

LANCASTER COUNTY MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

By William Frederic Worner.

In 1727 or 28, when Benjamin Franklin was about twenty-two years of age, he influenced a number of well-informed men in Philadelphia to unite with him in forming a club to be named the "Junto." He states that the object of the club was, "to improve our understandings." Its debates were to be conducted in the spirit of earnest inquiry after truth, without fondness for dispute or undue desire for victory. The Junto, which met every Friday evening was limited to twelve members. The American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, organized for the purpose of "promoting useful knowledge," is the direct descendant of the Junto, and continues the Friday evening meetings.

As the population in the colonies increased, Franklin felt the need of a society of larger scope and usefulness than the Junto. In 1743, he issued a circular entitled, "A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge Among the British Plantations in America." This proposal recites that "The first drudgery of settling new colonies, which confines the attention of people to mere necessities, is now pretty well over; and there are many in every province in circumstances that set them at ease and afford leisure to cultivate the finer arts and improve the common stock of knowledge." For this, and other reasons, Franklin urged "That a society be formed of virtuoso, or ingenious men, residing in the several colonies, to be called the American Philosophical Society, who are to maintain a constant correspondence. That Philadelphia, being the city nearest the center of the continent colonies, communicating with all of them northward and southward by post, and with all the islands by sea, and having the advantage of a good growing library, be the center of the Society."

In the spring of 1744, Franklin, who held the office of secretary, wrote a letter to the governor of New York, Cadwallader Colden, in which he informed him that the American Philosophical Society had actually been formed and that several meetings had been held, "to mutual satisfaction." He also gave a list of the members of the organization.

Dr. J. G. Rosengarten, in a brief sketch of this organization, states:

"Thus was launched the first scientific society in the new world. It led a struggling life, the detail of which we do not fully know, as the early records appear not to have been preserved, but from indirect evidence there is reason to believe that in the later fifties the society passed into a condition of suspended animation, to revive and flourish at a later period with greater vigor than it had previously possessed."

About ten years before the outbreak of the American Revolution, the Province of Pennsylvania was divided into two great parties. The Proprietary party was led by James Hamilton. To it belonged the wealthiest and most influential men,—such as the Allens, the Shippens, and all who were considered "the aristocracy of the country." The officers of the government also belonged to it. Such was the constituency of the party of the proprietaries, who were struggling to preserve their feudal sovereignty, which they were in danger of losing. They had governed with too autocratic a hand, and the king had been petitioned to make Pennsylvania a royal government.

The other was the Popular party, which was opposed to the policies of the Proprietary party. The leader of the Popular party was Benjamin Franklin, then in England on public business, who had a strong influence in the province.

It was about this time that the American Philosophical society was revived by the members of the Proprietary party, and they concentrated their energies upon it. In the years 1767 and 1768, it received as members many men of high

rank and talent. James Hamilton was elected president; and John Penn, the Proprietor, agreed to serve as patron.

The revival of the American Philosophical Society by the Proprietary party, inspired Franklin's friends to reorganize the Junto. In December, 1766, it determined to extend its scope; to admit non-residents; and to change its name to the more ambitious title of "The American Society held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge." Franklin was elected president. The new organization added many men of note from other provinces, in addition to the Philadelphia members of the original Junto.

The year 1768 opened with the two societies zealously engaged, in the same city and in the same pursuits, with a considerable number of members belonging to both societies. It was inevitable that the advisability of union should strongly commend itself to the good sense of the members of each. It took the whole year to elaborate the details, which was done with much formality and necessitated considerable diplomacy; but, finally, on December 20th, terms were agreed upon by both societies in session at the same time.

On the evening of the 2nd of January, 1769, the united society, under the title by which it is still known, "The American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge," held its first meeting and its first election of officers. The election of a president led to a lively contest. The candidates were Benjamin Franklin, president of the American society, who was, and had been for some time, abroad on public business, and who was identified with the Popular party in politics; and ex-Governor James Hamilton, president of the Philosophical society and a leader of the Proprietary party.

Of 124 members, 89 voted. Dr. Franklin was chosen the first president of the conjoined society and held the office, by successive re-elections, until his death in 1790.

The history of the American Philosophical Society shows that since the days of Franklin, Rittenhouse and Jefferson, it has elected as members leaders of science and letters, both in American and in foreign countries, and its roster contains the names of representative men down to the present day. The society has always maintained a deep and patriotic interest in political events. Membership in this organization is a coveted privilege and is regarded as being one of the greatest honors that can be conferred in America upon a scientist.

The foregoing information is interesting and instructive, and serves as a fitting introductory to the main object of this paper, which is to show the interest many intelligent people of Lancaster county manifested in the origin and development of the American Philosophical Society.

Reference has been made to the two rival organizations located in Philadelphia at the same time,—the American Philosophical Society, and the American Society held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge. It may be of interest to learn that an inhabitant of Lancaster county, James Wright, of Columbia, had the unique distinction of being a member of both organizations. On the 8th of April, 1768, he was elected a member of the American Society held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge; and on May 18th of the same year, he was admitted to membership in the American Philosophical Society.

The following is a list of members of the American Philosophical Society from Lancaster county, with the dates on which they were elected. All were not born in Lancaster county; some lived here for a short time only. At one time or another, however, they were closely associated with this county and had their residence here during some portion of their lives. For this reason we lay claim to them.

Name

Elected

1.	William Henry	March 27th, 1767
2.	Thomas Mifflin	January 19th, 1768
3.	Rev. Thomas Barton	March 8th, 1768
4.	Edward Shippen	March 8th, 1768
5.	James Webb	April 8th, 1768
6.	Rev. Peter Miller (Brother Jabez)	April 8th, 1768
7.	James Wright	April 8th, 1768—May 18th, 1768
8.	Benjamin West	June 10th, 1768
9.	Rev. George Duffield, D. D.	April 16th, 1779
10.	Timothy Matlack	January 21st, 1780
11.	Rev. Just Henry Christian Helmuth, D. D.	January 16th, 1784
12.	Rev. Gotthilf Henry Ernest Muhlenberg, D. D.	January 21st, 1785
13.	Rev. Samuel Stanhope Smith, D. D., LL. D.	January 21st, 1785
14.	Andrew Ellicott	January 21st, 1785
15.	William Barton	January 19th, 1787
16.	Benjamin Smith Barton, M. D.	January 16th, 1789
17.	John W. Kittera	January 18th, 1793
18.	Rev. Frederick Valentine Melsheimer	January 16th, 1795
19.	David Ramsay, M. D.	October 21st, 1803
20.	Charles Smith	January 18th, 1805
21.	Robert Fulton	January 20th, 1809
22.	Redmond Conyngham	October 15th, 1819
23.	Langdon Cheves	January 19th, 1821
24.	Rev. John Plitt	January 17th, 1823
25.	Samuel S. Haldeman	April 19th, 1844
26.	James Buchanan	January 16th, 1846
27.	Rev. Thomas Conrad Porter, D. D., LL. D.	October 21st, 1864
28.	D. Hayes Agnew, M. D.	October 19th, 1872

Author: Worner, William Frederic.

Title: Lancaster County members of the American Philosophical Society / by William Frederic Worner.

Primary Material: Book

Subject(s): Franklin, Benjamin, 1706-1790.
American Philosophical Society.
Philosophy--Societies, etc.--Pennsylvania--Lancaster County.
Philosophy--Societies, etc.--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia.
Lancaster (Pa.)--History--18th century.

Publisher: Lancaster, Pa. : Lancaster County Historical Society, 1927

Description: 38-40 p. ; 23 cm.

Series: Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society ; v. 31, no. 3

Call Number: 974.9 L245 v.31

Location: LCHSJL -- Journal Article (reading room)

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