



Living in fear of the pale faced messenger : the private and public responses to yellow fever in Philadelphia, 1793-1799
by Anita Marie DeClue

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Art in History
Montana State University
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Abstract:

When yellow fever struck Philadelphia—the premier city of the New Republic— it was the political, cultural, economic, social, and medical capital of America. When the pale faced messenger unleashed itself, with unbelievable ferocity in 1793, this charming and prosperous nerve center of the nation almost crumpled under the weight. This thesis analyses how private citizens, physicians, and governments dealt with the overwhelming problems caused by the almost annual visitation of yellow jack to the Quaker City between 1793 and 1799.

While society practically disintegrated under that first ferocious onslaught, the great tradition of citizen involvement saved the city. While thousands fled, often leaving behind sick loved ones, a volunteer committee took over the administration of the city and a group of black Americans assisted, playing a key role in the recovery of the city. In subsequent epidemics, citizens continued to volunteer their services, but only in ancillary capacities.

Although the real source of yellow fever—the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito—remained unknown for another one hundred years, physicians argued vociferously over every aspect of the disease. The medical community split into two camps. One group believed in local generation, its noncontagious nature, and a direct-heroic intervention treatment approach. The other group believed it was imported, contagious, and supported gentle-natural healing methods.

Without a medical consensus, all levels of government responded to the crises by trying to address all possibilities, ultimately strengthening each one. The city councils decided to pipe in running water, while the state created a Board of Health, allocating greater powers to it after each epidemic. At the end of the decade, the national government passed Quarantine and Health Laws.

Philadelphians survived the epidemics and lived with its consequences. Both the state and federal administrations moved away. The epidemics also exacerbated antiurbanism sentiment. Seen as centers of corruption, filth, disease, and strange immigrants, many saw the epidemics as divinely inspired—cities were evil places. The epidemics also highlighted the problems of race in Philadelphia, as African Methodists risked their lives to nurse whites, though accused of depraved behavior.

The future of medicine became more specialized and hierarchical because of the epidemics, while the heroic depleting treatments of one group remained popular. They spread westward where patients were bled and purged for another half-century. Although yellow fever remained mysterious, by 1800, many physicians thought it was imported and quasi-contagious in nature. However, the infecting agent remained unknown.

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ABSTRACT

When yellow fever struck Philadelphia—the premier city of the New Republic—it was the political, cultural, economic, social, and medical capital of America. When the pale faced messenger unleashed itself, with unbelievable ferocity in 1793, this charming and prosperous nerve center of the nation almost crumpled under the weight. This thesis analyses how private citizens, physicians, and governments dealt with the overwhelming problems caused by the almost annual visitation of *yellow jack* to the Quaker City between 1793 and 1799.

While society practically disintegrated under that first ferocious onslaught, the great tradition of citizen involvement saved the city. While thousands fled, often leaving behind sick loved ones, a volunteer committee took over the administration of the city and a group of black Americans assisted, playing a key role in the recovery of the city. In subsequent epidemics, citizens continued to volunteer their services, but only in ancillary capacities.

Although the real source of yellow fever—the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito—remained unknown for another one hundred years, physicians argued vociferously over every aspect of the disease. The medical community split into two camps. One group believed in local generation, its noncontagious nature, and a direct-heroic intervention treatment approach. The other group believed it was imported, contagious, and supported gentle-natural healing methods.

Without a medical consensus, all levels of government responded to the crises by trying to address all possibilities, ultimately strengthening each one. The city councils decided to pipe in running water, while the state created a Board of Health, allocating greater powers to it after each epidemic. At the end of the decade, the national government passed Quarantine and Health Laws.

Philadelphians survived the epidemics and lived with its consequences. Both the state and federal administrations moved away. The epidemics also exacerbated anti-urbanism sentiment. Seen as centers of corruption, filth, disease, and strange immigrants, many saw the epidemics as divinely inspired—cities were evil places. The epidemics also highlighted the problems of race in Philadelphia, as African Methodists risked their lives to nurse whites, though accused of depraved behavior.

The future of medicine became more specialized and hierarchical because of the epidemics, while the heroic depleting treatments of one group remained popular. They spread westward where patients were bled and purged for another half-century. Although yellow fever remained mysterious, by 1800, many physicians thought it was imported and quasi-contagious in nature. However, the infecting agent remained unknown.

INTRODUCTION: TO MEET THIS "AWFUL SUMMONS"

*When last I view'd thy tow'ring spires
Fair Philadelphia thou wert gay,
Health's bloom which ev'ry swain admires,
Did all thy beauties well display.¹*

When yellow fever attacked Philadelphia in the 1790s, the suffering caused by this disease struck terror in both patient and family. When seized, patients complained of "violent pains in the head, loins, stomach, and abdomen, [along with] great oppression upon the præcordia, nausea and vomiting [of] porraceous matter." Many complained of being cold in their limbs, but suffered "a burning heat in the intestinal canal, followed with loss of strength." The tongue in advanced stages of the disease, as observed by Dr. Charles Coffin, "became thick, dusky, and often black in the middle." Although some patients kept the original color of their skin, Coffin found that most "generally became sallow and yellowish," while a few patients turned "an orange colour." He noticed dull eyes with a "yellowish and sometimes red" cast to them. Adding to the horror was the change in the appearance of both stools and urine. Stools turned more yellowish as the disease progressed. It then "generally changed to a bottle green, and sometimes to the colour and consistence of coffee grounds." Normally pale yellow urine was now "reddish and turbid, and sometimes, of a greasy frothy appearance." The pulse also changed as the disease progressed. At the onset, it was often "hard and full," but changed

¹ A Citizen, *Feyer; An Elegiac Poem* (Philadelphia: John Ormrod, 1799), p. 5.

to “small and weak, especially in the advance of the disease.” Even more puzzling for the doctors, “the crassamentum of the blood taken away was loose, and the serum very yellow.” Generally by the fourth day, “vomiting of black bilious matter, like coffee grounds, together with great soreness of stomach, restlessness, dejection, and delirium,” resulted in a painful and hideous death. Philadelphians never imagined that their city, the foremost metropolis in America, could suffer so much by the bite of *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes.²

The colony of Pennsylvania with its port and chief urban center, Philadelphia, prospered almost from the beginning due to the grand plans of its founder, William Penn. While Quakers found a safe haven there, Penn opened the colony to all religions, to all ethnic groups, and encouraged economic development and allowed for more democratic government than other colonies along the Atlantic seaboard. As the center for colony-wide revolutionary activities, Philadelphia became the temporary political capital during the revolution and then from 1790 to 1800. The city also functioned as the cultural, economic and social capital of the New Republic. When yellow fever unleashed itself on the city in 1793, this charming and prosperous nerve center of the nation almost crumpled under the weight.

² Charles Coffin, M.D., “An Account of the Pestilential Fever which prevailed in Newbury Port, State of Massachusetts, in 1796; in a Letter to Mr. [Elihu] Smith,” *The Medical Repository*, 1:4 (1798), pp. 505. The ghastly appearance and horrible pain experienced by sufferers made yellow fever one of the most feared diseases of the time. Unfortunately, no one knew the source of this disease until the turn of the 20th century. They discovered, as with malaria, yellow fever needed an insect vector. In this case, it was the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito.

Unlike a crowded Britain with its large, unhealthy, and densely populated cities, the United States owned huge tracts of land barely populated while her major cities, including Philadelphia, were only large towns in comparison. Thomas Jefferson wanted to keep it that way. He believed in minimizing urbanization by encouraging citizens to shun cities and become good republican yeoman farmers. Consequently, comparatively few people lived in even moderately sized urban centers. Philadelphian Ebenezer Hazard concurred after surviving yellow fever during the 1793 epidemic. In its early disorganized, terror-stricken phase, Hazard, secretary of the Insurance Company of North America and author of *Historical Collections* agreed with many who doubted the future of all large towns, including the Quaker City. According to Shryock, Hazard "wrote that the experience ought to check the 'prevailing taste for enlarging Philadelphia, and crowding so many human beings together on so small a part of the earth.' America, he added, should reject the 'fashions of the Old World in building great cities.'"³ Other Philadelphians agreed with him, at least temporarily.

The ferocity of that yellow fever epidemic caught Philadelphians, as well as most other Americans, completely off guard. The last outbreak experienced over 30 years before, meant very few Philadelphians remembered or were immune to its ravages. Therefore, the magnitude of the 1793 epidemic surpassed anything ever experienced by

³ Richard Harrison Shryock. *Medicine and Society in America: 1660-1860*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960) p. 95. Shryock quoting Hazard; J. H. Powell, *Bring Out Your Dead: The Great Plague of Yellow Fever in Philadelphia in 1793* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949) pp. 51-52 and Powell quoting Hazard 295-296.

the newly independent nation. Philadelphians, whether private citizens, physicians, or governmental officials, responded to this crisis with a range of behaviors. Everyone reacted differently when confronted by the "pale faced messenger" of death. Some individuals fled the city; others stayed to aid the sick and dying; some quietly resigned themselves to its embrace; others valiantly but feebly fought his advances.

This series of epidemics occurred at a time when an emerging French Republic clashed against the monarchies of Europe, sorely testing American loyalties, their notions of republicanism, and their optimism. While not as extreme as their European counterparts, the gulf between Federalism and Republicanism widened. Philadelphia, a Federalist city, was also the capital of Federalist presidents Washington and Adams. Their foreign policies neither supported France nor denounced England, despite the clamor of ardent republicans to declare war on George III again. They appeared to support the growing power of a few wealthy elite over the rest of society, a laissez-faire approach to business, and a nation where urban areas dominated their rural counterparts.

The growing power of the Democratic-Republicans, led by Jefferson, often linked Philadelphia and the other heavily Federalist cities along the eastern seaboard with disease and corruption. Their idea of a strong and worthy Republic meant leaving those tainted cities for the interior lands where they could become independent farmers. In 1800, removing the capital from a sickly Federalist stronghold like Philadelphia to a new governmental center on federal lands as planned ten years before, took place. However, after Napoleon overthrew the Directory and turned a defensive Republican France into an oppressive Imperial France, support and optimism waned, seriously dampening

republican zeal. Other than the Republic of Haiti, a Caribbean island inhabited by ex-slaves, America remained the only Republic on the planet.

This thesis analyzes how private citizens, physicians, and governments dealt with the overwhelming problems caused by the almost annual visitation of "yellow jack" to Philadelphia between 1793 and 1799. Since this thesis involves how Philadelphians responded to these epidemics, it would be helpful to use a behavioral pattern model to check their progress. In his recent dissertation on the 1793 epidemic, Arthur Thomas Robinson adopted one developed by Dr. Daniel Fox. This seven-stage model can evaluate how individuals and the different levels of government responded to each yellow fever epidemic. Briefly, the seven stages included 1) underestimation or outright denial; 2) acceptance and public hysteria; 3) flight of citizens from infected areas; 4) victim isolation and quarantine; 5) voluntary coalitions and associations emerge to deal with the overwhelming problems created by the epidemic; 6) a general shortage of medical personnel coupled with the inability of the recognized medical interests to break free from the past and create innovative ways to fight the disease; and 7) in the aftermath of death and destruction, the community initiates changes to help them cope with any future epidemics.⁴ By using the 1793 epidemic as a baseline, we can compare the responses of latter years.

The first chapter examines the history of Pennsylvania and its principal city, Philadelphia. Unlike some other colonies to the north and south, Pennsylvania

⁴ Arthur Thomas Robinson, "The Third Horseman of the Apocalypse: a Multi-Disciplinary Social History of the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Philadelphia" (Diss., Washington State University 1993. pp. 3-4).

blossomed and prospered almost immediately because of religious toleration, a relatively democratic tradition, acceptance of a diverse ethnic mix, availability of rich farmland, and its strategic economic position. William Penn's unusual belief of giving people the freedom of their conscience allowed inhabitants to see themselves as individuals. Non-Quakers flocked to the colony and, taking his lesson to heart, set up a government that slowly evolved into the most democratic colony in America. By accepting such a diverse group of people and their cultures, Philadelphia teemed with diversity. Farming the rich lands of the interior brought prosperity to hinterland farmers who grew the crops, and to the Philadelphia merchants who shipped them overseas. The Port of Philadelphia on the Delaware River became a major exchange point for goods moving inland, along the eastern seaboard, and over the Atlantic Ocean. Unlike Puritan New England or Anglican Virginia, Penn's Wood continued to prosper throughout the colonial and new nation eras, becoming the template for the newly emerging American society. Philadelphia, in turn, became the Principle City of America: a great intellectual, cultural, and political center.

Chapter two analyzes the responses of citizens, officials, and physicians to the overwhelming problems associated with that deadly 1793 epidemic. Being the first in the series, it produced some of the most bizarre behavior; notably described in Mathew Carey's *Account*. The social order in Philadelphia almost crumbled under the stress, as thousands fled, abandoning the sick, and leaving the poor to fend for themselves. With all levels of government dissolved due to both abandonment and death, the Mayor of Philadelphia, a Church group of free blacks, and a small group of mostly nonprofessional citizens prevented total dissolution. They steadily and resolutely brought the city back

from the brink of extinction. Even as the committee of volunteer citizens united themselves through their problem solving, the highly regarded physicians of the city angrily denounced each other, splitting themselves on three basic questions. One faction, led by Dr. Benjamin Rush, believed that yellow fever was highly contagious, locally generated, and cured only with depleting measures. The other group, championed by Dr. William Currie, insisted that "yellow jack" was contagious, but imported from the West Indies, and only cured with a supportive regimen. To a panicking populace, already driven by fear, these strident relationships among medical professionals proved detrimental in both the short and long term.

In the aftermath of so much death and destruction, the Committee resolutely wrapped up their business, and Philadelphians slowly picked up the broken pieces of their lives. The state legislature created a Board of Health and gave them far-reaching quarantine powers to stop the pestilence from entering the city in the future.

The third chapter explores the four-year period between the deadly 1793 epidemic and the equally lethal one that occurred in 1798. Philadelphia experienced sporadic cases of yellow fever in the first three years, and a less severe epidemic occurred in the last year. During these four years, citizens and the government went on the offensive, while physicians continued their arguments unabated.

Citizens monitored the progress of yellow fever through their extensive business correspondence, notifying officials and newspapers of any new outbreaks. When the scourge came too close to their city, citizen committees worked to keep it out. They also reminded each other of the poor sanitary conditions of their neighborhoods, and when

“yellow jack” reentered their city in 1797, individuals immediately offered assistance. Learning from that first frightful visitation, fewer citizens abandoned the sick or the poor. Instead, residents immediately formed committees to solicit and distribute money and supplies to those in need.

With the creation and constant expansion of the duties of the Board of Health, the government created an organization capable of dealing with yellow fever. In these early years, the Board concentrated on preventing the importation of the contagion through quarantine procedures. They did not abandon their responsibilities when the grim reaper appeared in 1797. Instead, their preparation and organization successfully prevented disaster. They operated two hospitals, opened a tent encampment, oversaw purification of ships and houses, continued communicating with other cities, and kept their office open and records in order.

Unlike the teamwork exhibited by volunteer citizen groups and the Health Office, Philadelphia’s physicians constantly argued among themselves, damaging their professional image and frustrating both the populace and the government. Rush and his followers clamored for better sanitation and continued touting their miracle cure. In opposition, the College worked within the system to effect change by strengthening the quarantine laws, encouraging immediate isolation of patients or neighborhoods where contagion existed, and campaigning for more physician involvement on the Board.

Providence provided Philadelphia with this four-year grace period. Although no one had the knowledge or the means to prevent another onslaught, when it came the following year, the Mayor did not have to resort to another citizen committee. Their

successes during the 1797 epidemic bolstered confidence in the ability of the Health Board and civic-minded residents to manage any emergency. The bridegroom of death soon challenged that confidence.

Chapter four probes Philadelphia's response to another massive onslaught by the legions of death. As in 1793, the summer of 1798 began with the arrival of large numbers of Santo Domingan refugees. Unknown to the inhabitants of the city, these refugees also brought yellow fever with them. Slowly, over the next month, cases of yellow fever increased, as did the rumors. When officially recognized by the Health Office, inhabitants of the city and suburbs had to choose whether to flee or stay and help their neighbors through the crisis. Thankfully, many tens of thousands immediately fled, not waiting for the contagion to invade their neighborhoods, thus eliminating vast numbers of potential victims. Fortunately, enough citizens remained willing to aid the sick and relieve those in need.

Initially, the organization surrounding the Board of Health managed to keep the situation from dissolving into chaos and terror. However, as the number of cases skyrocketed and the area of infection rapidly spread out in all directions from the neighborhoods bordering the wharves, they were soon overwhelmed. When the President of the Health Board requested assistance, Philadelphia's residents enthusiastically responded. Their responses ranged from donating money, clothing, and food, to managing tent encampments outside the city for the poor, from collecting and distributing aid, to managing the city jail. In this epidemic, the Board of Health members became the officers directing their citizen volunteer army of foot soldiers.

The physicians of Philadelphia, still helplessly split over the same three aspects of yellow fever, continued their wrangling even as they treated thousands suffering from yellow fever. With the recent creation of a rival medical society, the Academy of Medicine, Philadelphia's medical community seemed unable to resolve their differences or prevent that most dreadful of all diseases. Their inability to build consensus not only angered and frustrated both the inhabitants and elected officials, it seriously undermined the profession as a whole.

After this particularly deadly visitation of the grim reaper, the legislature reevaluated the existing health laws, replaced the defective sections, and passed a much more complicated and comprehensive law in their next session. To help prevent another disaster, citizens followed the lead of the legislators. They too went on the offensive by addressing, and then correcting, some of the poor sanitary conditions within the city. Later, their efforts came under the jurisdiction of an expanded Board of Health. The opinions of the College of Physicians continued to parallel closely those of the Health Board, though sanitation began drawing more attention and action. Despite the support of many in the community, one important group of residents began to question the necessity of such strict measures. In a city economically dominated by merchants and their interests, the new health laws substantially increased their costs and threatened to bring the port to a standstill when yellow fever appeared. Health officers might be reminded—gently or forcefully—to consider that before declaring an emergency in the future.

The fifth chapter focuses on the last and least deadly epidemic of the decade. In many ways, the horrible experiences of 1798 heavily influenced how everyone acted the following year. Citizens formed committees and tackled the long neglected work of cleaning up the city. The Legislature passed a comprehensive health law featuring strict quarantine procedures and rigid fines and punishments for offenders. While still feuding with each other, both medical organizations—College and Academy—worked diligently to turn their opinions concerning yellow fever into the one officially sanctioned by government. Both groups also continued lobbying for more representation on the Health Board itself. However, it was the ambiguous responses to yellow fever during the summer of 1799 that surprised and disheartened many residents.

Despite good leadership, the Board of Health appeared to put the economic interests of the city above the health and safety of the city's inhabitants. Without official Board responses to yellow fever rumors, residents relied on their networks of friends and family to determine the seriousness of this attack. When deemed too dangerous to remain, inhabitants fled in growing numbers throughout July and early August. The Health Office remained silent for as long as possible, even denying the presence of the angel of death to their counterparts in other cities, because quite unintentionally, the legislature created a crisis within the Board of Health and the Judiciary by making the newly revised health laws too rigid. Their mandatory quarantine, increased fees and fines, compulsory criminal prosecutions, and the threat of shutting down all mercantile business if a health emergency occurred, placed too much pressure on the Health Board. Consequently, they postponed action for weeks despite receiving reliable information

confirming the presence of yellow fever within their city. Withholding official recognition postponed any actions that might mitigate the suffering of victims, relieve those in need, or institute measures to prevent its spread.

By late August, concealment was impossible. The Board declared an emergency, instituted a strict quarantine, and ordered the isolation of infected neighborhoods, while still reminding their fellow residents that the death rates remained very low. Philadelphia shifted into disaster mode despite these assurances. Businesses closed, government offices moved, and thousands more citizens panicked and fled. The Board even refused to open the tent encampments, though they did operate the city hospital. Without some providential assistance, Philadelphia seemed destined to suffer another calamity.

The city received that aid in the form of a rainy and cold month of September. Although no one understood the true significance, everyone noticed that the epidemic did not explode and spread as in previous years. Mortality rates remained low because temperatures slowed mosquito reproduction and feeding, just as the rain helped shorten their lives. An abnormally early frost put an end to the real culprit allowing the city to rebound sooner than usual.

Chapter six explores the medical responses to the yellow fever epidemics. Without knowledge of the insect vector, the great medical debates created by the 1793 epidemic, and then fueled by each subsequent epidemic, damaged the reputation of Philadelphia's medical community while proving impossible to win. By presenting details about the true culprit, the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, the medical arguments on both sides make more sense. In the cases of origin and contagious nature, both factions were

partially correct. However, in the case of their opposing treatments, the insect vector information helped neither side. Without knowledge of viruses, the physicians who relied on the historical successes of their predecessors in the tropics chose the correct healing regimen. Those who ignored it sent countless patients to the next world.

The end of this chapter evaluates how well Philadelphians responded to the yellow fever crises using the Fox model. Besides assessing how Philadelphians responded to each catastrophe, it also addresses some of the political, cultural, and medical effects produced as a result of the epidemics.

CHAPTER ONE

“GREENE COUNTRY TOWNE” TO “ATHENS OF AMERICA”:
A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

*Our streets, the scene where bustling care
With greedy hand did grasp for gain,
And shunn'd with fear, and putrid air
Now rules, where folly held her reign.⁵*

The Founding of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia

On March 4, 1681, King Charles II gave William Penn a large tract of land in North America to organize a colony, which became the basis for the “American” model of future settlement. Pennsylvania, with its port and chief urban center, Philadelphia, was a relative newcomer compared to much older colonies to the north and south. As a leader of “The Society of Friends,” also known pejoratively as Quakers by the Anglicans, Penn established a safe haven for *all* religious dissenters. His “Holy Experiment” did not force a religiously homogenous society upon residents as had the Puritans in New England or the Anglicans in the tidewater South. Along with religious toleration, Penn encouraged a much broader basis for political participation by any religious or ethnic group. According to historians Craig W. Horle and Marianne S. Wokeck, “with this

⁵ A Citizen, *Fever; An Elegiac Poem*, p. 6.

tradition of toleration and its advantageous geographical position, Pennsylvania rapidly became the prototype of the fabled American melting pot—a society of great religious, ethnic, and economic diversity.”⁶ From England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and Western Europe, farmers, shopkeepers, and artisans—many with their families—began the long trek to Pennsylvania.

The resulting heterogeneous mix of religions, cultures, and occupations combined with a rich hinterland and protected port for Philadelphia, made the colony prosperous almost from the beginning. Unlike Massachusetts and Virginia, there was no “starving time” to slow economic growth in Pennsylvania. Generally peaceful relations with Native Americans permitted farmers rapidly to clear and till the rich soils to produce abundant foodstuffs; meanwhile, their urban counterparts settled into a variety of trades. Colonists used the many streams of Pennsylvania to generate power for mills; they began harvesting the products of the land. It also made Philadelphia, where trade drove the economy, a “mercantile capital, a strong regional market, [that developed] exceptionally diverse and sophisticated forms of production and of trade.”⁷ While Philadelphia took many years to become an important center of commerce, it did, according to Richard S. Dunn, “rapidly establish itself as the chief port of the Delaware River, serving as the commercial entrepôt for Pennsylvania, West New Jersey, and the three Lower Counties on the Delaware. The older [ports of] New Castle, Chester, and Burlington, became

⁶ Craig W. Horle, and Marianne S. Wokeck, Editors, *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania: A Biographical Dictionary, Volume One – 1682-1709* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

commercial satellites of Philadelphia.”⁸ Both the rural and urban population changed the environmental landscape. In the hinterlands, logging, plowing, raising domestic animals and establishing various types of mills all adversely affected the previous ecological balance. In Philadelphia, as in other urban sites, the waste products of humans, their animals, trades, manufacturing processes and ships generated pollution. The slow process of environmental decay could not dampen Penn as he encouraged Philadelphia’s commercial potential. He wanted his capital city to serve as the New World center for Quakers and, following the traditions of the “Friends,” the proprietor wished to make the political process less exclusive.

The Political Development of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia

Whether in Church or State, Quakers distrusted hierarchical structures. Their religious and political persecution in Britain resulted in a very anti-authoritarian colonial government. To protect Pennsylvanians from similar persecutions suffered by Quakers in England, Penn presented them with several constitutions. Markham’s Frame in 1696, and Charter of Privileges in 1701, gave the unicameral legislature and the council unprecedented freedom of action that eased the minds of many. However, it took very little time for the Legislature, dominated by wealthy Philadelphians, to take advantage of their granted freedoms. While Quakers were egalitarian within their religious

⁸ Mary Maples Dunn and Richard S. Dunn, “The Founding: 1681-1701,” In *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*. Ed. Russell F. Weigley (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), p.18.

framework—women preached—that liberality did not extend to complete political democracy. They still believed it was a gentleman's obligation, not the common man's duty, to serve in various capacities of government. In their initial disagreements with Penn, according to Horle and Wokeck, "their opposition to the short-sighted policies of the proprietors led them to espouse popular rights and interests" far more liberal than anything in Europe or America.⁹ However, once in power, this anti-proprietary party quickly moved to consolidate their hold on the government. From above, they curbed the influence of the proprietor through guaranteed rights. From below, they reduced the authority of the residents by placing new, more difficult voter qualifications.¹⁰

With the incorporation of Philadelphia in 1701 Penn gave Philadelphia very limited government. It consisted of three principal offices—mayor, recorder, sheriff—and a small group of aldermen and councilmen. This latter body, according to Sam Bass Warner, became "a club of wealthy merchants, without much purse, power, or popularity."¹¹ The result was a very weak, decentralized city government. The city practically had to run itself. When the corporation ignored serious problems like crime, street paving, or street lighting, either citizens worked together or the legislature acted to

⁹ Horle and Wokeck, p. 3. Wayland F. Dunaway, *A History of Pennsylvania*, 2nd ed. (New York: Prentice Hall, Inc. 1948), pp. 46-7. Markham's Frame gave the Assembly and the Council the right to initiate legislation, and granted the assembly the right to adjourn its own sessions. It limited the power of the governor by because he could not perform any public acts without the consent of the majority of the council. The Constitution of 1701 incorporated its more important features and satisfied the needs of Pennsylvanians so well, that it stayed intact until the end of the proprietorship in 1776 and the creation of a very liberal constitution.

¹⁰ Dunn and Dunn, p. 27. These tougher qualifications included a two years' residency requirement and a new £50 means test as a way to eliminate new immigrants and poorer men.

¹¹ Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), p. 9.

solve problems. The Assembly, having wrestled power away from the Penn family, often resorted to appointing commissions giving them authority to solve municipal problems. Eventually, Philadelphians learned to by-pass their city government and form citizen committees, to resolve many of their pressing problems. This system easily adapted to the needs for military preparedness when threatened by war and for grass roots political action needed during the Revolutionary War period.¹²

Despite these problems, rural and urban Pennsylvanians managed to secure unprecedented religious and political rights, as their society moved toward secularization and democratization. One German schoolteacher and organist who resided in Pennsylvania in the early 1750s reflected the dismay of many Europeans when confronted with the unprecedented freedoms accorded colonists. In his *Journey to Pennsylvania*, Gottlieb Mittleberger expressed shock over the extent of individual freedom that led to a leveling of the social order, primarily due to the available economic opportunities. "Everyone may engage in any commercial or speculative ventures, according to choice and ability. ... A lad learns his skill or craft ... [and then] he can pass for a master and may marry whenever he chooses." Moreover, farmers in the countryside expect to be treated as gentlemen, and everywhere, people shook hands as indication of their equality. Mittleberger also feared the dangerous trend toward religious tolerance and the growing numbers of nonbelievers. "There are several hundred unbaptized people who don't even wish to be baptized ... In the homes of such people are

¹² Both Warner and Dunn discuss how this helped Philadelphians prepare for revolution and other large projects like supplying their city with water from the Schuylkill River.

not to be found any devotional books, much less a Bible.”¹³ Trapped in the Age of Faith, this traditionally minded European could not make the transition, as Benjamin Franklin had, to the Age of Enlightenment that advocated new individual liberties.

To an already relatively free society King George’s War (1744-1748) followed by the Seven Years’ War (1755-1762), brought waves of change to Pennsylvania. While the French and Spanish did not attack Philadelphia during the King George’s War, it clearly showed the citizens that the pacifist Quaker dominated political system would do little to protect them. As Franklin recollected, when “our Governor Thomas [tried] to prevail with our Quaker Assembly to pass a Militia Law, and make other Provisions for the Security of the Province [proved] ... abortive, I determined to try what might be done by a voluntary Association.”¹⁴ While respecting the pacifist nature of Quakers, Franklin still reprimanded them for their obstinacy in protecting the city. He also scorned the wealthy non-Quakers for doing nothing about the threat. Franklin appealed to the middling sorts of the city to join the association for the protection of all. The lesson learned, according to Gary B. Nash, was when “the threat of cannonading by privateers had unified laboring people and given rise to a belief that when difficult work needed to be done, it was the tradesmen and mechanics who could best do it.”¹⁵ They would need their newfound

¹³ Gottlieb Mittleberger, *Journey to Pennsylvania*, Ed. and Trans. by Oscar Handlin and John Clive (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 41, 42, 48.

¹⁴ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Eds. Leonard W. Labaree, Ralph L. Ketcham, Helen C. Boatfield, and Helene H. Fineman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 182. French and Spanish privateers lurked off the Delaware cape, threatening the commercial life of Philadelphia. Franklin successfully appealed to the ordinary people of Philadelphia to protect the city by forming a voluntary militia.

¹⁵ Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 146.

collective strength when the colonies battled with France and England and with Native Americans over the future of North America less than a decade later.

The Seven Years' War created more problems for Quakers involved in public life, especially as non-Quaker populations soared and democratically minded interior colonists wanted more political power. Franklin, a member of the Quaker-dominated Assembly, frequently saw them struggle with their anti-war principles when voting for Crown requested appropriations.

Their gradual removal allowed others to become They were unwilling to offend Government on the one hand, by a direct Refusal, and their Friends ... on the other, by a Compliance contrary to their Principles. ... To avoid this kind of embarrassment the Quakers have of late Years been gradually declining the public Service in the Assembly and in the Magistracy. Chusing rather to quit their Power than their Principle.¹⁶

Their gradual removal allowed others to become involved in political life. Growing animosities between the Philadelphia oligarchy and the rest of the colony also created additional problems. The frontier colonists faced the threat of hostile Indian attacks while their under-representation in the Assembly prevented political action to protect them. This east/west divide pitted wealthy established Philadelphia Quakers who supported the status quo against struggling, less-established immigrant farmers who distrusted the existing political hierarchy.

The threat of a French attack from the Atlantic and an Indian invasion from the interior created a crisis for Philadelphians who wanted to protect their city. There were

¹⁶ Franklin, *Autobiography*. pp. 188-9, 191.

three factors, according to Theodore Thayer, which made the urban center vulnerable to any enemy. "First, her geographical location away from the sea gave her a false sense of security; second, Quaker principles impeded military preparedness; and third, money bills for defense were blocked in the legislature by a chronic deadlock between the Assembly and the proprietors over the power of the purse."¹⁷ Therefore, as they had done before so many times, Franklin and others simply went around the law – using lotteries to create funds, creating civilian soldiers, and making military preparations. Philadelphia survived the war years despite the inability of the city government to protect them *again*. These additional successes further encouraged citizens to form committees to address their problems. Among several important lessons learned, besides military preparedness and raising money, as Thayer argued was that this series of "crises solved by citizen initiative ultimately led to a more responsive governmental structure."¹⁸ The result: Quaker power declined while mechanic power rose. Philadelphians emerged from the war years with real leadership potential. They were measuring themselves in order, eventually, to wear the mantle of Premier City in North America.

When the interests of King George III and those of his American colonies collided after the war, Philadelphia was in the right place at the right time. Because of the war, colonists realized their collective strength and maturity along with a growing frustration with their inferior position within England's mercantile system. The

¹⁷ Theodore Thayer, "Town into City: 1746-1765," In *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*. ed. Russell F. Weigley (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), p. 103.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 108.

unwelcome imposition of a series of revenue raising laws coming on the heels of the postwar economic depression encouraged more colonists to think of severing ties with England.¹⁹ Philadelphia, according to historian Harry M. Tinkcom, with "its strategic location, wealth, industrial and commercial importance, large and cosmopolitan population, and professional and business classes combine[d] to make it after 1774 the hub of America's revolutionary activity."²⁰ Philadelphians, with Franklin's help and previous examples, also had a long history of organizing effectively and working together toward a common goal. The rising star of Philadelphia's mechanics soared as talk of treason caused the flight of many upper-class citizens from the political arena. The resulting democratization of government made it seem natural also for Penn's capital to become the unofficial political center for a people in rebellion.

Long before the Continental Congress met to deal with differences with King George III and his Parliament, Philadelphians had actively protested against English tyranny. However, as the political climate changed, the early leadership by the "upper sorts" stopped short of the goals demanded by the "middling" and "lower sorts." The wealthy merchants, professionals, and prosperous artisans ultimately had much to fear from radical political change and independence. "When the colony's leaders

¹⁹ Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible*. Nash discusses the dual crisis which occurred after the French and Indian War. As so often happens in wartime, a few at the top benefited from the miseries of the rest by amassing fortunes. Those underneath them, the middling and lower sorts, perceived the injustices and suffered acutely. Their increasing annoyance with colonial leaders fused with their equally mounting aggravation with England and her attempts to thwart economic development. That growing frustration erupted to the surface with the implementation of the Stamp Act in 1765.

²⁰ Harry M. Tinkcom, "The Revolutionary City: 1765-1783," In *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*. ed. Russell F. Weigley (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), p. 109.

demonstrated either that they were incapable of effectively directing the resistance movement or that they actually preferred British rule to the danger of political change orchestrated by poorer citizens," as indicated by historian Steve Rosswurm, "the middling sort broke with the better sort in 1769 and 1770."²¹ The growing numbers of politicized citizens among the 'lower sorts' caused the resistance movement in Pennsylvania to radicalize and polarize until even moderate leaders from among the middle sorts lost support. By the time Congress initiated the successful tactics of the past – non-importation, non-exportation, and non-consumption of English goods – forming and working with committees ruled the day in Pennsylvania. When Congress formally declared independence, the radical committees began to challenge the authority of the Assembly. Indeed, demands for change from below resulted in the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 being the most democratic state government in the newly formed United States of America. With war declared on England, the new government received a baptism by fire.

Their immediate task was to solve the perennial problems of no militia and no substantial fortifications; Philadelphia was as vulnerable now to British attack by land and water as it had been to previous French and Spanish attacks. The use of committees to run government and solve problems continued until a new Assembly met. Well before the invasion, Loyalists and others who disagreed with the new political attitudes fled the

²¹ Steve Rosswurm, "Equality and Justice – Philadelphia's Popular Revolution: 1775-1780," In *Life in Early Philadelphia: Documents from the Revolutionary and Early National Periods*. ed. Billy G. Smith (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), p. 247.

city. Immediately before the British invasion, Congress and many radicals also fled, taking with them everything that might aid the enemy. Once occupied by British troops, Loyalists returned to their city, celebrating the return of normalcy and the silencing of those newly empowered radicals. Because of over ten years of politicization, the divisions among Philadelphia's citizens went deep with seemingly no middle ground available.

Upon the reoccupation of Philadelphia in the summer of 1778, radicals and conservatives renewed their quarrels despite having a common enemy, the Tories. When one unofficial group of radicals sought to punish Philadelphians who sided with the British, some of the prominent conservative leaders of the city refused to join them. Even without their help, this extralegal group helped bring Tories to trial. "During the autumn the grand jury drew up forty-five bills charging treason, of which twenty-three cases came to trial. Only two persons received the death penalty ... for openly aiding the British [and] were executed on November 4."²² It seemed that for the time being, Philadelphia's radicals still ruled the day and many in the returning Congress supported the Tory prosecutions.

Over the next decade political power slowly shifted back toward the center. Without a war or revolution, "there set in a political reaction which overthrew the [radicals] and placed moderate[s] in power."²³ Moderates, under the leadership of John

²² Tinkcom, "The Revolutionary City," p. 145.

²³ Dunaway, p. 186.

Dickinson, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Mifflin, as Presidents of Pennsylvania tightened voter requirements, supported the Federal Constitution, and eventually orchestrated the rewriting of the Pennsylvania State Constitution in 1790. The move towards conservatism in Philadelphia did not happen in a vacuum. It swept across the new Republic displacing the radicals and their revolutionary ideals. In less than a decade, the very ideals and tactics used to create a new nation, became unacceptable and unpopular to a majority of its citizens. By slowly gaining power, those supporters of the United States Constitution, or "Federalists," got control of the Assembly and voted to call a constitutional convention. "The convention completed its work on February 6, 1790, and took a recess of several months to give people time to consider the new constitution. ... On September 2, [it became] the organic law of the commonwealth." Thomas Mifflin, the president under the old constitution, won election as the first Governor of the State of Pennsylvania.²⁴

Philadelphia, a Federalist city, now campaigned to bring the national capital back from New York, to their city, where they believed it belonged. Many Philadelphians, including Benjamin Rush, tried to use their influence with old friends to get the capital moved back. Rush, both a staunch Republican and abolitionist, wrote to John Adams and discussed his fears. Richard G. Miller explained one side of his rationale. Rush "wanted to see it returned at once to prevent 'the seat of government [moving] to a more southern ... and less republican state' in the future." Although Philadelphia failed to become the permanent capital of the new nation, it did receive the honor of acting as temporary host

²⁴ Dunaway, pp. 186-193. Quote p. 192.

until the construction of a permanent capital along the Potomac River, in Virginia took place. For the last decade of the eighteenth century, Philadelphia was, "the largest, wealthiest, and most centrally located city in the Union."²⁵

When yellow fever first struck Philadelphia during the summer of 1793, Washington was in his second term as president and the French Revolution resulted in the creation of another Republic. Many Philadelphia republicans clamored for pro-French policies, with some ready for another war with George III. Although Washington wanted to maintain a neutral position, two members of his cabinet felt differently. Thomas Jefferson was decidedly supportive of the early, less radical aspects of the French Revolution, while Alexander Hamilton, had very strong aristocratic leanings. In 1793, when the French government sent an impetuous young man as their ambassador, trouble brewed in a hot and drought-stricken Philadelphia. As Miller observed, "Citizen Edmond Genêt tried to push American sympathies for fellow republicans farther than they would go." He enlisted American seamen to crew French privateers, and established "French maritime prize courts within the United States." He was finally recalled when "his patent contempt for American sovereignty drew a rebuke from the president."²⁶ In the midst of a diplomatic battle over foreign policy, yellow fever broke out and replaced a political crisis with a health-related one.

²⁵ Richard G. Miller, "The Federal City: 1783-1800," In *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*. ed. Russell F. Weigley (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), p. 169.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

The Economic Development of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia

As one wag observed, the Quakers came to America to do good, but instead they did well. Just as the Puritans in New England, subsequent generations of Quakers in Penn's Wood—free from religious persecution—became very interested in gathering earthly riches. As Sam Bass Warner observed, “the Quakers of Pennsylvania [also] proved unable to sustain the primacy of religion against the solvents of cheap land and private opportunity.” Their very goal of separation of church and state led almost immediately into what Warner coined privatism.²⁷ While modest opportunities for wealth existed in the countryside through farming, land speculation, and small enterprises like milling, Philadelphia was the place to be to build a family empire. Philadelphia's mostly Quaker business elite took advantage of the economic climate and became, through their worldwide connections with other Quakers, merchant princes.

Taking advantage of a rich hinterland and Philadelphia's geographic location, merchants developed import and export businesses. They typically exported mostly raw

²⁷ Warner, pp. 3-5. Warner believed he could trace the uniqueness of American cities to this concept of privatism. He broke it down into three areas. He believed that psychological privatism meant that individuals seek happiness in personal independence and their search for wealth. Warner's social privatism consisted of being loyal to your family first and this will be the basic unit of society. Groups of individual moneymaking families then make up a community. Finally, in political privatism the community would keep the peace between families and try to create a setting conducive to moneymaking opportunities. While it was possible to make money on the huge tracts of available land in Pennsylvania, the While there was money to be made on the vast stretches of open land in Pennsylvania, the potential for substantial riches could only be obtained in urban centers like Philadelphia. In the absence of industrial profits, revenue could only be produced from the total work of a town – wages, rents, real estate markets, produced goods, and trade coming and going through the city.

materials from the interior—timber, furs, and especially wheat. Later, they added flour and products from newly developing local manufacturers like iron and barrel staves.

They generally imported wine, sugar, rum, and British manufactured items. Like other specie-poor colonies, Philadelphians could not afford to deal solely with England.

Instead, they fulfilled the needs of West Indian plantations in exchange for bills of credit that English merchants accepted. Ironically, the slave trade helped finance—whether directly or indirectly—all three major hearths in British North America: New England, Mid-Atlantic (including Pennsylvania), and the tidewater South.

As the economic backbone of the city, this import-export business created jobs for thousands of workers. Historian Billy G. Smith recently explained the system:

“Producing, transporting, and selling commodities created a complex economy involving thousands of individuals.”²⁸ In a study by Susan Klepp, “nearly one-fourth of the workers [in pre-industrialized Philadelphia] were directly involved in the transportation industry through shipping or ship construction” alone.²⁹ Shipping involved several layers of employment. One level included mariners to sail the ships, laborers to load and unload the goods, and farmers or their representatives who produced raw materials and exchanged them for finished goods. The next level comprised the people who maintained

²⁸ Billy G. Smith, “Philadelphia: The Athens of America,” in *Life in Early Philadelphia: Documents from The Revolutionary and Early National Periods*. ed. Billy G. Smith (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 5-7.

²⁹ Susan Klepp, *Philadelphia in Transition: A Demographic History of the City and Its Occupational Groups, 1720-1830* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1989), p. 36. The eighteenth-century classifications included Shipping and Transportation, Construction (including Ship Construction), Unspecified Wholesale and Retail, Clothing and Shoes, Household Furnishing, Food and Liquor, Service (including Government Service), Health, Finance and Real Estate, Printing, Education, and Religion. Clearly, the early economy revolved around providing the necessities of life.

the ships, those who furnished the ship with necessities, and those who sold the goods in their shops. The final layer included a diverse group of people who indirectly profited from the trade. They included such "service" providers as tavern, inn, and boardinghouse owners. Also profiting in an indirect way were providers of labor. These consisted of persons who made their living by maintaining various modes of transportation and a large array of artisans who provided the inhabitants with a wide variety of handcrafted goods. Lastly, individuals involved in building houses and ships also benefited.

Just as a political hierarchy evolved in Philadelphia, so did an economic one. The merchant princes and other top businesspersons succeeded by reinvesting their additional capital into other areas, especially before a viable central banking system existed. Many purchased city plots and tracts of land in the interior or expanded their businesses to include manufactories and lent money.³⁰ By 1800, a few cotton mills appeared just outside the city to augment the early craft manufacturing. They generated their own wealth by attracting larger cotton imports and later, machine-makers. "Thus," according to historical geographer James T. Lemon, "the ability of its merchants to organize the Atlantic trade of the area spurred the development of a large city with a wide range of

³⁰ Edwin B. Bronner, "Village into Town: 1701-1746," In *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*. ed. Russell F. Weigley (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), p. 163. Elizabeth Drinker, *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*. 3 vols. Ed. Elaine Foreman Crane (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 2:1315 footnote. William Allen, a very wealthy Presbyterian political figure from the 1730s, 40s, 50s, inherited a fortune from his father. However, he expanded that fortune through huge land investments, iron furnaces, a copper mine, a rum distillery, and stocks and loans at interest. A generation later, Henry Drinker, a wealthy Quaker merchant did the same thing. In the diary of Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker, there are numerous references to the many tracts of land owned by her husband, as well as his involvement in ironworks in the Pennsylvania-New Jersey area.

activities.”³¹ Over time, prompted by the exertions of its merchants, the city built a complex web of business connections that promoted economic expansion.

Lemon also observed that only members of the top economic class routinely purchased the large quantities of luxury items brought to Philadelphia from around the world. By 1760, they enjoyed “spices and pepper from the East Indies, brass household ornaments from India, silks from China, [and] wine from Madeira.”³² Persons of the middling class, while not having luxuries at their tables or in their houses, usually enjoyed steady employment as skilled craftspeople and shopkeepers. A much larger lower class of semi-skilled or unskilled workers often experienced insecurity. Too poor to own their own homes, they spent much of their earnings on the necessities, including rent, firewood, clothing, and food. Crowded into tiny alley huts close to the wharves, they were the first to suffer from epidemics, personal injury, or under-employment. When any of these misfortunes occurred, whole families would seek aid from the more fortunate.³³ With its Quaker tradition of helping those in need, many successful entrepreneurs remained committed to civic and religious obligations.

³¹ James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1972), p. 129.

³² James T. Lemon, *Liberal Dreams and Nature's Limits: Great Cities of North America Since 1600* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 81.

³³ Billy G. Smith, *Life in Early Philadelphia*, pp. 9-10.

The Cultural Development of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia

While not a Quaker, Benjamin Franklin, the most famous rags-to-riches entrepreneur in early America, exemplified both the early economic potential of Philadelphia and the serious Quaker commitment to self and community improvement. Arriving penniless as a runaway apprentice from Boston in 1723, Franklin, as he explained in his *Autobiography*, used his sharp wits, insatiable quest for knowledge, and hard work ethic to establish a very successful newspaper.³⁴ In the process of becoming famous and wealthy, Franklin and the Society of Friends believed that in Philadelphia, individuals had to join together in common causes to get anything done. The city government, whether unable or loath to change, offered little to its citizens. Therefore, just as the legislature appointed committees to solve problems, Franklin encouraged citizens to follow their example. That process yielded a variety of institutions Philadelphians proudly supported for generations. This legacy of voluntary citizen committees helped Philadelphians weather the epidemics in the 1790s.

The descriptive sections of the city directories reflected the pride of Philadelphians and provide snapshots (if overly enthusiastic ones) of their city. The author of the 1791 Directory, appearing before the first onslaught of Yellow Fever, wrote glowingly about the urban center and its many benevolent and enlightened institutions.

³⁴ Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*. Indeed, Franklin understood the importance of individual efforts, but also knew that when used collectively, those efforts multiplied. He showed that in such diverse areas as self-improvement societies, library companies, fire insurance companies, the American Philosophical Society, Pennsylvania Hospital, and the Philadelphia Academy, among others.

The detailed and wordy narrative of the 1796 Directory, written after the carnage of the 1793 epidemic, remained very positive about the city. Surprisingly, the author of the 1804 Directory copied most of his descriptions from previous authors, keeping them to just ten pages. Despite the serious yellow fever epidemics in 1793, 1797, 1798, and 1802, which he largely ignored, the author dwelt on recent improvements. This may reflect the willingness of everyone to keep well closed, the book of the last century with its cloud of yellow fever.

Clement Biddle, author of the 1791 Directory, reflected the pride of a city that had survived the vagaries of war and occupation to become the capital of a newly established republic. While idealized, these descriptions reflect the optimism of the day. After the typical short history and geographical description, he informed his readers that the Assembly had just recently passed a new city charter. Biddle boasted of the new egalitarian atmosphere: "There is not perhaps in the world a more liberal plan of city government, every class of citizens have an opportunity of representing and being represented."³⁵ Apparently, the republican-spirited citizens of Philadelphia, following Franklin's early example, continued to support many worthwhile organizations and institutions. This spirit began with the first Quaker Alms House in 1713, continued through the Library Company in 1731, the American Philosophical Society in 1744, the Pennsylvania Hospital in 1752, the Philadelphia Academy in 1753, the Medical School in 1765, the Alms House and House of Employment in 1766, the Humane Society in 1780,

³⁵ Clement Biddle, "Information Concerning the City of Philadelphia," In *The Philadelphia Directory 1791*. (Philadelphia: James & Johnson, 1791), p. 2.

and included the most recent Sunday Schools in 1791. With all that Philadelphia had to offer its citizens, no one should suffer or fall through the cracks even during hard times. In this helping atmosphere, Penn's capital grew from village to town and from town to city, until it indeed became the premier city of the United States: The Athens of America.

Biddle wrote about the wide range of churches and their societies reflecting the religious diversity of Philadelphia, and praised public and private charitable institutions, medical facilities, and places of learning. "Almost every religious society has a fund ... for the relief of the widows and children of their clergy and other distressed members of their communion." Most also operated schools for rich and poor alike including one "for the Africans of every shade or colour, kept under the care and at the expence of the Quakers." The principal public charitable institution in Philadelphia was the house of employment. Here, the poor were "employed in coarse manufactures to aid in defraying their expences, under the care of the overseers and guardians of the poor." Privately, the Quakers supported an almshouse for "families of single persons who have fallen into decay" and were unable to provide for themselves. As the medical center of both colonial and early America, Philadelphia operated a hospital and a dispensary. Original funding for the hospital came from both the legislature and private donations. Private subscriptions continued to fund the operations, supervised by elected managers. Hospital staff included local physicians volunteering their time to treat "insane persons and the friendless sick and wounded." Funded by voluntary annual subscriptions, the dispensary treated paying subscribers and two poor patients nominated by each of them. Managers oversaw operations with physicians attending to "the sick and wounded at their own

houses.” Without the dispensary, Biddle believed that many persons would have suffered or died “for want of medical assistance and by the quackery of pretenders to the healing art.” Philadelphia also boasted of its places of learning. In addition to the church-operated schools, the University of Pennsylvania provided higher education in both liberal arts and sciences, including a medical school. The recently instituted Sunday schools “for the instruction of children who would otherwise spend that day in idleness or mischief” should have helped “to amend the morals and conduct of the rising generation.”³⁶

Despite the horrors of the 1793 epidemic, Thomas Stephens, author of the 1796 City Directory couched his account of the city in equally glowing terms. After opening with the usual short history and geographic description, Stephens discussed the weaknesses of city government under Penn’s Charter from 1701 to 1776 and the one created by the Assembly, dominated by revolutionaries and radicals, from 1777-1789. The new act of incorporation, passed by the Assembly in 1789 and 1790, presumably corrected the weakness and injustices of both its predecessors since Stephens offered no criticisms. Describing the city’s churches, Stephens noted the two new churches built by black worshippers. While barely mentioning the existence of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, he wrote the following concerning the African Protestant Episcopal Church. “The ministers of the Episcopal churches occasionally officiate ... [otherwise] the usual prayer’s & Liturgy are read by one of their elders. A young black man of very

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 3-5.

considerable abilities ... now studying ... will be soon ordained ... an appointed to the care of that congregation."³⁷

Stephens praised the work of public and private charitable institutions, and indicated other factors that made Philadelphia a great city. He mentioned the vast assortment of associations aimed at improving the condition of its members or others in society, the medically related facilities, educational institutions, scientific societies, and Charles Willson Peale's museum. Stephens wrote in sentimental terms about the public Alms House: "Here the helpless stranger finds a comfortable residence, in the hour of sickness and distress ... the blind ... the old & emaciated ... the unhappy woman, who, either from poverty or misconduct, may be destitute ... [all are] amply provided [for]."³⁸ As if to allay fears, Stephens even published the Stewart's account for a week's worth of provisions. Also applauded, were the Friend's Alms House and Christ Church Hospital, a small endowed nursing home for aged women. Reflecting Philadelphia's long tradition of citizen participation, Stephens noted a wide assortment of societies. Lauded are the Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, the Humane Society, the Society

³⁷ Thomas Stephens, "A Short Account of the City of Philadelphia &c.," in *Stephens's Directory for 1796* (Philadelphia: W. Woodward, 1796), pp. 196-232. Quote is from page 201. Stephens may have been reluctant to praise the other church because of the behavior of its founders, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones; Richard G. Miller, in *The Federal City*, wrote that the Methodist hierarchy drove away both black clergymen because their role as black church leaders was undesirable. Therefore, they founded a church of black Methodism with Allen eventually becoming the first bishop of the African Methodist Church of North America. Jones also established St. Thomas's, the first Episcopal church for blacks in America and subsequently ordained as the first black Episcopal priest in America. Besides breaking away from white-dominated churches, both Jones and Allen founded the Free African Society in 1787. This society responded to pleas for help from Mayor Clarkson during the 1793 yellow fever epidemic, serving as nurses, carters, and in the cemeteries. In the process of their relief work, the Society incurred large debts not repaid by the city. Despite all their efforts to help, the Society received very little praise. Instead, whites accused them of stealing and other transgressions. (p.187.)

³⁸ Stephens, p. 205.

