omitted from *Mirania*.

chase of apparatus for exhibiting experiments in natural philosophy.

The successive steps of fifteen formative years had now been taken: first had appeared the Trustees of 1740, with their New Building, their unrecorded acts and their unfulfilled trust; then the transfer of the building and the trust to the Trustees of 1749, and the inauguration, in 1751, of the Academy and the long-delayed Free School. In 1753 had come the grant of the first Proprietary charter, and now, under the second charter, in 1755, the fully organized College with its two dependencies, the Academy and the Charity School, fared forth through twenty-five distinguished years, till, like a ship under full sail, the Colonial institution grounded on the military and political shoals of the Revolution.

Before, however, entering upon a description of this period of the University's history, it seems proper to discuss the question of the date of its origin.

#### THE DATE OF ORIGIN

Chronology is one of the primitive interests of mankind; men dearly love dates. Yet there is probably no more inexact science. History is full of dates which have been assigned only to be first accepted, then disputed, reasserted, corrected, and finally abandoned. In fact there are many well-known events that can never be unequivocally dated. The year or day may be only approximate, or the testimony for it may be indecisive, or it may be one of several equally defensible dates, or it may be mythical altogether. Even those which are most familiar are sometimes ambiguous. The discovery of America may be attributed to Leif Ericson in 985 or to Columbus in 1492. American textbooks close our colonial period with July 4, 1776, when we asserted our independence, while English textbooks close it with 1783, when Great Britain acknowledged it. A.U.C., the year of the foundation of Rome, has been abandoned by modern scholars altogether.

There is always something conventional about an early date, however widely it may be accepted. It is like the source of a river.

A choice may be made, as we approach its headwaters, among a number of affluents. One may have a somewhat greater volume, another may flow more nearly in the direction of its later course, another may be actually longer; or it may rise in a lake which has equally contributory streams.

It is the same with the origin of universities. The dates given for the foundation of Oxford, Paris, Bologna, or Salamanca are notoriously traditional only. Harvard celebrated in 1936 with dignity and propriety her three-hundredth birthday, commemorating the year in which the Massachusetts General Court resolved that it would give, a year later, in 1637, £200 toward a "School or College," and another £200 when the work of establishing it should be completed. The legislative act of 1636 was what the most recent historian of Harvard aptly describes as "the first official and recorded step toward the establishment of the earliest collegiate foundation in the English colonies." But it was, as he observes, only a step. It was not till two years later that the alterations in an old dwelling house were made that gave the College a place in which to offer its earliest and soon interrupted courses, and the death of John Harvard gave it its first bequest and its name. Continuous teaching did not begin till four years later, and its charter was not given till 1650. The foundation of Harvard was evidently a progressive operation. William and Mary, duly chartered by the Crown in 1693, and claiming that as her date of origin, has an academic tradition that extends back to the grant of land for a "seminary of learning" by the Virginia Company in 1619; and still more specifically to 1660, when a similar grant for a "college" was made by the Provincial Assembly though not acted on till the later date.

As to Yale, although it was in 1701, the year usually given as that of her foundation, that the act of the Assembly of Connecticut incorporating it as a "Collegiate School" and authorizing it to give licenses which were equivalent to degrees was passed, its peripatetic and divided life for some years, successively at Branford and Saybrook, and separately at Wethersfield, before settling down in New Haven in 1716, might seem to require the choice of a later date. On the other hand the tentative steps toward the organization of a Connecticut college, taken long be-

fore, might justify an earlier one. The same is true of Princeton, on whose first charter, that of 1746, her official date of origin, a cloud has always rested since it was never recorded and no one knows its exact wording, though presumably it gave all the rights she claims. She also sojourned in Elizabeth and Newark before she settled in her permanent abiding place and justified her modern name. On the other hand an early historian of that institution, going further back, says "The College of New Jersey traces its origin to the great schism in the Presbyterian Church in America, which took place in 1741."<sup>1</sup> Indeed the history of the "Log College" and the long-discussed plans for the establishment of a Presbyterian college in New Jersey have been suggested, not without propriety, as reasons for a still earlier date. The discovery recently of documents which carry the history of the University of Delaware continuously back through the Academy in Newark to Alison's Academy in 1743, have led to the adoption of that as its date of origin by the modern institution. The incorporation, October 31, 1754, of King's College seems to give an unusually clear-cut date for the origin of what we now know as Columbia University, and with that date, with a modesty not always characteristic of the city of its location, it has always been satisfied, though a board of trustees to administer its affairs had been created three years earlier, in 1751, and certain land in the city had long been set apart for a future college. On the other hand it had no building of its own till 1760. The accepted date of origin in each of these cases is a sufficiently well-chosen one, which there is no occasion to criticize. But the fact remains that in each case the accepted date is a conventional one only, and another might have been settled upon instead. All that historical accuracy can demand—or indeed achieve—is that the reason for the choice shall be made clear.

There are six years, 1740, 1743, 1749, 1751, 1753, and 1755, for any one of which a case might be made out as the proper "date of origin" of the University of Pennsylvania. The significance of each has appeared in the narrative as given in the preceding pages. It will have been noted that 1740 is the date of the creation

<sup>1</sup> *Historical Sketch of the College of New Jersey*, anonymous, published Phila., 1859.

of the earliest of the many educational trusts the University has taken upon itself during the two hundred years of its life. It might be considered a lawyer's date; it is a familiar legal practice in considering the date of any institution to seek out the oldest trust it administers. As a matter of fact it was a learned judge who was the special proponent of the adoption of this date. The year 1743, when Franklin first drew up his plans for a college would have a stronger claim if he had only published the plan.

The year 1749 was the year of organization of the present Board of Trustees. On November 13 of that year the earliest entry was made in that long series of minutes which in its twenty-three portly volumes brings the record of administration down to the present day. It would, if chosen, be a secretary's date; in his opinion the life of an organization is to be found in the record of the actions of its administrators.

January 1751 instruction actually began. For the first time teacher and pupil faced each other as they were to do in due succession for the next two centuries. This would be a pedagogue's date; if the Faculty had been consulted on the matter this might have been the date officially chosen. To them it is teaching that makes the University.

The years 1753 and 1755 are the dates of the two successive Proprietary charters. By the first the Trustees were incorporated and given financial and administrative powers; by the second their educational powers were extended to the grant of academic degrees. These gave social standing and legal rights, prestige, and the full title the institution was to hold through the colonial period, "The College, Academy and Charitable School of Philadelphia in the Province of Pennsylvania." But the charters, from an educational point of view, regularized and legalized the existing activities of the institution; they did not initiate them. The year of the grant of either of the charters would be a formal rather than a realistic date. The year of the charter of an educational institution is apt to be the least significant of its early dates.

The official choice among these dates was not actually made at Pennsylvania till more than a hundred years after the latest of



them. As a matter of fact the origin of an institution seldom becomes a matter of interest till a certain stage of antiquity has been reached and a natural pride in its survival adds warmth to the cold records of chronology. Then someone remembers that the nation or the city or the society or the institution is half a century or a century or two or three centuries, or, in Italy or in China, a thousand years old, and an anniversary is celebrated accordingly. It is necessary therefore to anticipate our narrative in order to make clear the reason for the choice.

The question did not come up for any definitive discussion or official decision until 1885.<sup>1</sup> It was possibly suggested at that time by the Centennial Exposition of 1876, the precursor of so many centennial celebrations. In the University Catalogue for 1885-86 and continuously afterward for some years appeared a short "Historical Sketch."<sup>2</sup> In this much stress was laid on the part taken by Franklin in plans for higher education in Philadelphia and in the organization of the Board of Trustees of the Academy in 1749, with the intimation that this year was the proper date of origin.

In the fall of 1889, however, in a volume entitled *Benjamin Franklin and the University of Pennsylvania*, published by the United States Commissioner of Education in succession to a similar volume, *Thomas Jefferson and the University of Virginia*, the view was expressed that the date should rather be 1740, when the trust for a free school, afterward carried out by the Trustees of the Academy and College, was created and the building which became its first home was erected. The author of this historical sketch in this volume remarks of the free school: "This may be said to be the beginning of the University of Pennsylvania." For the next ten years, till the final authoritative decision of the Board of Trustees in 1899, the date of the foundation of the University was under general discussion. Professor McMaster gave the weight of his historical knowledge and critical judgment to the view that the continuity of the free school trust

<sup>1</sup> The Alumni Society, formed in 1835, unfamiliar with the early history of the College, held a "centennial" celebration in 1849.

<sup>2</sup> This was prepared presumably by Jesse Y. Burk, then Secretary of the University.

through all subsequent changes "carries back the foundation of the institution now called the University to 1740."<sup>1</sup> The Provost accepted these statements and obtained the approval of the Board of Trustees for the publication of Professor Thorpe's volume, practically pledging them to that date. The historical sketch in the Catalogue for 1893-94, and subsequently, was changed so as to subordinate the 1749 date and to give prominence to that of 1740.<sup>2</sup>

The matter was brought to a head by the proposal in May 1899 to adopt a new seal for the University on which the date of its origin should be placed. A decision could be postponed no longer. Judge Pennypacker, a member of the Board of Trustees, was thereupon asked to make a formal report on the subject. He was a specialist in the early history of Pennsylvania, a collector of rare books and pamphlets in that field, and a robust Pennsylvanian in his general attitude. June 5, 1899, he read a carefully prepared "brief," as he called it, before a committee of the Board of Trustees, consisting of Charles C. Harrison, then Provost, the Bishop of Pennsylvania, a distinguished Philadelphia lawyer, and two prominent business men. In this formal argument Judge Pennypacker laid stress on the fact that the exact form of words used to create the free school trust in 1740, "For the Instruction of Poor Children Gratis in Useful Literature and Knowledge of the Christian Religion," was used in the deed by which the Trustees of that school transferred their trust in 1749 to the Trustees of the Academy who finally fulfilled the duties their predecessors had failed to carry out. The same formula with but slight change of wording was used in the charters of 1753 and 1755 and in later acts of 1779, 1789, and 1791, showing that the trust had been a continuous one from 1740 to the date of the presentation of his

<sup>1</sup> The compiler of *Benjamin Franklin and the University of Pennsylvania* was Professor Francis N. Thorpe, a new and active member of the Faculty; and the writer of the historical sketch was John L. Stewart, a recent graduate. The correspondence on this matter is in the archives of the University.

<sup>2</sup> Late in 1898 a committee of the Society of the Alumni proposed to the Board of Trustees the celebration of the next year, 1899, as the sesquicentennial of the University, which would of course have involved the acceptance of the year 1749 as the foundation date. December 6, 1898, the Trustees resolved, as was obvious, that in the remaining few months there would not be time to prepare such a celebration, but that they would take up anew in a special meeting the question of the date.

argument. He quoted various contemporary writings indicating that the Charity School, the Academy, and the College were popularly looked upon as a single institution, the roots of which extended back into the free school, and gave his unqualified opinion that 1740 should be recognized as the date of origin.<sup>1</sup>

The next day, June 6, 1899, the committee reported to the Board favorably on that date and the Board resolved that "the date of foundation heretofore affirmed, A.D. 1740, as that of this University is shown to be warranted," thus settling the matter, so far as official action could settle it. The new seal with that date upon it was thereupon approved, and thereafter it was used on official documents and publications until 1933, when in the interest of simplicity the date was omitted from the seal then adopted. The reader may draw his own conclusion as to the propriety of this choice among the possible dates of origin from the events of these early years as they have been told. Like all such choices it must be a conventional one; but apart from legal continuity, a choice that reflects so clearly the intellectual and philanthropic aspirations of the time will on further study probably not be considered inappropriate for the beginning of a great educational institution.

The fact that this date places Pennsylvania earlier in accepted origin than either of its two nearest compeers—Princeton, which has settled on 1746 as its foundation date, and Columbia, which has chosen 1754—has doubtless been a satisfaction to Pennsylvanians who, like all who live in a young country, are avid for antiquity and, like all who are nearly on an equality, are jealous of precedence. But in the eyes of the historian, searching for fundamental causes, these questions of a few years of priority or posteriority are somewhat irrelevant. Historians generally have little interest in beginnings, which they know to be usually only stages in growth. What is of real significance is that these three neighboring institutions, which were to grow to great universities in later times, came into existence to all intents and purposes simultaneously. There must have been in these middle years of the eighteenth century in this region some general cause especially conducive to bringing higher educational institutions to

<sup>1</sup> Report of the Provost, 1898-1899, pp. 209-23; also separately published.

the birth. There were also special conditions which characterized each. So far as the School, Academy, and College which were to become the University of Pennsylvania were concerned, this formative influence was without doubt the growing size, wealth, and intellectual ambition of the city in which it was so modestly established. This will come out even more clearly as its position in the life of colonial Philadelphia is described.