

Colonizing the Mind:
The Library as a Site for Colonial American Identity Formation

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ABSTRACT

The Library Company of Philadelphia, founded in 1731 by Benjamin Franklin and his Junto, served as the impetus for society libraries across colonial America. While inspiring ubiquitous learning, the Library Company also reinforced the English language in linguistically diverse Philadelphia. Furthermore, the Company emblematically displayed ownership of a new land and developed an idealized concept of what it meant to be a Pennsylvanian society through their cabinet of curiosities—all while cultivating the organization's reputation within the colonial press. The Library Company, therefore, utilized language and material/visual culture to navigate individual and community identity in a decidedly unstructured atmosphere—the period shortly before the complete onset of American nationalism. The process of “becoming American,” the development of an identity tied to a specific location that emphasizes class mobility and self creation while also differentiating itself from other societies, is enumerated through the study of these linguistic and cultural manipulations.

DEDICATION

To my husband Jonathan, whose tireless support makes all things possible.

AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This study is possible because of the plethora of scholarly foundational texts written about the Library Company of Philadelphia. Particularly invaluable to this thesis were the many works of former Library Company Librarian, Edwin Wolf II, and a doctoral dissertation from the University of Pennsylvania written by Dorothy F. Grimm.

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Introduction

In 1690, Alpha Behn's posthumously published play, "The Widow Ranter," first identified an American national consciousness by displaying class mobility and self-creation in colonial Virginia.¹ According to Paul C. Herman's "We All Smoke Here," Behn's depiction of early American national consciousness was not an endemic outgrowth, but an idealized English conception.² While Behn provides a removed and idealized view of the process of "becoming American" in the colonies, more can be learned from viewing this process through the creation of a unique American institution—specifically, the Library Company of Philadelphia.

In 1731 Philadelphia, ardent bibliophiles under the collective auspices of Benjamin Franklin's *Junto* formed the Library Company of Philadelphia—arguably, the first subscription library. Similar to private joint-stock companies of the era, men (until the admittance of the first female member in 1769)³ purchased transferable shares in order to become Company members/subscribers. Specifically, men applied for membership, members voted as to the worthiness of the applicant, and, if found acceptable, applicants purchased new shares or were allowed to purchase the share of an existing member. Although ostensibly organized as an exclusive organization, Company rules permitted non-members free in-house and fee-based out-of-house access to the library's books. While this practice has led some to herald the Library Company as the first public library in America (Franklin himself refers to the institution as a "publick library"), several colonial book repositories make equally compelling cases. For example, in Maryland, the British Anglican Minister Thomas Bray set up thirty-two parish book

¹ Peter C. Herman, "'We all smoke here': Behn's *The Widow Ranter* and the Invention of America," in *Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of the North Atlantic World*, ed. Robert Appelbaum and John W. Sweet (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 254-255.

² Herman, 255.

³ The Library Company of Philadelphia, *At the Instance of Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia: Library Co. of Philadelphia, 1995), 4, <http://www.librarycompany.org/about/instance.pdf>.

collections for the use of clergy and congregants between 1696 and 1704.⁴ Even though the Company's role as the first "public library" remains uncertain, the Library Company served as the impetus for the expansion of subscription and society libraries across America. According to Benjamin Franklin in his Autobiography:

...these Libraries have improved the general Conversation of Americans, made the common Tradesmen and Farmers as intelligent as most Gentlemen from other Countries, and perhaps have contributed in some Degree to the Stand so generally made throughout the Colonies in Defense of their Privileges.⁵

If Franklin is to be believed, libraries (particularly the Library Company) attributed to the formation of a uniquely American identity. This thesis proposes to evaluate just how the Library Company facilitated the process of "becoming American" within the context of a significant colonial city, Philadelphia.

This project proposes to study the Library Company of Philadelphia's role in formation and subversion of identity in colonial Philadelphia from the birth of the institution in 1731 to the eve of the American Revolution. Taking as a base assumption that colonialism itself is a unique conduit for identity formation (often causing colonists to consider themselves citizens of two separate nations and forcing unwanted identities on native outsiders), I will evaluate how the Library Company of Philadelphia attempted to construct a group mentality amongst the religiously, ethnically, and economically diverse citizens of the colonial city while also helping (unwittingly) to define the identities of individuals and communities. Not a static institution, the Library Company evolved internally and responded to local and governmental situations during colonial rule. With this dynamism in mind, this thesis attempts to prove that the Library

⁴ Richard Beale Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979), 73.

⁵ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography*, quoted in The Library Company of Philadelphia, *At the Instance of Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia: Library Co. of Philadelphia, 1995), <http://www.librarycompany.org/about/instance.pdf>.

Company of Philadelphia reflected the process of “becoming American” in colonial Philadelphia. Specifically, I will argue that the Library Company deftly utilized elements of language and material/visual culture to formulate the standards through which members viewed themselves and to which non-members compared themselves—the actions of the Library Company, therefore, not only reflect the process of “becoming American” in colonial Philadelphia, but can also be seen as a driving force in shaping this process.

In this thesis, “becoming American” is the process in which a conscious separation from the mother country occurs concomitantly with an identity tied to a specific location (the colonies), group identification emerges based on shared language (irrespective of ethnic descent—if from a European country/not an imported slave), a belief in class mobility takes hold, and the concept of an “American” becomes constructed in opposition to native inhabitants and Old World cultures. Conceptualizing “becoming American” as a process coincides with identity theory which views identity as “questions of using resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being...”⁶ Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* discusses this non-linear formation of identity and identification within a larger “nation” and states that “...the ‘nation’ proved an invention on which it was impossible to secure a patent. It became available for pirating by widely different and sometimes unexpected hands.”⁷ Benedict forwards the concept of an “imagined community” and cites language and print as potent tools in its creation—he sees the nation (or other systems of identification) as a social construction resulting from individual’s recognition of shared attributes with a larger body of people.

⁶ Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, ed., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 4.

⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), 67.

The Library Company acted as one of Benedict's usurping inventors, deftly re-imagining itself and the larger community. Studying the attempted standardization of written communication through the promotion of English, the exterior dissemination of a consciously forged reputation, and the physical/visual manifestations of otherness (the creation of difference in order to reaffirm the self) and ownership as evident in the "Cabinet of Curiosities" should better illuminate the Company's role in these processes of identity formation, becoming "American." This paper takes as its focus the process of constructing an American identity in a specific location and does not refute the fact that similar processes occurred elsewhere—it studies the confluence of varying processes that resulted in a unique identity.

To better contextualize the study's argument, a brief overview of the Library Company's colonial history and the major events simultaneously occurring in Philadelphia first must be delineated. The library of Francis Daniel Pastorius in Germantown, Pennsylvania, founded in 1683 (only one year after the foundation of Pennsylvania), served as the first library in the vicinity of Philadelphia.⁸ Over a decade after the creation of Pastorius's repository, William Penn attempted to further enrich the knowledge of his colonists by shipping books to Pennsylvania from London booksellers in 1699 or 1700. This venture proved unsuccessful due to the dearth of citizens with expendable incomes.⁹ If Benjamin Franklin is to be believed, the lack of readily accessible literature persisted in Philadelphia until the early decades of the eighteenth century—which suffered in comparison to the textual abundance of Boston.¹⁰

After a regretfully immoral stay in England, the young Benjamin Franklin formed a social/intellectual club, the Junto, in Philadelphia. Due to Junto members' constant references to

⁸ Edwin Wolf II, *The Book Culture of a Colonial American City: Philadelphia Books, Bookmen and Booksellers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 4.

⁹ Wolf, *The Book Culture of a Colonial American City*, 9-12.

¹⁰ See Franklin's *Autobiography*.

written texts in meetings, Franklin suggested that members “club” their personal books at one location for the organization’s use. This scheme shortly failed because of the mistreatment of books—but, it successfully planted the idea of the Library Company in Franklin’s fecund mind. The original members of the Company were not wealthy men, except Robert Grace (the descendent of British aristocracy) who originally housed the Company’s books in his house on Pewter Platter Alley.¹¹ Many early members initially served as artisans or in the middling trades; but later achieved prominent status in the colony. For example, Thomas Cadwallader became the first Philadelphia native to hold a medical degree from Europe, William Coleman (initially “a merchant’s clerk”) became a provincial judge, and Thomas Godfrey went on to invent Hadley’s quadrant (although the invention remained hotly contested).¹²

Such uniform class mobility initially masks the large-scale diversity endemic to the Company. Amidst the Company, abolitionists mingled with slave owners and sellers; Quakers, Deists, and Anglicans (among others) frequented the same book room; and eventually, both Tories and Patriots protected the interests of the Library. This diversity largely excludes ethnicities beyond the pale of Britain or the allowance of female participation in library matters. From the majority of individuals inscribed on the charter in 1742 to members listed in later colonial catalogues, most surnames indicate English, Welsh, Scottish, or Irish descent. Very few members were of French descent, such as Jacob Duché, or German descent.¹³ Regardless of family ethnicity, many members were native to America—and even native Philadelphians.

Colonial Philadelphia maintained many disparate ethnic groups—largely through Penn’s concepts of toleration and freedom. Although historian Edwin Wolf II asserts that “Pennsylvania

¹¹ Dorothy F. Grimm, “A History of the Library Company of Philadelphia” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1955), 28-29.

¹² Grimm, 26-29.

¹³ Much information concerning the location of birth and the ethnic heritage of members was ascertained through cross-referencing the entymology of surnames with genealogical indexes.

was the [colony] most sparsely inhabited by natives”¹⁴ at the time of European contact, William Penn and the Quaker community continued to treat Native Americans fairly.¹⁵ Even with protective treaties from the proprietor, Colonial Pennsylvanians sometimes entered into conflict with the neighboring Native Americans—as seen in the 1763 massacre at Lancaster of non-hostile Conestoga Indians.¹⁶ Penn’s exercise of tolerance and the promise of freedom of worship led many European immigrant groups to settle in Pennsylvania, although the Dutch and the Swedish established themselves in the territory before it became Penn’s colony. When William Penn received his charter in 1682, 6,000 Swedish settlers resided in Pennsylvania.¹⁷ Penn sold land to the previously mentioned Francis Daniel Pastorius which later became Germantown—a community of Germans largely maintaining their ethnic identity.¹⁸ The German community grew and often avoided assimilation by supporting German newspapers and churches.¹⁹ With many English speaking colonists expressing anxiety about growing German communities, the Library Company’s role as an “English” library (as opposed to William Logan’s largely classical repository and Pastorius’s early collection) illustrates growing ethnic tension and ultimately the production of a self/other dichotomy—in addition to the attempted standardization of the English language in America.

While continually emphasizing a single language (possibly as a result of the Enlightened pursuit of “useful knowledge”), the utilization of library texts by women (admitted as members over thirty years after the Company’s founding) showcases the possible inroads available to unsanctioned members of the community. The inclusion of texts directed for female

¹⁴ Edwin Wolf II, *Philadelphia: Portrait of an American City* (Philadelphia: Stackpole Books, 1975), 20.

¹⁵ Wolf, *Philadelphia*: 28.

¹⁶ Wolf, *Philadelphia*: 53.

¹⁷ Joseph D. McNair, “Schooling, Education, and Literacy in Colonial America,” Miami Dade Community College, <http://faculty.mdc.edu/jmcnair/Joe28pages/Schooling,%20Education,%20and%20Literacy%20in%20Colonial%20America.htm> (accessed October 15, 2008).

¹⁸ Wolf, *Philadelphia*: 13.

¹⁹ Wolf, *Philadelphia*: 51.

consumption in the library catalogue indicates that books were used by the family members of the primary shareholder in the Company. These “feminine” books, such as *The Ladies Library*, only reinscribed a patriarchally designated identity on the female reader—yet, women were not confined to only reading these prescriptive texts. This subversion of an exclusionary identity ultimately speaks to the democratic zeitgeist that eventually flowered in Philadelphia, and in the greater American colonies. This study should, therefore, contribute to the study of colonial institutions while also contributing to our understanding of the contested nascence of democracy in one of America’s most diverse colonies.

Any scholastic study rests upon its academic predecessors, this thesis is no exception. As an institution of considerable import and longevity, the Library Company of Philadelphia merited several complete, and partial, histories—most focus on the company’s role as a conduit of European culture to the American colonies. No treatment of the institution rivals the breadth of information provided in Dorothy F. Grimm’s 1955 dissertation from the University of Pennsylvania, *A History of the Library Company of Philadelphia*.²⁰ In this expansive history, covering the period from the library’s creation to the Romantic period (1835), Grimm posits that, “the history of the institution is a microcosmic study of the country’s social, cultural, and political growth during its most formative years” and sees the company as a “mechanism for conveying European culture to the colonies.”²¹ The significance of the proposed thesis, where it differs from the multitudinous histories, is its focus on the Company’s role in identity formation (in “becoming American”) not on the Company as simply a receptacle and disseminator of European culture. Also, studies dealing with the founding fathers and the pre-revolutionary era

²⁰ Other significant treatments of the Library Company include histories written by former librarians: Austin K. (Austin Kayingham) Gray’s *The First American Library*, George Maurice Abbot’s *A Short History of the Library Company of Philadelphia*, and Edwin Wolf’s multiple histories published by the Library Company and the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*.

²¹ Grimm, V.

often can produce single dimensional, vainglorious treatises. This study differs from monolithic renderings in its complex look at a truly complex institution—an organization that was once used as the library of congress and continues to persist for over 200 years.

To do justice to such a complex institution, the subsequent historical methodology has been followed. In Chapter One: “Establishing English: Standardization in the Stacks,” conclusions have been drawn from the interpretation of the Library Company’s printed catalogues, the extant correspondence between Benjamin Franklin and library members, and the Company’s minute books. Secondary literature on colonial linguistic development in addition to demographic histories also proved invaluable in the contextualization of primary documents. Chapter Two: “Through the Looking Glass: the Cabinet of Curiosities” relies upon the list of cabinet contents present in Company catalogues and the individualized treatment of items in these catalogues, advertisements for the cabinet, and a comparative reading of the library’s textual holdings. Studies on the “cabinet of curiosities” and academic treatments of “othering” provided insight into the early modern tradition of collection and display. Chapter Three: “Publishing for Prominence: the Role of Newspaper Articles in the Cultivation of Group Identity and Reputation” utilizes articles from 1731-1776 in Pennsylvania newspapers (largely the *Pennsylvania Gazette*), explanatory correspondence from members, and minutes of the Library Company. Secondary sources on the role and norms of colonial newspapers and theoretical treatises concerning the application of visual culture to historic study helped to better maneuver this potent medium.

The greatest danger in any study of an organization with a famous founder remains the tendency to conflate a diverse institution with the beliefs and actions of a single man. Franklin was a driving force in the creation and the continual decision making process of the Library

Company throughout early decades—and in the later decades procured books for the institution while in London. When decreasing his involvement in the Company later in his life, members jealously sought out his involvement—some members envied the attention Franklin continued to give his Philosophical Society. Although significant, Franklin does not personify the Library Company. While in this thesis much primary source material stems from Franklin’s writings and correspondence, the inclusion of recorded views of Company members and published material temper this amalgamating tendency.

Finally, taking the Library Company’s motto into consideration, *Communiter Bona Profundum Deum Est* (“To pour forth benefits for the common good is divine”)²² we now begin the investigation of the Library’s role in “becoming American.”

²² J. A. Leo Lemay, “Chapter 4: The Library Company of Philadelphia,” in *The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Volume 2: Printer and Publisher 1730-1747* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005): 94.

Chapter One:

Establishing English: Standardization in the Stacks

Books, the embodiment of the permanence and portability of thought, have the ability to communicate ideas over great distances to vast populations—of course, only if the reader understands what is written, if he or she is versant in the language and has the skill set to read. Appropriate for any study of “language” is a discussion of etymology—the origins of a term’s connotations. The word “language” evolved and developed new meanings over time in varying contexts. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, by the tenth century A.D. language signified a “system of spoken or written communication used by a country, people, community, etc” and by the thirteenth century indicated the “gift of oratory, ability to speak well.”²³ Both connotations of “language” will be discussed in relation to the Library Company’s role as a morally and educationally “redemptive” organization.¹

Paul K. Longmore’s article “They Speak Better than the English Do²⁴” provides the large-scale colonial contextualization for this chapter. Longmore studies the attempt to standardize and nationalize “American English” in the North American colonies as part of an effort to gain respect from the metropole of the mother-country (London) and assert control amongst non-English colonists. This chapter provides an in-depth look at how and why a specific institution, the Library Company of Philadelphia, promoted this linguistic standardization and nationalization artfully explicated by Longmore. Specifically, this chapter posits that the library’s conscious compilation of largely English language texts, prescriptive

²³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “Language, noun (and int.)” [http://:Dictionary.oed.com](http://Dictionary.oed.com) (accessed 10 Oct 2008).

²⁴ Paul K. Longmore, “They... Speak Better English Than the English Do”: Colonialism and the Origins of National Linguistic Standardization in America,” *Early American Literature* 40. 2 (2005): 279-314.

grammars, and literary paradigms speaks to the creation of a novel “American”²⁵ identity, created through a quasi “public education.” The collection of English texts also illuminates the standardization of the hegemonic language while highlighting provincial ethnic tensions.²⁶ Finally, through the discussion of the relative acceptance of English speaking non-Englishmen, it will be shown that ethnic tensions were grounded on language rather than ethnicity by birth—biological determination.

Before looking specifically at the Library Company’s status as a form of quasi public education and the intentions/results concerning its focus on the English language, the educational system in Pennsylvania must first receive a cursory overview. The concept of “public education” underwent great consideration in Pennsylvania shortly after its colonial nascence. In 1683, the Pennsylvania government enacted an early education law. According to this edict, on pain of monetary penalty, guardians and parents were responsible for ensuring their children could read and write (what we now consider literacy) by twelve years old and must be schooled in a “useful trade.”²⁷ Later, colonial schools emerged and were usually religiously and ethnically founded. The Quakers, early proponents of education, allowed children to utilize their schools for free if unable to pay.²⁸ Lawrence A. Cremin, studying signatures on wills and available newspapers, asserts that the proliferation of schools in colonial Philadelphia and New York led to “...a continuing high rate of literacy among men, and a perceptibly rising rate among women.”²⁹ Keeping in mind the high rates of men’s ability to read and write and women’s increasing ability in Philadelphia, the library’s role as a textually based organization does not

²⁵ The definition of “American” utilized in this thesis is expounded in the introduction on page 3.

²⁶ The standardization of the hegemonic language and language’s involvement in ethnic tensions are explicated generally in Longmore’s text.

²⁷ McNair.

²⁸ McNair.

²⁹ Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education; the Colonial Experience, 1607-1783*. 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1970): 540-541.

necessarily signal an inequality of accessibility based upon “literacy.” In fact, widespread literacy makes a publicly utilized library potentially a mark of a well-informed citizenry—Michael H. Harris even identifies a “literate and stable” population as a historical prerequisite for successful libraries.³⁰

Unlike the standard public school system understood today, public education found many forms—libraries, charitable societies, and newspapers in addition to religious schools and later academies. In a letter to family members John, Thomas, and Richard Penn, written after the Company’s receipt of a charter in 1742, Library Company directors expound the beneficence of their literary organization:

“The Powers and Privileges now granted us, will, without Doubt, very much conduce to the Increase and Reputation of the Library, and as...valuable Books come to be in more general Use and Esteem, we hope they will have very good Effects on the Minds of the People of this Province, and furnish them with the most useful kind of Knowledge....”³¹

This published missive indicates the manner of books desired by directors—those disseminating “useful knowledge.” The doctrine of “useful knowledge” permeated the American middle colonies as early as the mid seventeenth century as Quaker reformers forwarded the concept of “guarded education,” a system of learning eschewing dead languages and the abstruse knowledge of trained clergy, and John Locke’s views on practical/vocational education began to take hold.³² But, as Meyer Reinhold asserts, the

³⁰ Of course, applying the term “literacy” in reference to society’s ability to read is itself anachronistic. According to Deborah Keller-Cohen’s article “Rethinking Literacy: Comparing Colonial and Contemporary America” in *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* neither “literacy” or “literate” “...appeared in common American usage until the nineteenth century...In contrast illiterate was used more generally to mean ‘unlettered, untaught, unlearned’; it was also used rather specifically to mean the lack of Latin-based scholastic learning” (289). In keeping with this contemporary connotation, the Library Company would have happily identified itself as an “illiterate” institution with its eschewal of archane scholasticism.

³¹ *American Weekly Mercury*. “To the Honorable John Penn, Thomas Penn, and Richard Penn...” November 17-24, 1743. infoweb.newsbank.com (accessed April 19, 2008)

³² Meyer Reinhold, “The Quest for “Useful Knowledge” in Eighteenth-Century America.” *American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia Proceedings*. 119. 18 (1975): 110.

concept of “useful knowledge” served as a “slippery” neologism as various factions attempted to appropriate the phrase for diverse uses.³³

In the Library Company’s case, “useful knowledge” appears in its holdings on botany, navigation, mathematics, physics, brewing, and politically relevant histories—but is most prominent in the preponderance of English language texts. A main tenet of the doctrine of useful knowledge remained the avoidance of Latin and Greek languages in pursuance of modern tongues. For example, in the Company’s 1741 printed catalogue less than ten of the three-hundred and seventy-five texts appear in Latin—and most of Latin books were gifts, not Company ordered. According to Library Company aficionado Edwin Wolf II the preponderance of English language books was not accidental. To prove the purposeful nature of the company’s collection, Wolf quote’s Franklin’s musing: “As in the Scheme of the Library I had provided only for English books, so in this new scheme [the creation of the Academy in Philadelphia] my ideas went no farther than to procure the means of a Good English Education.”³⁴ Franklin, of course, was not the sole embodiment of the grand institution—it was not just *his* library. The dearth of texts in arcane languages likely stems from many Company members’ ignorance of Latin and Greek.³⁵ Edwin Wolf acknowledges that many “gentlemen” learned Latin but asserts that few retained the skill: “...there were those in Philadelphia who wanted to wear that badge [of a gentlemen], even among the Quakers who shunned ornamentation including that of the mind. Latin tags were used by authors and orators, but I suggest that what was learned with difficulty in their nonage was forgotten with ease by adulthood.”³⁶

³³ Reinhold, 109.

³⁴ Edwin Wolf II, ed, *A catalogue of books belonging to the Library Company of Philadelphia: a facsimile of the edition of 1741, printed by Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1956): ix.

³⁵ Wolf, *A catalogue of books*, viii.

³⁶ Edwin Wolf II, *The Book Culture of a Colonial American City*, 47.

Although the aforementioned lack of ancient tongues corresponds with perceived colonial utility, knowing ancient languages did not help shoemakers and silversmiths get customers or fabricate commodities, the greater absence of books in modern languages did not stem from a lack of necessity in colonial society. While founding members spoke and read the English language, their exclusion of other modern languages impeded the extended education and enrichment of non-English emigrants in their native tongue—thus hegemonically creating a single language of the educated.

How did members' choose books and how representative were they of the actual population? James Logan, "...a weighty member of the governor's council, the Penn family's personal agent, negotiator with the Indians...",³⁷ offered advice on books for the Company's first London order. After accumulating a base for the library, book selection proceeded through directorial discussion and intermittent gift giving—Dorothy Grimm asserts that the book list provided in John Clarke's *Essay Upon Study* influenced book choice.³⁸ Booksellers and London liaisons also had the limited liberty to augment orders with recently published texts they believed the Company would enjoy. Booksellers knew the linguistic preferences of the Company, and adhered to its directives, as evident in a letter of 1736: "I [the bookseller] have sent the books according to your order...except Lambertie on the Affairs of Europe Since 1700, which are not yet translated and he [Peter Collison]³⁹ imagined your Design is not to have them in French."⁴⁰

³⁷ Wolf, *Philadelphia*, 43.

³⁸ Wolf, *A Catalogue of Books*, vii.

³⁹ Peter Collison served as the Library Company's London liaison without compensation. A fervent Quaker, Collison also provided books for a Quaker school in Philadelphia. Although the Company generally accepted Collison's services with gratitude, members began to tire of his habit of sending personal gifts to local Philadelphians in the Library Company's designated book trunk. The London Quaker and the Library Company parted ways after the Company treasurer offended Collison in a letter. Differing from other society libraries, such as the Charleston Library Society, the Library Company attempted to obtain books from North American sellers as early as 1734 (see Library Company Director's Minutes page 43).

⁴⁰ *Library Company of Philadelphia Minute Book*, "December 20, 1736," Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

Around 1750, according to historian James Raven, "The Library Company [of Philadelphia] became famous for its tin suggestion box...., painted with a lion's head and with a slot in the middle where 'Gentlemen are requested To deposit in the Lion's Mouth the Title of such Books As they may wish to have Imported.'"⁴¹ This movement toward a more democratized method of purchasing indicates that (at least after 1750) a substantial connection existed between the books available in the library and those desired by the members. Interestingly, a marked continuity exists in the proportion of foreign language texts present in the library's early order and in its later catalogues. This constancy suggests that, although early book selection remained under the influence of a select few, the languages of texts purchased reflect larger Company interests.

Company members' desire to include books largely in the English language likely stemmed from growing ethnic tensions.⁴² As mentioned in the introduction, Philadelphia maintained great ethnic diversity during the colonial era. According to demographer Susan Klepp, "Many of the Germans [in colonial Philadelphia] did not fare particularly well in the new world. A minority in an English-dominated culture, they tended to be excluded from positions of power in both politics and the economy."⁴³ Klepp also posits that the German colonists created a "...self-sufficient economy of their own...supported by German language papers and influential ministers."⁴⁴ This self-sufficient sub-society created their own hierarchy which likely would have been disregarded by English speaking elites.⁴⁵

⁴¹ James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Consumers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811*. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002): 150

⁴² This instance illustrates Longmore's point that the "...enforcement of Standard English in the colonies would bolster the dominance of English colonials in the midst of not only non-English British colonists but a host of non-Anglophone settlers and subjugated peoples" (299).

⁴³ Susan E. Klepp, *Philadelphia in Transition: A demographic History of the City and Its Occupational Gaps 1720-1730*. (New York: Garland Publishing, INC, 1989): 21

⁴⁴ Klepp, 21.

⁴⁵ Klepp, 22.

The growing number of unassimilated Germans concerned many English colonials, with the possible exception of Quakers with whom many Germans allied politically.⁴⁶ While also praising the industriousness of the Germans in a letter to the Library Company's London liaison, Peter Collison, Benjamin Franklin exemplifies the contemporary fear of cultural encroachment when he writes:⁴⁷

...Those who come hither are generally of the most ignorant and stupid sort of their own Nation, and as Ignorance is attended with credulity when Knavery would mislead it, and with Suspicion when honesty would set it right, and as few of the English understand the German language, and so cannot address them either from the press or the Pulpit, 'tis almost impossible to remove any prejudices they once entertain.⁴⁸

If Franklin is to be believed, few English speaking colonials understood German or had the desire to learn the tongue. But Franklin implies that if Germans could be reached (i.e., if they knew English) they could be brought into the dominant culture. Franklin and other elite members of the Library Company, such as Richard Peters, William Allen, James Hamilton, were four of the six colonial trustees for a London based charitable organization, "the Society for promoting religious Knowledge and the English Language among the German Emigrants in Pennsylvania."⁴⁹ This society aimed to teach German immigrants English to make them better

⁴⁶ Wolf, *Philadelphia*: 51

⁴⁷ Another letter from Peter Collison written August 12, 1753 and currently housed by the American Philosophical Society exemplifies the contemporary fear of encroachment, the fear of physical/territorial encroachment and of a cultural takeover in the colony, while also positing a scheme for the suppression of local German power. Franklin's plan consisted of:

- "Hints Humbly proposed to Incorporate the Germans more with
- 1st To Establish More English Schools amongst the Germans.
 - 2dly To Encourage them to Learn English Lett an Act of Parliament
 - 3d To prohibit any Deeds, Bonds, or writeings &c. to be Made
 - 4 To Suppress all German Printing Houses that print only
 - 5th To prohibit all Importation of German books.
 - 6 To Encourage the Marriages of Germans with English and
 - 7ly To Discourage the sending More Germans to the Province." [sic]

⁴⁸ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and other Writings on Politics, Economics, and Virtue*. Ed. Alan Houston. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 231

⁴⁹ Perry, William S. ed. "Pennsylvania Trustees of the German Society to the Society, September 24, 1756." *Papers Relating to the History of the Church in Pennsylvania, A.D. 1680-1778*. Privately printed, 1871, 560-2.

servants to the crown—to “*anglify* [sic] and *incorporate*” them.⁵⁰ Implicit in this charitable society is the acknowledgement of an ethnic separation based on language—not heredity. The English, and hence the American colonists, proudly traced their roots from early Germanic people depicted in the work of Tacitus;⁵¹ but, the language barrier resultant from a large isolated German population inhibited colonial commerce and threatened the assumed hegemony of English colonizers.

A parallel to the above Society’s acceptance of ethnically different individuals and rejection of an alternate language appears in the Library Company’s large proportion of foreign language texts translated to English (almost one fifth in the 1741 catalogue and large portions of pages in the 1765 catalogue list translated texts). A large portion of translated works come from France (a result of the potency of the “French Enlightenment”⁵²)—specifically from authors like Fénelon, the abbot de Vertot, Voltaire, and Rapin de Thoyras. Other texts issue from Spain, Italy, and Germany, among a host of other European and Asian countries. While the Company eagerly accepted the ideas of far away and dissimilar countries (as will be seen later with objects in the discussion of the “cabinet of curiosities”), it only wanted them if “Englished”—a term translated texts donned in catalogues.

⁵⁰ William Smith, “William Smith to Richard Peters and Benjamin Franklin,” February 1754, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, PA. Packard Humanities Institute: The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, www.franklinpapers.org.

⁵¹ See Karen Kupperman’s *Indians and the English: Facing Off in Early America* (pages 28-30) for a thorough discussion of the British reading and application of Tacitus—specifically their proclaimed descent from ancient Germanic tribes.

⁵² For an in-depth study on the proliferation of French text and what specific texts were especially popular in colonial America see: Paul Merrill Spurlin, *The French Enlightenment in America—Essays on the Times of the Founding Fathers* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1984).

In colonial Pennsylvania the eventual creation of a state wholly dependent upon the English language was certainly not inevitable. In fact, in 1750/1 Ben Franklin wrongly prophesied:

The Observation concerning the Importation of Germans in too great Numbers into Pennsylvania, is, I believe, a very just one. This will in a few Years become a German Colony: Instead of their Learning our Language, we must learn their's, or live as in a foreign Country. Already the English begin to quit particular Neighbourhoods surrounded by Dutch, being made uneasy by the Disagreeableness of disonant Manners; and in Time, Numbers will probably quit the Province for the same Reason.⁵³

The Library Company's linguistic singularity acted as an exercise in ethnic assertion. While not explicitly expressed as a monolithic disseminator of a singular language (although several published letters between company directors and the proprietors enumerate the glory of educating the masses—implicity in English), the company's holdings and newspaper notices resulted in an English speaking body of Company members—even after the 1769 merger with the less high-minded Union library.⁵⁴ If Company members were decedents of those beyond the pale of the British Empire, they were usually born in America—and likely spoke English as their primary language. While Benjamin Franklin held a financial interest in the short-lived first German newspaper in Philadelphia, the *Philadelphia Zeitung*, no library notices or published letters can be found in that paper or other German weeklies from that period: *Pennsylvanische Fama* or *Wochentliche Philadelphische Staatsbote*. Located in Germantown, a predominantly German community, the Germantown Library was established in around 1744⁵⁵ thirteen years after the formal creation of the Library Company. Although no known records exist concerning the Germantown Library, this institution sprung from the general proliferation of copy-cat library

⁵³ Archibald Kennedy. "To James Parker." *The Importance of Gaining and Preserving the Friendship of the Indians to the British Interest, Considered*, 1751, 27-31. franklinpapers.org

⁵⁴ For a description of the Company's ethnic composition, refer back to page 5 of the Introduction.

⁵⁵ This date was deduced from contemporary newspaper notices.

companies (such as the Union Library, the Association Library, the Amicable Library, etc) while likely filling the specific need for non-English literature.⁵⁶

While a quotation from Franklin previously indicated that most colonizers of English descent spoke little or no German, modern foreign language grammars and teaching texts slowly increased over the company's colonial growth. This increase in foreign language interest indicates a more cosmopolitan knowledge desired by members; while also fulfilling the demands of a repository centered on "useful knowledge." As already indicated, a conglomeration of languages intermingled in Philadelphia—not only the languages of inhabitants but also those of disembarking sailors in the thriving port city. The increase of foreign language "teaching texts" is best seen through the Library Company's book orders and catalogues. In the Library Company's first hand-written book order of 1732 no contemporary language texts appear (although Latin literature appears under the heading Philology). By the Company's 1770 catalogue the library housed, three books on learning French, two on Italian, three on Portuguese, three on German, and three on Spanish.

In 1774, the centrality of learning contemporary and ancient languages appears in the Library Company's search for a replacement librarian. An advertisement running in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* reads: "A LIBRARIAN IS WANTED by the LIBRARY COMPANY of Philadelphia; a Person who understands the learned Languages, and is well acquainted with books..."⁵⁷ While members learned foreign languages—Ben Franklin suggested to multiple friends that before coming to the American colonies they

⁵⁶ The private library of Francis Daniel Pastorius of Germantown was the first library near Philadelphia; yet, its holdings were eventually bought by literary connoisseur, James Logan. Therefore, a "public" library was not specifically available to the German community of Germantown.

⁵⁷ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, "A Librarian," March 23, 1774, infoweb.newbank.com (accessed April 19, 2008).

would benefit from learning German⁵⁸—the inclusion of foreign language books remained stagnant. This divergence indicates that these languages were utilized for commercial matters, i.e. for the utilitarian purposed discussed earlier, in lieu of increasing membership of other ethnicities.

The Library Company’s focus on language extended beyond the hegemonic support of English language in a polylingual society, English language was also tied to moral superiority and economic uplift. While the connection between morality and reading remained overt, correspondence and the historical happenings of Philadelphia indicate that morality was also strongly tied with learning and speaking the English language—and moral superiority was tied to the ability to speak and write the language well. Numerous Library Company correspondence and excerpts explicitly link reading with morality. In a letter in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, likely ghost-written by the newspaper’s owner Benjamin Franklin, “Obadiah Plainman” declares that “when my daily Labor is over, instead of going to the Alehouse, I amuse myself with the books of the Library Company...”⁵⁹ The library as an agent of abstemiousness likely attracted morally upright men and gladdened members’ wives; but, other documents indicate a relationship with specifically English language texts and morality. In the continuation of the passage to the proprietors previously quoted, the Library Company Directors proclaim:

...we hope they [books] will have very good Effects on the Minds of the People of this Province, and furnish them with the most useful kind of Knowledge, that which renders Men benevolent and helpful to one another. Our unhappy Divisions and Animositie of late, have too much interrupted that charitable and friendly Intercourse which formerly subsisted among all Societies in this Place, but as all Parties come to understand their true Interest, we hope these

⁵⁸ See: Benjamin Franklin, Letter, July 25, 1768, Boston, Massachusetts Historical Society, The Packard Humanities Institute, The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, www.franklinpapers.org

⁵⁹ Obadiah Plainman, “To Tom Trueman,” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 29, 1740, infoweb.newsbank.com (accessed April 19, 2008).

Animosities will cease, and that Men of all Denominations will mutually assist in carry on the Public Affairs...”⁶⁰

This quotation again links morality with the act of reading [“knowledge, that renders Men benevolent and helpful to one another”]; but the library’s role as a repository of English texts must be considered with such overtures of moral uplift.

Going beyond the mere act of reading any text, the cited excerpt from 1743 indicates that certain books could reconcile factions and improve public discourse through heightened morality. The “unhappy Divisions and Animositities” referenced, likely refer to the discord resultant from the October elections of 1742. According to Edwin Wolf II:

Voters had to climb...Town Hall steps to cast their votes. The Quakers stationed themselves there; a mob of sailors recruited by the opposition tried to take over; a melee ensued. Aided by German allies, the Quaker partisans counterattacked and drove the sailors back to their ships...the hiring of mobs for partisan purposes became more frequent...⁶¹

While the directors’ 1743 statement likely also refers to books of “useful knowledge,” the reference to “denominations” (and implicitly ethnicities) indicates that the morality of non-English speaking colonists could be uplifted via the appropriate mollifying English texts. In Franklin’s previously cited letter to Collison, moral degradation is tied to colonizers who spoke other tongues—ignorance and credulity are grafted on the colonial German community.

This connection between morality and the English language becomes more concrete when viewing the goals of the previously mentioned “Society for promoting religious Knowledge and the English Language among the German Emigrants in Pennsylvania,” a society of which four elite Company members served as colonial

⁶⁰ *American Weekly Mercury*, “To the Honorable John Penn, Thomas Penn, and Richard Penn...” November 17, 1743, infoweb.newsbank.com (accessed April 19 2008).

⁶¹ Wolf, *Philadelphia*: 44.

trustees. In a letter of 1755, the Colonial trustees laud and reiterate the plans of the London based society: “That the whole of what you aim at is, not to proselyte [sic] the Germans to any particular Denomination, but...to spread the knowledge of the avowed uncontroverted Principles of Religion and Morality among them, to render them acquainted with the English Language and Constitution.”⁶² This quotation clearly conflates the English language with morality and lawfulness. While the goals of this society do not speak to the views of the entire Library Company, the involvement of an elite few of influential library members in this society speaks to trends pervasive in the Company and Philadelphia at large.

The moral connotation of the English language in colonial Philadelphia extends beyond the othering of threatening ethnicities. Native speakers of English in the American colonies could ostensibly heighten personal morality through the perfection of speech and writing. Eighteenth century prescriptive grammarians, just like their counterparts in the field of etiquette, expounded upon propriety’s dependence on proper speech and writing. According to Longmore, contemporary colonial nationalists believed that “...language shaped the values of a people and influenced the form of their government.”⁶³ A literal conflation of “proper” English language with morality appears in the Library Company’s first book order. The Library Company’s hand written book order of 1732 divides desired books by the following categories: History, Architecture, Mathematics, Morality, Geography, Physick [sic], Anatomy, Natural Philosophy, Botany , Politics, Animals, Chorology, Logics, and Philology.⁶⁴ Although history remained the largest category with nine books, if one combined Philology with several works under Morality

⁶² Perry, William S. ed. “Pennsylvania Trustees of the German Society to the Society, September 24, 1756.” *Papers Relating to the History of the Church in Pennsylvania, A.D. 1680-1778*. Privately printed, 1871, 560-2.

⁶³ Longmore, 304.

⁶⁴ Library Company, First Orders of Books, 1732. March 31, 1732. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

(which colonials used as templates of the English language) Philology becomes the largest category. Specifically, the *Spectator*, the *Guardian*, the *Tatler*, and Addison's Works (considered works of Morality by early Library Company members) were utilized as templates for colonial writing and dialogue—Ben Franklin arduously copied pages from the *Spectator* to improve his ability to best a rhetoric rival in his youth.⁶⁵ Another example of the association of morality with a particular style of English appears in the Company's discussion over correspondence with the proprietors. After a committee of Company members (helmed by Franklin) composed a laudatory missive directed to the Penns, Quaker members questioned its floridity of style. The excessive ornamentation and ostentation proved anathema to the Quaker ideal and would not be fitting for the current endeavor. Inevitably, due to time constraints, Franklin's copy made it to the *Pennsylvania Gazette*'s press and became indicative of the Library Company's "style"—as will be discussed in chapter three.

Notions of the discussed "perfection" of speech and writing—the standardization of English—predominated in colonial America. In "They Speak Better than the English Do" Longmore traces how colonial Americans attempted to standardize their written and spoken language to compete with London [the metropole of the mother country] through the leveling effects of regional *koines*, dialects resulting from linguistic leveling and intermingling. Eventually, Longmore states that such linguistic intermingling and selective alteration resulted in a colonial dialect which superseded that of the mother country—as evidenced by laudatory contemporary sources. Longmore also discusses how the English "perfected" their language to avoid being associated with individuals of "low extraction,"⁶⁶ and connects this practice with

⁶⁵ Franklin, Benjamin. *The Autobiography and other Writings on Politics, Economics, and Virtue*. Edited by Alan Houston (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 11.

⁶⁶ Longmore, 288.

colonial concerns (i.e. the fear of being deemed inferior to Europeans or of a lower class in colonial society).

Library Company members utilized such self improving texts to do more than increase personal morality. Members likely also understood the cultural, social, and commercial benefits of a standardized language. As already mentioned in the introduction, early Library Company members rocketed through the colonial social hierarchy. Feasibly, the Library Company's proscriptive holdings, along with their marked desire for self-improvement, aided this stratospheric leap. Although the word "Dictionary" frequently graces the pages of Library Company catalogues, it rarely refers to the modern all-encompassing list of words and definitions for a particular language. Following the early-modern impulse to categorize and define, many "dictionaries" provided tailored information on various occupations, hobbies, and sciences, such as the *Gardener's Dictionary*. While most Company owned dictionaries did not expound the particularities of the English language, the library's 1770 catalogue contained multiple texts dictating how one should write and speak English—such as Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language; in which the Words are deduced from their originals, and illustrated in their different Significations, by examples from the best writers...*⁶⁷, *Brachygraphy; or, Short-writing made easy to the meanest capacity*, and *English Tongue: (A practical Grammar of the) or, a rational and easy Introduction to spelling and writing English correctly and properly, by Question and Answer*. While not encompassing a large proportion of the Company's holdings, these and other texts likely increased the members' chances of being upwardly mobile in the colonial class system—a system in which the perfection of English not only signaled standing but distanced oneself from the "otherness" of non-British, often lower-middle class, immigrants.

⁶⁷ The Library Company of Philadelphia, *The Charter, Laws, and Catalogue of Books, of the Library Company of Philadelphia. With a Short Account of the Library Prefixed*. (Philadelphia: Printed by Joseph Crukshank, 1770), 113.

Franklin once asserted that even the “common farmer” could access the Library Company’s volumes—of course, only as long as they refrained from falling asleep twice in the library’s reading room.⁶⁸ The Company librarian corroborated this assertion in his discussion with a foreign gentleman when he intimated: “...for one person of distinction and fortune, there were twenty tradesmen that frequented this library.”⁶⁹ While the Company may not have elevated all of these tradesmen/farmers/etc. beyond their current stations, it succeeded in tacitly enforcing a standard of linguistic communication and in fostering a novel culture of literacy. In his article of broader scope, Longmore’s identifies the impact of the large-scale colonial process of English standardization, microcosmically evident in the Library Company, when he insightfully asserts:

“North American provincials imitated metropolitan English speakers and writers...in order to win recognition and standing within the British Empire. But their doing so inadvertently helped them to fashion a ‘unified linguistic field’ based on a standardized American variety of English. That common language domain in turn provided one necessary means for them to create a distinctive American culture and nation.”⁷⁰

While not rivaling the grandiosity of Longmore’s intriguing statement (concretely tying linguistic singularity with eventual revolutionary nationhood),⁷¹ this chapter has illustrated the centrality of the English language in the Library Company—in of its role as a form of communication, in the promulgation of linguistic hegemonic control, and in the ethnic “othering” of non-English speakers. Significantly, language has also been shown to bridge the gap between biologically differentiated ethnicities—thus uniting together disparate ethnic groups. These

⁶⁸ For more discussion on the Library Company’s rule against sleeping in the reading room see: G. S. Weight, “America’s first library kept patrons awake.” *Wilson Library Bulletin* 32 (1958): 649.

⁶⁹ *Pennsylvania Packet and General Advertiser*, “To the Right Honorable the Lord Viscount,” March 16 1773, www.infoweb.newsbank.com (September 21, 2008).

⁷⁰ Longmore, 305.

⁷¹ While focusing less on the emulation of English norms expounded by Longmore for a more in-depth study of the *process* of ethnic assertion and group identification, this chapter illustrated how a single institution utilizing language to create a novel identity in a unique setting.

processes in union helped to form a unique identity, separate from England and dependent upon the colonial location. Although this process of linguistic standardization occurred throughout the colonies, the Library Company's noted role likely influenced some of the greatest minds of a generation. With colonial Pennsylvania rooted in ethnic and religious diversity, individuals sought to secure their place in a heterogeneous society—they succeeded through privileging one language, by laying the foundation of their sense of self through a standardization in the stacks.

Chapter Two:

Through the Looking Glass: The Cabinet of Curiosities

Snake skins and fossils and feathers—Oh my! While the aforementioned naturalistic list resembles something from a fantastic children’s tale, these now mundane objects partially composed the “oddities” in the Library Company’s “cabinet of curiosities.” Although modern scholars remain uncertain of the exact physical characteristics and layout of the Library Company’s collection,⁷² in this case, the term “cabinet of curiosities” describes a then centuries-old tradition of collecting rare and worldly paraphernalia and does not necessarily connote a particular storage system. Now largely destroyed or sold, the composition of the collection remains knowable through the Library’s published catalogues which began listing non-textual objects in 1757. Although Edwin Wolf II and Dorothy F. Grimm produced venerable treatments of the Company’s cabinet,⁷³ these histories only view the collection as “America’s First Museum” or as a portal of knowledge concerning the larger world amongst a relatively isolated colonial community. While both historical depictions deserve recognition and provide valuable insights, this chapter aims to augment Grimm’s blanket assertion that the Library Company’s cabinet of curiosities:

...served the ordinary citizen of Philadelphia, who could see the curiosities found in his own locale and wonder upon those from such far away places as the South Sea Islands and the land of the Eskimos...it surely contributed something to the visitor’s awareness of other lands and customs, leaving him a little less provincial and a little less insular in outlook.⁷⁴

⁷² No interior paintings or blueprints of the Library Company’s rooms remain from this period. Nor do any museum use statistics exist.

⁷³ Wolf provides an overview of the Company’s non-textual collections from its naissance to the twentieth century in an article in *Magazine Antiques* from August 1981 entitled, “The Library Company of Philadelphia, America’s First Museum.”

⁷⁴ Grimm, 97.

Although likely an effective tool for expanding colonial worldviews, this chapter argues that the Library Company's cabinet provided more than an educational day-trip for the colonial inhabitants of Philadelphia. The cabinet served as a site of identity formation. It will be shown that the Library's textual holdings functioned as an organized site of *othering* through its "histories" and travel narratives and the cabinet continued this ethos of *othering* through the marginalization or complete exclusion of non-European cultures. This process speaks to the creation of a distinct colonial identity in which what it meant to be a Pennsylvanian or even a Philadelphian was constructed in reference to outside cultures. This distinct colonial identity was bolstered through the Company's adoration of ancient Greek and Roman coins within its collection—these numismatic pieces served as a venue for symbolic comparisons to ancient republics.

Also, because the cabinet housed local rarities from the "New World," it differed from its continental predecessors which only displayed New World paraphernalia in the hopes of creating a complete microcosm within their domain. This inclusion of local artifacts, mostly natural resources and objects from the earth, may speak to an attempt to create/reinforce a manifest ownership of a new land—a mentalité evidenced both by the nature of the cabinet and a writing emblematically tying the cabinet to untapped natural resources awaiting European excision. The main use of the Library's cabinet remained scientific study and comparative experimentation; yet, by looking beyond scientific functionalism new processes of identity formation can be uncovered. A comparative analysis of library holdings and contemporary writings amidst a thorough foundation in the long history of "cabinets of curiosities" will substantiate the aforementioned assertions.

Before beginning an analytical reading of the Company's visual holdings, a brief overview of the practice of collecting and displaying "oddities" must first be elucidated to adequately contextualize the Library's "cabinet of curiosities"—this will also provide a basis for later comparative differentiation. Churches and ruling powers first assembled collections of interest;⁷⁵ yet, a later "rebirth of knowledge" created an intellectual interest in which cabinets flourished amongst diverse economic classes. The Renaissance in Europe inspired the ubiquitous assembly of oddities by nobles and commoners alike.⁷⁶ According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*'s entry on the "History of Museums," a burgeoning focus on science, natural history, antiquity, and the newly "discovered" American continents helped spur the collecting interest of Renaissance thinkers. Eventually, "cabinets of curiosities" even became economic enterprises by profiting on the entertaining qualities of oddities. Father and Son Tradescant charged a sixpence for a visit to their amazing collection of curiosities in London.⁷⁷

While a pastime of the populous, according to Giuseppe Olmi, "The shape of collections was determined by two main factors: the social and economic status of the collectors, and, more importantly, their intellectual and professional interests."⁷⁸ Logically, the coffers of princely collectors differed greatly from their common collecting corollaries; yet, similarities often exist across class divisions as many attempted to reconstruct the greater world in their domain—by creating an accessible microcosm.⁷⁹ Also, depending on academic leanings, some collectors utilized their cabinets for teaching purposes⁸⁰ while others utilized them as a laboratory for

⁷⁵ Isabel Yaya. "Wonders of America" *Journal of the History of Collections* 20.2 (2008): 174.

⁷⁶ Yaya, 174.

⁷⁷ Karen Kupperman, *Indians and English* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 22.

⁷⁸ Giuseppe Olmi, "Science, Honor, Metaphor: Italian Cabinets of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century," in *The Origins of Museums*, ed. Oliver Impey and Arthus MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 6.

⁷⁹ Yaya, 173.

⁸⁰ Leah Dilworth, ed., "Introduction," *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 6.

experiments and scientific observations—this is especially seen later in the Age of Enlightenment.

Because of the linguistic diversity of collectors and their varying interests, specialized argot developed in assorted tongues to suit multiple purposes. According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, in sixteenth century France and England collections of oddities were termed cabinets, while Germans called such an assembly a *Kammer*. In Italy an assemblage of peculiarities in a home was referred to as a *studiolo* or *museo*.⁸¹ Names for specialized collections also existed, a *Kunstammer* or a *Rüstammer* denoted a collection of armor, art, and historical artifacts and a *Wunderkammer* or *Naturalienkabinett* signified a collection of natural artifacts (also elucidated in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*'s "History of Museums"). Not always adhering to a fixed definition, a *Wunderkammer* often appears in literature in reference to a general collection⁸² and is broadly defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as a "room of wonders."⁸³

Within these sometimes specialized rooms of wonders, common types of object often appeared and held Latinate designations. According to Isabel Yaya's study of cabinets, "*mirabilia* were objects that stood out for their rarity and were intended to evoke curiosity... *artificialia* [collections involved]...combining the workings of nature with the creations of man...*naturalia* [collections]...assembled fauna, flora and minerals, as well as items that were intriguingly rare or possessed some affinity with the world of fables."⁸⁴ Scientific equipment, *scientifica*, comprised part of a cabinet's *artificialia* [a significant segment of the Library Company's holdings]. Falling under the category of *mirabilia*, *automata* were mechanical items

⁸¹ Yaya, 177; Also, the first museum in Russia, opening in the early eighteenth century, was called the *Kunstkamera*.

⁸² Joyce Henri Robinson's "An American Cabinet of Curiosities" in *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America* defines a *Wunderkammer* as "a room or collection of fine art and marvelous or wonder-provoking objects" (19).

⁸³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Wunderkammer, n." <http://Dictionary.oed.com>. (accessed 26 Jan 2009).

⁸⁴ Yaya, 174-175.

such as clocks and watches⁸⁵ which represented more technologically advanced interests than the natural rarities and mythical items with which they were intermingled. Also located under *mirabilia*, collections frequently housed ancient Greek and Roman artifacts [especially due to a resurgent interest in the ancients resulting from the Renaissance];⁸⁶ yet, recently discovered New World rarities sometimes outweighed antiquity's antiquities.

In her well reasoned article, "Wonders of America," Yaya argues that in Europe "the Americana of the cabinets served to illustrate and confirm a certain vision of exoticism"⁸⁷ and "...absorbed within the microcosm of the cabinets, the American object was lost amidst the surrounding curiosities..."⁸⁸ According to Yaya, and also argued by historian Karen Kupperman in *Indians and English*, Old World cabinets were organized according to material of composition [metal, wood, etc.] not by culture of origin and thus created an atmosphere in which objects were decontextualized and exoticized.⁸⁹ These American artifacts lacked recognition for their level of craftsmanship—an indicator of civility of the larger culture. Significantly, civility remained a benchmark during this early modern period for the evaluation of other societies; and, a presumed lack of this trait often provided the impetus for unjust treatment between cultures. Just like the armchair travel authors that propagandized the American colonies from venues such as London, the display of American artifacts in European locations effectively *othered* native peoples and their larger culture. The connection between texts and objects of display goes beyond the *othering* of non-European nations; many private and institutional collections remained physically

⁸⁵ OED, *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Automaton, n." <http://Dictionary.oed.com>. (accessed 26 Jan 2009).

⁸⁶ Yaya, 174.

⁸⁷ Yaya, 177.

⁸⁸ Yaya 181.

⁸⁹ Yaya, 177-182; Kupperman, 20-21.

connected to book repositories⁹⁰—such as the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, the Royal Society of London, and eventually the Library Company in the New World.

The preceding history of collecting in the Old World provides the basis for an in depth study of the Library Company’s cabinet of curiosities—an institution that implemented traditional collecting practices in a novel colonial setting. Although some colonists likely brought curiosities from abroad and collected interesting items within the colonies, institutional collections appear to have arisen only in the eighteenth century. The Library Company began amassing its holdings at the Library’s inception 1731 with a gift from London book liaison, Peter Collison—a print of an orrery.⁹¹ Later institutional cabinets of the colonial period include the collections from the American Philosophical Society and those of the Charleston museum, established in 1773.⁹² The “cabinet of curiosities” established by the Library Company of Philadelphia largely followed the tradition of its Old World forbearers through its collection of *naturalia*, *mirabilia*, and *artificialia*—although it refrained amassing non-scientific, mythical artifacts like unicorn horns. The size of the Company’s collection in no way rivaled the princely collections of the old world or the Tradescant’s behemoth collection in London. Its small size likely resulted from its dependency on donations.

Most items within the collection were donated by members and non-members [as was the frequent accessioning practice for institutional collections in the Old World], not acquired through a standard accessioning program. Elites often bestowed unique items obtained during travel, while the directors of the Library Company courted proprietary patronage in the hopes of

⁹⁰ Yaya, 183.

⁹¹ An orrery is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “A mechanical model, usually clockwork, devised to represent the motions of the earth and moon (and sometimes also the planets) around the sun.”

⁹² Joyce Henri Robinson, “An American Cabinet of Curiosities: Thomas Jefferson’s “Indian Hall” at Monticello,” in *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America*, ed. Leah Dilworth (New Brunswick, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 22.

receiving expensive scientific instruments. Scientific instruments were also sometimes purchased with Company funds—e.g. the hydrostatical balance and solar microscope. The one instance of the Library Company providing recompense for artifacts was the barter of Matthew Clarkson’s collection of fossils for a lifetime membership in the company in 1761.⁹³ Due to the Company’s method for ascertaining objects of interest, its cabinet cannot be seen as a product of the directors’ unified vision. Conversely, because the collection resulted from the beneficence of those associated with the institution *and* Company members chose to display items [thereby making them representative of the organization], the collection can be read as representative of the Library’s worldview.

While the organization of these gifted items remains unknown, whether or not the Company organized by material or by category, indicators of the location and function of the Library Company’s “cabinet” remain within reach thanks to the Company’s minutes and the arduous work of previous historians. The Library, after it gained semi-permanent housing, located its collection in a separate room from its textual holdings. This separation appears in an excerpt from the company’s minutes in 1760 in which the librarian complained that: “...several skins in the form of Indian Dresses in a room adjacent to the Library, grew extremely (sic.) offensive and troublesome.”⁹⁴ This physical division also appears earlier in an advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* from 1740 that reads: “The Gentlemen who have subscribed to the Encouragement of a Course of Philosophical Lectures and Experiments, to be performed by Mr. Greenwood, are desired to meet in the Chamber adjoining to the Library at the State House ...”⁹⁵ Philosophical equipment comprised a large segment of the Company’s cabinet, therefore, this

⁹³ Grimm, 90.

⁹⁴ Library Company of Philadelphia Director’s Minutes, August 11, 1760, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

⁹⁵ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, “The Gentleman,” June 5, 1740, infoweb.newsbank.com (accessed September 20, 2008).

advertisement refers to the collection's physical location within the State House. More than indicating location, the previous advertisement reveals a major service provided by the collection—the facilitation of instruction and experimentation. Acting as the site of philosophical lectures would likely result in the frequent viewing of curiosities by men of great knowledge, and more generally, result in increased traffic flow through the museum room. The focus on experimentation is not surprising considering the enlightened interest in scientific study, but a less explicit function can also be seen through the comparative study of the Library's textual catalogue and its visual holdings—i.e. the *othering* of locals and people of non-western European descent.

A direct, utilitarian relationship existed between the Company's textual holdings and its oddities on display. To fully understand the history and function of the cabinet's components, individuals referenced the Company's well-stocked stacks. The Company's directors recognized this referential relationship between books and objects—this recognition appears in the description of medals [a part of the *mirabilia*] in the printed catalogue of 1770: “The silver imperial medals, any of the books upon that subject will explain; and for want of time they are but slightly mentioned in this catalogue.” The Company's *scientifica* also found corollaries within the Libraries shelves—such as the *Employment of the Microscope* and *Micrographia Illustrata; or, The Knowledge of the Microscope Explained*. Significantly, the cultural *mirabilia* also found their expository counterparts on the library's shelves—only in the largely European penned history texts. The apparent informative relationship between text and objects likely informed the manner in which readers viewed displayed objects and inevitably reinforced prevalent stereotypes concerning other cultures.

Proportionally, history books dominated the texts listed in the Library Company's printed catalogues throughout the colonial period. According to Wolf, "The three hundred and seventy-five titles listed in the 1741 catalogue can be roughly divided into subjects as follows: History 114, Literature 69, Science 65, Theology 38, Philosophy 33, Social Sciences 28, Arts 13, Linguistics 10, and General 5."⁹⁶ What Wolf fails to discuss, by broadly terming the largest category as "history," is the interrelation and conflation of standard history texts with exotic travel narratives. History texts often are touted as impartial transmitters of past events, while not often being the case. Travel narratives, on the other hand, usually follow the exploits of a European adventurer or colonizer or even a propagandizer who has never set foot out of Europe (e.g. Richard Hakluyt) in unfamiliar territory. These travelogues expound "unusual" characteristics of distant societies while also making comparisons to the home culture. In the case of English authors writing of the New World, many expressed envy over the robustness of the Native Americans now lost in England.⁹⁷ Amalgamated under the category of history, these travel narratives would wield the authority/legitimacy of a standard history, while concomitantly *othering* unfamiliar cultures through a focus on difference. Much of this differentiation between European and unfamiliar societies appears in the language of the titles in the Company's printed catalogues.

Full titles of texts appeared in the Companies printed catalogues and speak to a disparity of respect between western and non-western cultures. Following the early modern tradition of title-writing, many of these titles spanned multiple lines and contained dozens of arcane words. These long descriptions served as blurbs and informed prospective readers of a book's content. Several trends appear when comparing titles of histories on European cultures against Eastern,

⁹⁶ Edwin Wolf, *A catalogue of books*, vii.

⁹⁷ For a full discussion of this British/native comparison, see the "Chapter I: Mirror Images" in Karen Kupperman's 2000 publication, *Indians and English*.

African, and aboriginal societies. When referring to European histories, authors often utilize the familiar term “our” or implement various laudatory phrases. Authors of texts present in the Company’s shelves also recognized civility of these western European territories by focusing on their complexity of law and rule.

In opposition to the veneration authorially bestowed on European cultures, the extended titles filling Company catalogues illustrate demeaning attitudes toward aboriginal, Eastern, and African cultures. While relating to European (especially English) societies with the word “our,” authors often utilized the distancing term “their” when discussing African, aboriginal North and South American, and Asian cultures. The greater frequency of exciting descriptive words like “remarkable” and “curious” in reference to non western European cultures further illustrates the *otherness* of these lands.⁹⁸ In these extended titles, great focus was also given to the manners, behaviors, and religions of unfamiliar cultures; for example: *The History of the Conquest of China by the Tartars. Together with an Account of several remarkable Things, containing the Religious, Manners, and Customs of both nations, but especially of the latter. First written in Spanish and now in English. London 1671.*⁹⁹ This emphasis on manners and religion, prominently placing these aspects in titles, further illustrates the importance of gauging the civility of non-European cultures. Although books within the Library’s collection were largely written by European non-members, the democratic process of book selection (discussed in

⁹⁸ Examples of “remarkable” appear throughout the 1764 catalogue, as well as all other colonial printed catalogues, and include: *A Voyage to the Levant; or, Travels in the principal parts of Asia Minor, the Islands of Scio, Rhodes, Cyprus, &c. With an Account of the most considerable Cities of Egypt, Syria, and the Holy Land. Enriched with above (sic.) 200 Copper-Plates, wherein are represented the most noted Cities, Countries, Towns, and other remarkable Things, all drawn to Life. By M. Corneille le Bruyn. Done into English by J. W. London, 1702* under “Books in Folio” on page 18 and *A New General Collection of Voyages and Travels: Consisting of the most esteemed Relations which have been hitherto published in any Language; comprehending everything remarkable in its kind, in Europe, in Asia, Africa and America with respect to several Empires...* under “Books in Quarto” on page 32.

⁹⁹ Many other examples of the focus on unfamiliar manners and religions exist, but a particularly telling entry comes from the 1741 printed catalogue under “Books in Folio” (page 6): *The Royal Commentaries of Peru; in Two Parts. I. Treating of the Original of Their Incas or Kings; of their Idolatry; of their Laws and Government both in Peace and War...*

Chapter One) indicates the texts conformed to the interests of the Library’s constituency. Also, while extended titles listed in catalogues do not indicate the breadth of an entire book, they signify main points and, thereby, what informed the viewing of the cabinet’s oddities.

1757 Catalogue	1770 Catalogue
<p>“A curious Air-Pump, with its Apparatus, given by the Hon. John Penn, Esq.;</p> <p>An electrical Apparatus; A large Pair of Globes; a large reflecting Telescope; a double Microscope; a large Camera Obscura, and a handsome Lot of Ground, whereon to build a House for the Library, given by the Hon. Thomas Penn, Esq.;</p> <p>Pennsylvania Fossils, &c. given by Mr. Bartram.</p> <p>Cloathing [sic], Instruments, and Utensils of the Eskimaux, given by the North West Company.</p> <p>A Snake’s Skin, 12 Feet long, and 16 Inches over.</p> <p>A piece of Marble, lately dug out of the Ruins of <i>Herculaneum</i>.</p> <p>An antique Pewter Dish, given by Mr. Stephen Paschall.</p> <p>A very beautiful Concha, given by R. G.</p> <p>A Malabar Manuscript, on Leaves, given by the Rev. Mr. Hugh Jones.</p> <p>A Sea Feather.</p> <p>Some curious Snakes, Scorpions, &c. in a Bottle of Spirits.</p> <p>A 12 Inch concave Reflecting Mirror, given by B. F.</p> <p><i>Mitchell’s</i> Map of North America.</p> <p>Prospect of <i>London</i>, from <i>Westminster</i> Bridge to <i>London</i> Bridge. By Messieurs Bucks.</p> <p>Prospect of <i>Portsmouth</i>, by Ditto.</p> <p>A Hydrostatical Balance, with its Appurtenances, and a Solar Microscope, have been purchased by the Company...”¹⁰⁰</p>	<p>“A curious air-pump, with its apparatus, given by the Honourable John Penn, Esq.</p> <p>An electrical apparatus; a large pair of globes; a large reflecting telescope; a large double microscope; a large camera obscura; and a valuable lot of ground whereon to build a house for the library, given by the Honorable Thomas Penn Esq;</p> <p>Pennsylvania Fossils, &c. given by Mr. <i>Bartram</i>.</p> <p>Instruments and utensils of the <i>Eskimaux</i>, given by the <i>North West company</i>.</p> <p>A Snake’s Skin, twelve feet long, and fifteen inches over.</p> <p>A Piece of marble, lately dug out of the ruins of <i>Herculaneum</i>.</p> <p>An antique pewter dish, given by Mr. Stephen Paschall.</p> <p>A very beautiful concha, given by R. G.</p> <p>A Malabar manuscript, on leaves, given by the reverend Mr. Hugh Jones.</p> <p>A Sea feather.</p> <p>Some curious snakes, scorpions, &c. in a bottle of spirits.</p> <p>A twelve inch concave reflecting mirror, given by B. F.</p> <p><i>Mitchell’s</i> map of <i>North-America</i>.</p> <p>Prospect of <i>London</i>, from <i>Westminster-bridge</i> to <i>London-bridge</i>, by Messieurs <i>Bucks</i>.</p> <p>Prospect of <i>Portsmouth</i>, by ditto.</p> <p>A large cabinet, containing a very curious collection of <i>American fossils</i>, with several pieces of earth, clay, sand, &c. all methodically disposed, and explained by a numerical list, or catalogue, giving an account from what place each sample was brought. This collection was the work of Mr. <i>Samuel Hazard</i>, late of this city, merchant, and was purchased for the company since his decease.</p> <p>Two manuscripts in rolls, in the <i>Russian</i> language and character, given by Mr. <i>Lewis Timothy</i>.</p> <p>The hand and arm of an <i>Egyptian</i> mummy presented by Mr. <i>Benjamin West</i>.</p> <p>A hydrostatical balance with its appurtenances. Two solar microscopes.</p> <p>An air pump. Two pair of globes &c.</p> <p>They possess also a handsome house in this city.</p> <p><i>The valuable Collection of Ancient MEDALS, in the Library, was received from England, (through the hands of the Honorable Proprietary, THOMAS PENN, Esq;) with the following remarks and account of them.</i></p> <p>THE <i>Roman</i> coins hereafter mentioned, are a small specimen of the several sorts of money made use of in that famous Empire, and are a present from Mr. <i>Gray</i>, of <i>Colchester</i>, to the public library of <i>Philadelphia</i>, as a token of the honour and esteem which he has for Pennsylvania.¹⁰¹</p>

Table 1: Published listings of the Library’s Cabinet of Curiosities from 1757 and 1770.

¹⁰⁰ Library Company of Philadelphia, *The Charter, Laws, and Catalogue of Books, of the Library Company of Philadelphia*. (Philadelphia: Ben Franklin and D. Hall, 1757), 22-23.

¹⁰¹ Library Company of Philadelphia, *The Charter, Laws, and Catalogue of Books, of the Library Company of Philadelphia. With a Short Account of the Library Prefixed*. (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1770), 4-5.

The scant non-European items in the cabinet reinforce the principles of *othering* already discussed within the Company's textual catalogue. Although the listings of objects within the Library's printed catalogues appears incomplete, Peter Collison's orrery print and "a human Heart prepared by Injection"¹⁰² are among the several unlisted curiosities, they remain the best indicator of the cabinet's contents. Table one, on the previous page, lists the contents of the Library's cabinet from 1757 and 1770. As is evident by comparison, very little change occurred in the composition over thirteen years. "Cloathing" of the "Eskimaux," present in the 1757 catalogue, disappears in the 1770 catalogue—this clothing was likely the malodorous animal skins that bothered the librarian in 1760.¹⁰³ Several additions appear in the 1770 catalogue: American fossils of Samuel Hazard, two Russian manuscripts, a hand and arm of an Egyptian mummy, and ancient medals and coins. This relative continuity illustrates that the primary categories of collecting were *naturalia* and *scientifica*—likely due to the Company's interest in furthering the Enlightenment ideals of scientific study and the generation of new knowledge. American objects derive primarily from the earth and were not shaped by human cultures.

As evident from the provided lists, the non European cultural artifacts comprised a very small minority of the cabinet's holding. Therefore, it is important not to overstate the impact of the "foreign" objects. Yet, the continuation of an ethos of *othering* appears when viewing these objects in association with the Library's previously mentioned travelogues and "histories." As exposed separately by Kupperman and Yaya, the inclusion of "foreign" cultural artifacts without contextualization serves to *other* representative cultures. Although the physical organization of the Library's Collection remains unknown, non-European items (items of the "Eskimaux," a

¹⁰² Edwin Wolf II "The library Company of Philadelphia, America's first Museum," *Magazine Antiques* 120, no. 2 (August 1981): 348.

¹⁰³ George Maurice Abbot, *A Short History of the Library Company of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, The Library Company Board of Directors, 1913), 10.

Malabar manuscript, a mummy's hand, and even the Russian manuscripts because of their non-western/non-familiar status) are listed amongst *artificialia* and *naturalia* and given only a cursory gloss. Significantly, while located in a colony exercising relative toleration towards the Native American population, no items from local tribes appear in the catalogue. This absence may indicate a desire to overlook aboriginal inhabitants due to increasing cultural tensions¹⁰⁴ and provides a noted dichotomy between the host of natural resources and fossils included in the cabinet—it appears that the Company, and Pennsylvanians in general, remained far more interested in the what the “virgin” earth could produce than who had been living off that “virgin” earth for millennia (as will later be seen in reference to an article written by Thomas Paine).

The extra-cultural items that were included in the cabinets exemplify the cultural interests of the Company's textual holdings—religion, manners, and behavior. The clothing, instruments, and utensils of the “Eskimaux” illustrate the *otherness* of their daily life and provide a gauge for “civility.” As a gift from the North West Company, the collection summarizes the Inuit culture merely with a handful of objects—a common practice with a European culture exploring a New World land for profit. While not an indicator of contemporary civility, the arm of an Egyptian mummy (see figure 1) represents ancient religious practice and norms. Mummies, or parts of mummies, appear frequently in cabinets during this period and were often used in powdered form in common pharmacology. Francis Hopkinson brought the mummy's arm back from London, a gift from Benjamin West, and bestowed it to the Library Company in 1767.¹⁰⁵ Library Company Historian Edwin Wolf remained at a loss to categorize this holding when he

¹⁰⁴ For a cursory explanation of growing tensions between Native Americans and Pennsylvania inhabitants of European descent see Edwin Wolf II's *Philadelphia*. These tensions also appear in Franklin's autobiography in his treatises on native schooling and his views on defense.

¹⁰⁵ Abbot, 10.

wrote: “Is it anthropological, ethnological, or archaeological?”¹⁰⁶ A combination of all three, this object was a remnant of a burial ceremony and represented ancient Egyptian religious practices and cultural values. Although representative of extra-cultural interests, the cabinet’s inclusion of the mummified hand of a woman also can be read as representative of a male-centric view of science—significant, once again, considering the primary function of the cabinet was experimentation.

The severed arm was originally referred to in the Library Company minutes as “a woman’s hand, taken from an Egyptian mummy.” The inclusion of a mummified limb from a female in the cabinet of curiosities may indicate that the company kept abreast of contemporary science—at least according to Londa Schiebinger’s view of enlightened science in *Nature’s Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*. According to Schiebinger, concepts about gender were implicit in “modern science” and were often expressed in a focus on the female anatomy—the scientific male viewing the female body in pieces. This mummified limb can be read as placing women as the object of study and not the practitioner of science. At the time of the mummy’s acquisition, membership in the Company remained entirely male. The inclusion reinforces the exemplar of the scientific enlightened citizen as male. This connection holds greater import when contextualized by the uncertain female role in hierarchically unsettled Philadelphia before the Revolution¹⁰⁷ and thus provides insight into the gendered construction of identity.

While ancient, the Library Company eschewed Egypt as the historical template for their burgeoning society and, not surprisingly, embraced ancient Greece and Rome. The value placed in these ancient items appears in the Library Company’s consternation after the 1773 theft of

¹⁰⁶ Wolf, “The library Company of Philadelphia, America’s first Museum,” 351.

¹⁰⁷ See Clare Lyon’s *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, 1730-1830*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

many coins when the cabinet was located in Carpenters Hall. While the inclusion of ancient coins and medals remained common in curiosity cabinets, the Library Company's textual description of its ancient holdings provides a significant point of departure. Although most items within the cabinet received only a cursory explanation and a note on benefaction, the Company's collection of Greek and Roman medals and coins received over three pages and listed medals individually with a history of the item and its historical context. Just as the Puritans of Massachusetts looked to the Bible for advice on how to order society and conduct daily life, the Library Company looked to antiquity for how to best order Pennsylvania, at least emblematically. This modeling appears in the evaluation of the medals' worth in the printed catalogue: "Medals, merely considered as curiosities, are of very little value, and hardly worth the attention of prudent men; but when they are regarded as proofs and illustrations of history, or when the legends and reveries contain any useful illustrations, some benefit may be obtained from them."

The crafters of the printed catalogue utilized Roman numismatics to parlay into a discussion of Pennsylvania's defense. Pennsylvania, as a state founded and inhabited by a potent Quaker political block, largely eschewed the idea of a standing army—even in times of tension with Native Americans. Great commotion often plagued the State House when proposals for state defense were decried by Quaker elite—although these elite often supported defensive action privately when out of earshot of the Society of Friends. The drafters of the catalogue first discuss two silver Roman coins and compare the symbology to the present state of Pennsylvania—the first coin is compared to Pennsylvania's dependence upon agriculture for public welfare and the second illuminates Rome's military might and implies Pennsylvania's

need for defense. An extended discussion of a regulated defense, one without the prospect of military coup follows:

The first of the two [coins] is the properest present to Pennsylvania, tho' something may be learned from the latter: A military force, for necessary self-defense, is often wanted, to preserve what industry has gained; but it never should be allowed to extend itself so far, as to endanger what it is designed to protect.

Though we ought not to let our trust in Providence run into presumption, or to the neglect of those means which are put into our hands; yet there is something more to be expected of security of this province, than to any other; because they set out upon a better foundation. There is hardly an instance in the world, of a people's growing to such a number, and such a degree of strength, without any one war or military enterprise [sic].¹⁰⁸

The above excerpt indicates not only a desire for proper defense, but a belief in the exceptionalism of the Pennsylvanian colony. The colony deserved protection because of its unique and honorable beginnings. Although wishing to emulate the Roman's defensive prowess, the drafters also recognized the error in allowing the military to control the government and the vitiating effects of Rome's luxury.

To temper Roman faults, the Library Company recognizes the more humanitarian benefits of the Grecian state. Already tied to Greece through its parent city's name, Philadelphia is derived from the Greek meaning "brotherly love," the Library Company respected the construction of the Grecian city states and the Greek excellence in the arts and sciences.¹⁰⁹ Regardless of the ancient point of reference, the desired emulation of Greece and Roman cultures illustrates the cabinet's use as a tool for the construction of the ideal society. While the printed listing of the cabinet of curiosities would seem an unlikely genre for the exposition of political ideas, and even somewhat tendentious ideas like the militarization of Pennsylvania, the tangible symbols of antiquity provided the necessary fodder for contemporary comparisons.

¹⁰⁸ Library Company of America. *The Charter, Laws, and Catalogue of Books, of the Library Company of Philadelphia. With A Short Account of the Library Prefixed.* (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1770), 6.

¹⁰⁹ Library Company of America. *The Charter, Laws, and Catalogue of Books, of the Library Company of Philadelphia. With A Short Account of the Library Prefixed.* (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1770), 6.

Just as the cabinet's ancient *mirabilia* provided the template for an ideal society, its *naturalia* was utilized as an example of the untapped natural resources present in colonial Pennsylvania and spoke to the need for their further European excision. The connection between natural resources found in curiosity cabinets and the economic benefit of the exploitation of said resources was not first elucidated by the Library Company, although the expression of these ideas within a colonial setting indicated a novel ownership of an unsecured land. In the seventeenth century, Elias Ashmole cited the reasons for the gift of his curiosities to Oxford as "...the knowledge of nature is very neccessarie to human life, health, and the conveniences thereof...and to this [end], is requisite the inspection of Particulars, especially those as are extraordinary in their Fabrick, or useful in Medicine, or applied to Manufacture of Trade" [sic].¹¹⁰ As a member of the English virtuosi, a group of intellectuals interested in cultivating broad knowledge and applying learning to economic improvement, Ashmole's philosophical practicality led to his improvement oriented view of the curiosity cabinet.¹¹¹ This view remained alive in the late eighteenth century, only with a more overt industrial tenor.

As already mentioned, no local Native American objects from North America appeared in the Company's cabinet—only evidence of the fecundity of the earth was included. The Library Company valued the American fossils to such an extent that they traded a lifetime membership for their acquisition—the only incidence of a barter.¹¹² The previously mentioned exclusion and *othering* of cultures within the Library's textual holdings and the cabinet's focus on natural resources likely led to a sense of manifest ownership of the land—due to a perceived

¹¹⁰ Elias Ashmole quoted in Brian Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 13.

¹¹¹ For a thorough explanation of England's virtuosi see Brian Cowan's *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse*.

¹¹² According to Edwin Wolf II's "The Library Company of Philadelphia: America's First Museum" (238) other natural holdings unmentioned in the catalogue include unusual geological formations and pickled fauna.

lack of “civilized” inhabitation. The lack of recognition of Native American territorial rights (probably due to their lack of European style “improvement” of land) and the desire for the excision of natural resources best appears in an article in the *Pennsylvania Magazine* by “Atlanticus.”

In 1755 Thomas Paine, operating under his pseudonym Atlanticus¹¹³ wrote “Useful and Entertaining Hints. The real value of a thing / Is as much money as ‘twill bring.”¹¹⁴ As obvious from the title, “Atlanticus” emphasizes the real world commercialization of objects while largely eschewing their intrinsic value—in this case, nature’s bounty. “Atlanticus” begins this piece by referencing the “cabinet of Fossils, with several species of earth, clay, sand, &c...”¹¹⁵ in the possession of the Library Company. The author then parlays his discussion of the cabinet to the industrial value of gaining knowledge of America’s resources—all in an effort to enforce the importance of subterranean mining of useful metals. “Atlanticus” states:

Tis by the researches of the virtuoso that the hidden parts of the earth are brought to light, and from his discoveries of its qualities, the potter, the glass-maker, and numerous other artists, are able to furnish us with their productions. Artists considered merely as such, would have made but a slender progress, had they not been led on by the enterprising spirit of the curious.¹¹⁶

Although this excerpt reads as a general recognition of the commercial benefits of Earth’s fecundity, and parallels the statement of early virtuoso Elias Ashmole, Paine later issues clear demarcations between the Old World’s bounty and the New World’s mystery through an extended metaphor replete with negative female connotations. Paine writes:

Tho’ nature is gay, polite, and generous abroad, she is sullen, rude, and niggardly at home: Return the visit, and she admits you with all the suspicion of a miser,

¹¹³ Alfred Owen Aldridge, *Thomas Paine’s American Ideology* (University of Delaware Press, 1984), 28.

¹¹⁴ Atlanticus, “Useful and Entertaining Hints. The real value of a thing / Is as much money as ‘twill bring” *The Pennsylvania Magazine, or American Monthly Museum*, February 1775, www.proquest.com (accessed December 12, 2008)

¹¹⁵ Atlanticus

¹¹⁶ Atlanticus

and all the reluctance of an antiquated beauty retired to replenish her charms. Bred up in antediluvian notions, she has not yet acquired the European taste of receiving visitants in her waiting room: She locks and bolts up her private recesses with extraordinary care, as if not only to preserve her hoards, but to conceal her age, and hide the remains of a face that was young and lovely in the days of Adam. He that would view nature in her undress, and partake of her internal treasures, must proceed with the resolution of a robber, if not a ravisher. She gives no invitation to follow her to the cavern. The external earth makes no proclamation, of the interior stores, but leaves to chance and industry, the discovery of the whole.¹¹⁷

Paine constructs a conceit in which nature, a woman, guardedly hides her treasures—i.e. her virtue—and industrious males must force entry to claim their rightful possessions. Proposing ravishment, Paine not only suggests raping the land of natural resources (a trope frequently used by later historians looking back on the practices of settlers of European descent) but negatively comments on the station of women—the gendered personification of nature. Also, by suggesting that American land has yet to acquire a European “taste” for yielding natural resources, Paine implies that the former sole owners failed to adequately improve the land for its current uses—thus negatively reflecting on Native American “civility.” Paine’s arguments, and his implicit assertion of manifest ownership of the land, remain particularly poignant because they were made on the cusp of the American Revolution. While Philadelphians, and colonists in general, were declaring their independence from Britain they were also declaring and rationalizing their ownership of a new land and its many hidden resources.

The use of the cabinet as an emblem for the European excision of natural resources is intrinsically tied to the disparagement of Native Americans’ civility. The former notion would not have spread through society if not based in a belief of superiority. The veneration of Greek and Roman societies also provided a template for the evaluation of civility—a significant concept in the formerly mentioned processes. Inevitably, the textual and visual othering of

¹¹⁷ Atlanticus

cultures, the emblematic modeling of ancient societies, and the assertion of physical ownership of the land (and of women) remain three disparate functions of the Library Company's cabinet of curiosities—yet, all appear interconnected. Although the Library Company's cabinet of curiosities primarily acted as a functionalist tool for scientific experimentation, it has been shown that this mechanism of display also served as a malleable tool for the cultivation of identity—as seen through the construction of the concepts of an ideal Pennsylvania, an ideal society, and the ideal scientific male. While the Library Company's cabinet of curiosities likely enhanced the worldview of colonial Philadelphians, as proposed by Grimm, it significantly served to solidify their position in a new land.

Chapter Three:

Publishing for Prominence:

The Role of Newspaper Articles in the Cultivation of Group Identity and Reputation

HEAR YE! HEAR YE! READ ALL ABOUT IT! LIBRARY COMPANY IMPROVES MINDS, AND DESERVES RESPECT! While this headline (an anachronistic insertion considering colonial newspapers refrained from using such eye-catching slogans) did not actually appear in Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* or other contemporaneous weeklies, it encapsulates the spirit permeating the Library Company's published letters, notices, and advertisements during the colonial era. With this self-laudation in mind, the current chapter argues that the Library Company of Philadelphia outwardly constructed its identity as an institution through the most common form of visual communication in the colonies—the newspaper.¹¹⁸ The Company was able to cultivate community-wide deference due to the lack of traditional hierarchy present in colonial Pennsylvania while the relatively classless consumption of the colonial newspaper enhanced the Library's audience and facilitated its message. Although many treatises on the Library Company utilize newspaper accounts as historical evidence of activities, as seen previously within this thesis, they all fail to consider the intentions and results behind the specific use of this media to construct identity within a thriving, highly literate port community. This study hopes to remedy such an oversight.

Three genres of newspaper “articles” provided the medium for the dissemination of the Library Company's cultivated reputation: letters to the editor, proprietary correspondence, and

¹¹⁸ Inherent to the efficacy of the newspaper as a tool for fostered reputation is the citizen's ability to read, or listen to what was written. Pennsylvania was a *highly* literate colony—it enacted an education law in 1683 requiring parents to teach their children to read and prepare them for a useful trade by age twelve. See further explication in “Chapter One.”

advertisements. Through these genres the Company forwarded three specific aspects of its identity within the community—the Library depicted itself as a tool for egalitarian self-improvement while conversely expressing itself as an enlightened elite, a unified/harmonious body, and an organization in league with the ruling powers—qualities that often remained in opposition with reality. The eventual comparison of the Library Company’s threefold self-presentation in print with its later emulators will indicate the results of the Company’s cultivated reputation.

Although the results of the Company’s self-formulated reputation will be discussed, the principal endeavor of this chapter remains the explication of the creation process and the enumeration of facets of this outwardly-oriented identity. Yet, the method of ascertaining public reaction to the Company’s created reputation must be explicated to avoid later confusion. No personal records of non-members praising the library’s grandiosity remain, and utilizing extant Company created newspaper articles and Library Company director’s minutes cannot support assertions concerning ubiquitous community-held beliefs. Therefore, when discussing the efficacy of the Library Company’s fostered reputation, assertions will only be made through the study of published pieces from other libraries and printed articles in extra-territorial newspapers.

Other methods of ascertaining public opinion appear in Richard L. Merritt’s “Public Opinion in Colonial America: Content-Analyzing the Colonial Press.”¹¹⁹ While Merritt focuses on the colonial paper’s representativeness of political opinion, his concepts remain applicable for the study of community deference. According to Merritt, “Equally important in appraising the influence of the newspaper in colonial America is the relative absence of other media of

¹¹⁹ Richard L. Merritt, “Public Opinion in Colonial America: Content-Analyzing the Colonial Press,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 27.3 (Autumn 1963): 356-371.

communication.”¹²⁰ Merritt later asserts that “an indirect measure of the effectiveness of the colonial newspapers is their endurance.”¹²¹ Merritt’s last statement remains particularly significant to the current study because the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, the primary vehicle for the Library’s missives, ran from 1728 to 1815—a noteworthy accomplishment considering the frequent bankruptcies of colonial papers.¹²²

The lack of traditional hierarchy in Pennsylvania set the foundation for the Library Company’s self-creation within the colonial press, and no one better explicates this colonial social organization than historian Richard Beeman. Quoting Victorian scholar Walter Bagehot, Beeman suggests that England’s tradition of deference was rooted in the belief that “Respect is traditional; it is given not to what is proven to be good, but what is known to be old.”¹²³ In the American colonies, especially the youthful Pennsylvania,¹²⁴ institutions lacked the longevity, but not the will, required to garner “traditional respect.”¹²⁵ Therefore, institutions, and even people, could more easily elevate their status through the dissemination of select information to the public—to cultivate a desired reputation. As will be seen through the Library Company,

¹²⁰ Merritt, 364-365.

¹²¹ Merritt, 367.

¹²² Merritt, 368.

¹²³ Richard R. Beeman, “The Varieties of Deference in Eighteenth-Century America.” *Early American Studies* (Fall 2005): 315. Beeman quotes from Victorian constitutional scholar, Walter Bagehot, when describing England’s political system.

¹²⁴ A compendious history of colonial Philadelphia, and to a greater extent Pennsylvania, appears in Edwin Wolf II’s pictorial history, *Philadelphia: Portrait of an American City*. According to Wolf, William Penn received the charter for Pennsylvania in 1681 and began creating a government founded on religious freedom and toleration (13-14). Younger than Virginia or Massachusetts, colonial Pennsylvania lacked stringent hierarchical divisions. Clare A. Lyons cites this hierarchical ambiguity as the locus of the quasi-female liberality present in colonial Philadelphia in her book, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, 1730-1830*.

¹²⁵ Conversely on page 338, Richard Beeman goes on to expound upon the singular act of deference enacted in the American colonies when he discusses colonials’ universal recognition of *subjectship* to the king of England due to the lax nature of colonial citizenship.

associations with institutions and people wielding “traditional respect” remained an asset in the socially mobile construction of reputation.¹²⁶

In addition to Pennsylvania’s youthful nature, Philadelphia’s role as a port also made the city less amenable to strict hierarchical structures. In *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865*, Richard D. Brown posits that the hierarchical information systems, where news and information were controlled by elites and then selectively distributed to non-elites, were not sustained in port cities where individuals readily exchanged information as they embarked and disembarked. According to Brown:

Urban communities in the late eighteenth century, which were all ports, possessed institutions and customs that affected both face-to-face and printed modes of communication directly. The result was that port residents, whether merchants, professionals, or artisans, were all exposed to unprecedented qualities of information, with frequency not available elsewhere.¹²⁷

Power, traditionally, belonged to the elites because of their control over information.

Although the Library included uncommon men of great intellect, they were not the traditional European elite. Through the unsettled system of hierarchy resulting from a young colony and an influx of information surging through multiple classes, the Company fostered their reputation through a highly potent means of classless diffusion of information—the colonial paper.

More than historic studies of hierarchical control pertain to the current study.¹²⁸ For, example, the field of sensory history enumerates the often unnoticed, experiential aspects of history. While the study of newspapers and the book repositories forwarded within their pages

¹²⁶ The term “reputation” frequently appears in this chapter and will be defined as: “The condition, quality, or fact, of being highly regarded or esteemed” [as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary]—in this study reputation does not merely refer to the generic opinions concerning a person or institution.

¹²⁷ Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1835* (NY: Oxford University Press US, 1989), 127.

¹²⁸ Although focusing on France, Robert Darnton’s edited *Revolution in Print: The Press in France, 1775-1800* also provides an applicable study to the impact of the printing press during the time surrounding the French Revolution.

initially appears to privilege the sense of sight—thus falling into the western trap of occularcentrism¹²⁹—the congregational aspect of colonial literacy remained heavily reliant upon hearing. In *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book*, David D. Hall identifies aspects of “traditional literacy” (a “literacy” more dependent upon reading than writing that began to change in the eighteenth century, but persisted until the early nineteenth) and cites reading aloud as integral to this system of knowledge.¹³⁰ With the historic significance of reading orally in mind, the reading of Library Company articles can be viewed as a multi-sensory experience that could reach multiple people and thus create a simultaneous public discourse. Recognizing this medium as more than visual, should aid the production of a richer historical study.

Also, inherent to this study is the role of newspapers in colonial America as a powerful aspect of visual culture—scholars of this field have provided valuable insight to the current work. Although not directly connected to the present investigation, In *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, David Henkin’s “Word on the Streets: Ephemeral Signage in Antebellum New York” studies the ubiquitous “bills, boards, and banners”¹³¹ papering antebellum New York and differentiates this form of visual culture from graphic icons or monuments due to its more “direct” message. In this chapter, the printed word clearly communicates a specific message and avoids much of the abstract interpretation common to paintings and figural monuments; yet, it still elicits a visual reaction through fonts, typesettings, and the studied use of white space. Inevitably, Henkin finds signage, even when passing from person to person, to be an impersonal form of communication—albeit a “highly evocative

¹²⁹ The Western focus on ocularcentrism is discussed by several prominent scholars of sensory history. Mark M. Smith, in his sensorially expansive *Seeing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching History*, combats the assertion that vision has predominated the modern era and posits that the “proximate” senses remained significant throughout this period.

¹³⁰ David D. Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 56-57.

¹³¹ Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przblyski, *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 195.

symbol of modernity.”¹³² While the Library Company began in the early-modern period and was replete with the concomitant focus on ordering and othering, colonial newspapers were not an impersonal form of communication—they instead brought people together as individuals read newspapers together in taverns, ports, and inns. Although Henkin’s article differs in its focus in place, time, and impersonality, it provides an excellent example of the interpretation of print media as a visual source—especially in Henkin’s assertion that the increase “of the printed word in public space reflected and reinforced the rise of mass literacy.

Before delving into the analysis of specific articles, notices, and letters, the modes of eighteenth century newspaper publication and consumption must first be explicated to adequately contextualize primary sources. The newspaper arrived late to the American colonies; yet, quickly adapted to meet a much needed communication niche. The first newspaper [*Public Occurrences*], published only one edition during its twenty-four hour run in 1690.¹³³ *Public Occurrences*, published in Boston, was suppressed due to the colonial authorities’ fear of the newspaper’s power—its possible dissemination of unsanctioned ideas to the non-elite. The first newspaper in Philadelphia, Andrew Bradford’s *American Weekly Mercury*, hit the presses as late as 1719—enough time for colonial authorities to slightly lessen restrictions on the press.¹³⁴

The newspapers primarily utilized in this study issue mostly from Philadelphia; yet, references to the Library Company appear in newspapers from other colonies due to

¹³² Henkin, 203.

¹³³ Sidney Kobre, *The Development of the Colonial Newspaper* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1960), 1.

¹³⁴ Robert Magnum Barrow, “Newspaper advertising in colonial America 1704-1775” (Ph. D. diss., University of Virginia, 1967), 41.

the widespread editorial penchant for copying text from distant colonies.¹³⁵ According to

Richard L. Merritt:

An analysis of a fairly large sample of newspapers for 1738 indicates that slightly over half (52.6 percent) the columns contained news reprinted from English journals, while another 20.7 per cent had originally appeared in newspapers of other American colonies. Less than a fourth of the news space in 1738 was filled with original reports. By 1768 these ratios had changed considerably: one-fourth (27.6 percent) of the news stemmed from British sources, another quarter (25.1 percent) came from other American colonies, while 44.2 per cent comprised original reports.¹³⁶

While such extra-territorial “borrowing” expanded the Library Company’s influence as far away colonies re-ran news of Library Company happenings, Franklin’s privileges as postmaster also broadened the influence of his *Pennsylvania Gazette*. As postmaster Franklin could corner the newspaper market through easy access to transportation infrastructure; postmasters often had the power to inhibit the sale of rival papers by blocking their transportation¹³⁷—some editors had to resort to bribing mail carriers to disseminate their editions!¹³⁸ Also, postmasters often received information concerning recent events from disembarking ship captains and government dispatches.¹³⁹ Taken together, editorial “borrowing” and the privileges specific to the *Pennsylvania Gazette* increased the number of people who read of Library Company happenings throughout the English speaking British colonies, and influenced the results of the Company’s constructed reputation—as will be seen later.

¹³⁵ Merritt, 361-362.

¹³⁶ Merritt, 361-362.

¹³⁷ Kobre, 100.

¹³⁸ Irving E. Fang, *A History of Mass Communication: Six Information Revolutions* (Burlington, MA: Focus Press, 1997), 66.

¹³⁹ Fang, 66; Steven J. Shaw, "Colonial Newspaper Advertising: A Step toward Freedom of the Press" *The Business History Review* 33.3 (Autumn, 1959): 410.

Stylistically, colonial newspapers resembled the format of those published in England;¹⁴⁰ yet, Philadelphia newspapers altered the template to meet the needs of their unique colonial setting. In their study of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Charles E. Clark and Charles Wetherell trace the evolution of the colonial newspaper from 1728 to 1765 and state:

...the Gazette under Franklin and Hall gave over most of page one to official transcripts, essays, and news, preceded occasionally by letters. Pages two and three were chiefly news pages, and page four was devoted overwhelmingly to advertisements. As the number and size of advertisements increased throughout the period of study, both Franklin and Hall were forced to use part of page three as an advertising page as well—during Hall's tenure, in fact, the greater part of it.¹⁴¹

The layout of colonial newspapers pertains to the impact of individual stories. The letters under discussion, both proprietary and notes to the editor, usually appeared prominently on the first page—this prominence would likely result in increased reader attention.

An important point to keep in mind when studying references to the Library Company within the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, especially those written before 1746 when David Hall became the active business partner, is that *Ben Franklin's views do not necessarily reflect those of the entire company*—but often wielded a significant influence. While Franklin's views and the Company's are not necessarily coterminous, his opinions greatly influenced library practices throughout the early years as he variously acted as director and librarian. Even missives signed by all directors often bore the mark of Franklin's literary style and forwarded Franklin's specific interests. Also, the pieces Franklin composed served as the primary base of information that reached the public during the institution's early decades and, therefore, acted instrumentally in the initial creation of the Company's constructed reputation.

¹⁴⁰ Robert Magnum Barrow, "Newspaper advertising in colonial America 1704-1775" (Ph. D. diss., University of Virginia, 1967), 1.

¹⁴¹ Charles E. Clark and Charles Wetherell, "The Measure of Maturity: The Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728-1765" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Volume 26, No. 2 (April 1986): 284-285.

Franklin, himself, put great emphasis on the importance of constructing personal reputation and much of the Library Company's method for fostering group identity within Philadelphia can be linked to his concept of impersonal suggestion. In his autobiography, Franklin discusses the obstacles in soliciting subscriptions for the Library Company and states:

The objections and reluctances I met with in soliciting the subscriptions made me soon feel the impropriety of presenting one's self as the proposer of any useful project that might be supposed to raise one's reputation in the smallest degree above that of one's neighbors, when one has need of their assistance to accomplish that project. I therefore put myself as much as I could out of sight, and stated it to be a scheme of a number of friends who had requested me to go about and propose it to such as they though lovers of reading.¹⁴²

This method of achieving one's desired result without hazardously engaging in personal assertions resembles the preferred mode of increasing the library's reputation through the newspaper—speaking through the voice of others (as will be seen with Obadiah Plainman) or disguised amongst a larger group.

The attempt to show the Library Company as a beneficent bastion of middle class *improvement* is best seen in one of Franklin's literary "creations." In an attempt to increase sales, Franklin formulated the concept of "letters to the editor"; yet, many of these letters were written by Franklin himself.¹⁴³ He even engaged in published arguments with himself under obvious pseudonyms which often indicated class or moral standing—such as Tom Trueman or Obadiah Plainman. In a self-disputatious letter published on the first page of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1740, "Obadiah Plainman" counters the defamatory claims made by "Tom Trueman":¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 76.

¹⁴³ Steven J. Shaw, "Colonial Newspaper Advertising: A Step toward Freedom of the Press" *The Business History Review* 33.3 (Autumn, 1959): 418.

¹⁴⁴ The letter to which Obadiah Plainman responds, originally published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on 22 May 1740, also speaks to the library's published depiction as an equalizing institution for all, while simultaneously constructing the organization as an elite body. In this letter, Tom Trueman questions Plainman's use of the term "better sort" and discusses a hypothetical situation in which Library Company members are referred to as such.

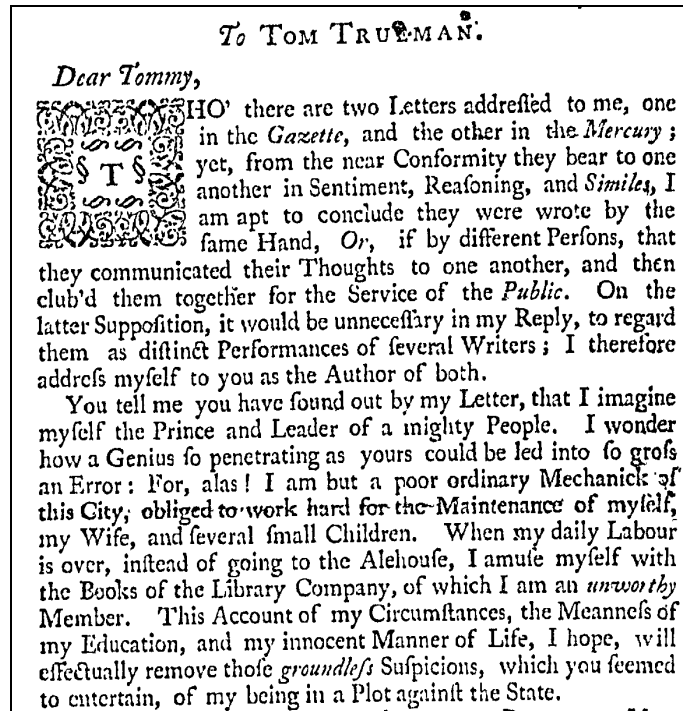


Figure 1: "To Tom Trueman," *Pennsylvania Gazette*. May 29, 1740, Issue 596 page 1

To disprove assertions of self-importance and seditiousness, "Plainman" refers to his humble status and undeserved membership in the Library Company to illustrate his unassuming desire for self-improvement. Speaking as a true "plain man" the author ingeniously utilizes his assumed role as a non-elite member to make him more relatable to the common man— Plainman's claims concerning the Library Company are more legitimate because he is not merely furthering elite interests. Significantly, this farcical defense indicates not only how Franklin attempted to construct the Library Company's reputation within the community but, also suggests how contemporary citizens viewed the Company. While obviously equating the library with morality and egalitarian self-improvement within the letter, "Plainman" assumes that

After delineating the plurality and diversity of the company, Trueman asserts that the application of the "better sort" would not signify that non-members encompassed the "Mob and Rabble"—thereby avoiding the appearance of elitism—but does not indicate *how* the term differentiates member. Elitism, therefore, remains present in the implicit elevation of company members above non-members.

readers would agree with/recognize this connection—this assumption possibly indicates common disseminated beliefs concerning the institution at the time.¹⁴⁵

Also significant when discussing the rebuttal to “Tom Trueman,” is the attention-grabbing character of the letter’s visual format. Already prominently located on the first page, where the letters, news, and official edicts appeared, Franklin’s fabricated missive stands apart through the ornate filigree-surrounded “T.” This graphic type-setting harkens to the intricate artistry present in the illuminated manuscripts from the Middle Ages—and *may* signal an attempt to gain legitimacy through a reference to traditional written culture. Irrespective of legitimizing intention, such floridity holds the readers’ attention and increases the significance of the letter. Franklin was the innovator of this print medium and ushered in the use of novel typesettings/graphics and the visually appealing use of white space—thus increasing the appeal of his newspapers and his ability to privilege certain articles.¹⁴⁶ The discussion of this particular excerpt provides an excellent initiation into the Library Company’s fostered reputation; yet, the Company refrained from forwarding a monolithic concept of self [as a bastion of knowledge for the common man] within the colonial newspapers—often promoting disparate and incongruent constructed identities within the community.

Moving from an institution of the “common man” to one forwarding the agreement between everyman, some of the Company’s earliest proprietary dialogues illustrate attempts to showcase the library as a unified/harmonious body—a juxtaposition to the ideological multiplicities permeating the organization. The imperfect fit of this promoted unity best appears in the disparity between the Library Company’s internal debate over a proposed charter and the

¹⁴⁵ Published letters from non-members corroborate Franklin’s depiction of the Library Company as a tool for the common man. This can be seen in a letter in the *Pennsylvania Packet and Weekly Advertiser* from March 16, 1773 beginning “To the Right Honorable the Lord Viscount...”

¹⁴⁶ Shaw, 418.

discussion of said charter in the provincial press. In 1737 Thomas Penn promised the Library Company a plot of land on which to erect a much needed library building; yet, this promise remained unmet in 1740 when directors learned that Penn required the Company to obtain a charter before receiving the endowment.¹⁴⁷ Penn wanted to know where the company stood before bestowing such a significant gift. This revelation, although initially met with approval, proved divisive as a coalition of individuals against proprietary rule made their opinions known. According to historian Dorothy Grimm, “Not all Philadelphians were favorably disposed towards the proprietors, and many, knowing that the proposal was made by Thomas Penn, would have preferred that the Company not be connected in any respect with the Penns.”¹⁴⁸ Irrespective of conflict, members passed the motion for incorporation after many meetings and a thorough discussion of charter rules. Finally, Governor George Thomas signed the charter on March 25, 1742.¹⁴⁹ Unfortunately, this conflict was not without consequences as two members rescinded their association with the company—likely due to its proprietary ties.¹⁵⁰

While directors issued several florid missives to the Penn family in the hopes of receiving great textual donations and scientific equipment,¹⁵¹ the letter published in the *American Weekly Mercury* during the week of November 17, 1743 actually thanks the proprietors for an ostensibly monumental endowment—the previously mentioned official charter. In this stately letter, likely spearheaded by Benjamin Franklin, the Library Company utilizes unifying language and masks

¹⁴⁷ Grimm, 47.

¹⁴⁸ Grimm, 49.

¹⁴⁹ Grimm, 48.

¹⁵⁰ Grimm, 49.

¹⁵¹ Often successful in the issuance of flattering supplications, the Library received many gifts from the proprietors during the colonial period. According to the Company’s published catalogue of 1770, the library received a “curious air-pump” from John Penn. From Thomas Penn, the library held: “an electrical apparatus; a large pair of globes; a reflecting telescope; a large double microscope; a large camera obscura” and a valuable set of ancient coins.

the internal discord resulting from the actions of proprietary discontents. An excerpt from this laudatory letter follows:

To the Honourable *JOHN PENN, THOMAS PENN,* and *RICHARD PENN,* Esqrs; true and absolute Proprietaries of the Province of *Pennsylvania, &c.*

The humble ADDRESS of the *Directors of The Library Company of Philadelphia,* in Behalf of themselves and others the Members of the said Company:

May it please the Proprietaries,

WE the *Directors of The Library Company of Philadelphia,* by the Appointment and Direction of a general Meeting of the said Company, return your Honours most sincere Thanks for the *Charter of Privileges* to them granted. It is with the greatest Satisfaction we receive this extraordinary Mark of your Favour and Regard; and what heightens the Obligation is, that it was purely the Effect of your own Goodness and Generosity without being solicited: But we have the Pleasure to observe, this is not the first Instance of your kind Concern for the Advancement of the Library, even beyond what the Company could have hoped for. And tho' we may be wanting in Expression and suitable Acknowledgments, yet we assure your Honours we have the most grateful Sense of the Benefits received, and of the favourable Regard of our Proprietaries towards us.

Figure 2: "To the Honorable John Penn, Thomas Penn, and Richard Penn...", *American Weekly Mercury*. November 17-24, 1743 Issue 1246: 2.

In this epistle of gratitude, the directors speak for the entire company and utilize the all encompassing "we." Although a unified voice appears necessary when an organization represents itself in print, and complies with Franklin's notion of impersonal suggestion, this unity remains incongruent with the internal discord surrounding the charter. While elected as representatives, the opinions of the directors remain *unrepresentative* of dissenting members unhappy with any connection to the proprietors. This letter posits the feelings of a segment upon the whole organization, as seen in the statement: "It is with the greatest Satisfaction we receive this extraordinary Mark of your Favor and Regard..." Interestingly, the proprietors appear to recognize the library's inherent discord in their published reply: "If this should be the happy

consequence of forming your society, we shall have great reason to be highly satisfied with the assistance we have given you...we must recommend to you, that, ever having that Design in View, you lay aside all personal Dislikes...”¹⁵² Whether the Penns knew of the library’s internal struggle or were cognizant of the possible divisions inherent in such an organization, the proprietors promoted a unified institution similar to the one that the Library Company already purported to have. Although depicting itself in the press as a cohesive body, it remains unclear whether the community (and even elites) accepted the notion—particularly because it was sometimes untrue.

A rare mention of the explicit cultivation of reputation, and its concomitant power and prestige, also appears in the previously cited article of November 1743, and is intrinsically tied to proprietary rule: “The Power and Privileges now granted us, will, without Doubt, very much conduce to the Increase and Reputation of the Library.”¹⁵³ In the discussed article, the Library Company dons the role of submissive proprietary supplicant and therefore reifies the sovereignty of a decidedly uncertain ruling power.¹⁵⁴ While allying itself with an uncertain, and often unpopular, power,¹⁵⁵ the Library Company utilized this relationship as a stepping stone in the furtherance of increased holdings and reputation. Although sometimes unpopular, the proprietary government (acting as a branch of the English realm) remained one of the few

¹⁵² *American Weekly Mercury*, “To the Honorable John Penn, Thomas Penn, and Richard Penn...” November 17-24, 1743, infoweb.newsbank.com.

¹⁵³ “To the Honorable John Penn, Thomas Penn, and Richard Penn...”

¹⁵⁴ Traditionally the proprietors remained uninvolved in colonial affairs, often operating through regents. According to Edwin Wolf II’s *Philadelphia* (15), William Penn left Pennsylvania just after two years of obtaining the colonial charter and thereafter often acted as an absentee landholder. William’s sons acted as proprietors during the library’s colonial period, John Penn arrived in Pennsylvania in 1733, and appeared more involved than their father—even though an appointed provincial governor acted in the Penns’ behalf.

¹⁵⁵ The unpopularity of the proprietors is later seen in their attempted ousting in 1764. According to Edwin Wolf II’s *Philadelphia* (54) “The Assembly in the spring of 1764 adopted a petition to the king asking him to take over the government from the proprietors. Franklin was a proponent of royal government, as were the Quakers and Moravians.”

institutions in Pennsylvania that was old, and therefore deserved “traditional respect.”

Associating with such a bastion of respect, and disseminating knowledge of this association through the colonial press, would likely augment perceptions of the Company’s power and influence.

Going beyond the mere association with an institution of traditional deference, the Library Company elevates its status through its deft positioning as both a supplicant and advisor to the proprietors. In a published letter welcoming Thomas Penn to Pennsylvania, picked up by the *Boston Gazette* for the week of June 4, 1733,¹⁵⁶ the Library Company positions itself amongst the common people by writing:

All the good People of Pennsylvania rejoice in your happy Arrival in this your Province, and will continue to rejoice in whatever promotes your Prosperity; among the rest, the Subscribers to the Library in Philadelphia, beg Leave to assure your Honour, that in the same good Affections they are not behind the warmest of their Countrymen.¹⁵⁷

Although initially associating itself with the “good People,” the Library Company is quick to differentiate its status by designating itself as “among the rest”—thereby fostering an elite identity. Shortly after ephemerally enmeshing itself with the common man, the Library Company elevates its position by asserting its ability to bestow a public education (a need unmet by the government) and further heightens its status by publicly advising proprietary rule: “With a View of supplying in some Measure this Deficiency, for the present, among ourselves, we have attempted to erect a common LIBRARY in Philadelphia.”¹⁵⁸ This letter, therefore, illustrates a dichotomy within the library’s constructed reputation—it sought to be viewed as both an institution of the common man and one of the elite.

¹⁵⁶ The *Boston Gazette*’s reprint of this missive acts as a perfect example of the broad dissemination of select information common due to the practice of “recycled” articles.

¹⁵⁷ *Boston Gazette*, “May it please your honor,” Monday June 4 to Monday June 11 1733, infoweb.newsbank.com (accessed September 30, 2008).

¹⁵⁸ “May it please your honor.”

While the Library Company's proprietary communication has been mined for elements of fostered reputation, these published letters also illuminate the impact of this constructed identity—specifically through the comparison of the company's literary style with later copy-cat corollaries. The composition of the previously discussed letter welcoming Thomas Penn to Pennsylvania is discussed in the Library Company's minutes of May 14, 1733: "the persons appointed to draw up an address, brought and delivered it to the Directors...some objection was made to the style by those who had accustomed themselves to what is called the 'plain language' ...but the address was agreed to."¹⁵⁹ The 'plain language' preferred, refers to the less florid, terser, manner of communication furthered by the Quakers [the Society of Friends]. In colonial Philadelphia the Quakers held great sway, both socially and politically, so the Library Company's adoption of an elevated style was by no means certain—but likely was influenced by the literary perspicacity of Benjamin Franklin. Interestingly, this "Franklinian style," replete with its quasi-bombastic tangents, likely would have been more melodious to the ear than straight-forward Quaker approved prose—significant considering the multisensory impact of the colonial paper. Regardless of controversy, the Library Company remained faithful to its original style (as has been seen in the earlier provided excerpts) and eventually influenced the proprietary correspondence of other library societies.

The emulation of the Library Company's published literary formula best appears in the hand written letter from the Directors of the Union Library Company to John Penn, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Pennsylvania. The formula of the Library Company's letters to the proprietors usually consisted of a grandiose/laudatory greeting, a statement of the institution's goals, and various attempts to court patronage. The Union Library Company's letter

¹⁵⁹ qtd. In Abbot, 7.

to John Penn of 1763 practically replicates the Library Company's letter to Thomas Penn published in 1733 (and therefore conforms to the delineated formula) while also emulating its progenitor's use of elevated language. The discussed letter reads:

May it please the Governor:

To the general Expression of Joy on thy safe Arrival & Accession to the Government of Pennsylvania. We the Directors of the Union Library Company of Philadelphia, think it our Duty to add our unfeign'd and respectful Congratulations.

We render them with the greater Pleasure, as it is to a Branch of that worthy Family, from whose Wisdom are derived the many constitutional Advantages which the Province enjoys, beyond any other within our Knowledge.

We presume to hope, as publick [sic] Libraries are of singular use to the Community, that the one we are appointed to the Care of, which is founded on the same Plan as that of the other incorporated Company of this City, will share thy Patronage & Protection.

We sincerely wish, that thy Administration may be as happy, as every Endeavour that we can contribute to make it so, will be chearfull [sic], within the narrow Sphere of our Concernments.¹⁶⁰

In addition to emulating the format and style of the Library Company's proprietary correspondence, the Union Library explicitly mentions the proprietary favor bestowed upon the original Library Company in the hopes of receiving similar treatment. The Union Library even organized itself under the guidelines provided by the Library Company—it attempted to rival the attainment of the Library Company. By 1763, through the masterful dissemination of select information in the press and the association with proprietary rule, the Library Company appears to have secured its position as an institution eliciting deference and its increasing longevity (while not rivaling the longevity of British institutions) may have garnered “traditional respect.”

Advertisements, like the discussed proprietary letters, illustrate the impact of the Library Company's consciously cultivated reputation—how it influenced the creation of other libraries

¹⁶⁰ Union Library Company. Address to John Penn, Governor and Proprietor of Pennsylvania [in George Dillwyn's hand] 1763. LCP Records 8414.F. Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

and how these emulators, once again, copied the Company's style. Between 1728 to 1765 the *Pennsylvania Gazette* ran 2,807 advertisements out of 5,209 items; encompassing 53.9% of the paper's items.¹⁶¹ Most Library Company "notices" for annual meetings and extraneous book sales appeared in the advertising section. While many modern readers give only a cursory glance to the multi-colored advertisements depicting delectable foods or must-have commodities dominating their Sunday papers, colonials voraciously read the black-and-white notices and lists of merchandise. Notices and Advertisements appeared close together and only frequently used generic graphics like ships and pointing hands; yet, these pages were of vital interest to farmers, consumers, and shippers of the burgeoning port city. This illustrates an instance of content superseding visual interest. Historian Robert Magnum Barrow discusses the colonial penchant for advertisements when he writes:

Some of it may seem dull by present standards, but many an eighteenth-century reader must have thought the notices more interesting than the dry, stale foreign news that filled most papers, especially if no new British measure of local issue appeared to spark debate. There were even some colonists who read every line of their newspapers simply because there was very little else available for them to read.¹⁶²

Although only the Library Company's meeting and book sale notices usually appeared amongst the flurry of transatlantic shipments sales and runaway slave notices that dominated the advertising section, frequent published references would have kept the Company present in citizens' minds—thereby increasing its community-wide reputation.

The impact of the Library Company's advertisements and notices glaringly appears in the advertisement section of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of March 1, 1760. Notably, while the editor may have held sway over the drafting of advertisements, the Library Company notices continue

¹⁶¹ Clark and Wetherell, 286.

¹⁶² Robert Magnum Barrow, "Newspaper advertising in colonial America 1704-1775." (Ph. D. diss., University of Virginia, 1967), 62.

to follow its original formula even after Hall's usurpation of editorial control—thus ruling out an overly involved editorial pen (except in the moderate insertion of attention grabbing type-settings like an enlarge first letter). Taking into account the observed editorial uninvolvedness, the copycat libraries would have emulated the published notices of the Library Company for their own published announcements—thus constructing a community-wide identity through the already created identity of a more staunchly situated institution. In the following excerpt, four libraries all adopt the formula of the original Library Company's notices by delineating the company name, the location and time of meeting, the purpose of the gathering, and the length of the library's existence [if considerable]:

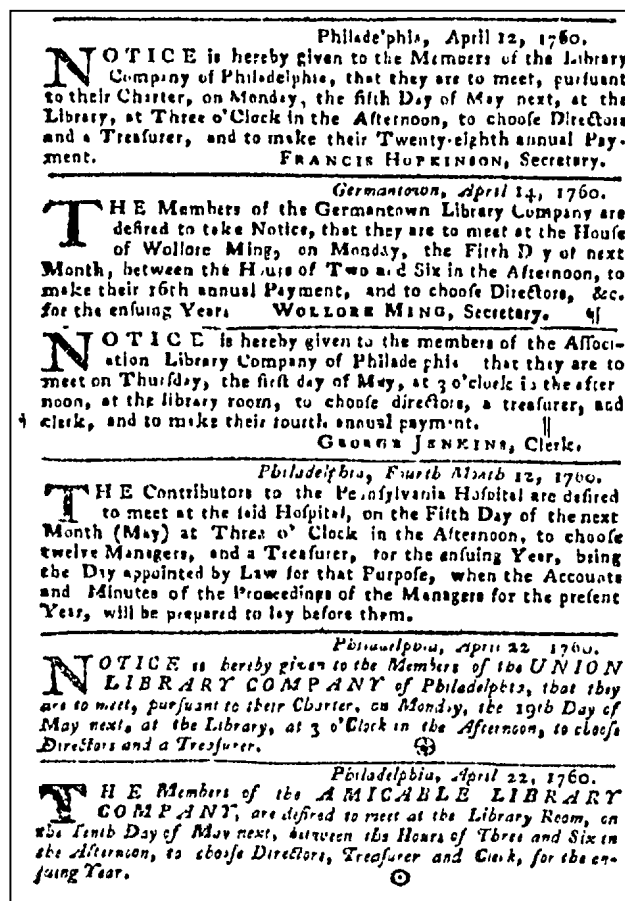


Figure 3: *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 1 May 1760. Issue 1636, page 4.

In the provided list of notices, disregarding the notice for the Pennsylvania Hospital sandwiched between library announcements, the only two libraries which list their duration are the Library Company of Philadelphia and Germantown Library Company—the two longest surviving organizations. This obvious display of longevity, once again, indicates that although an institution could gain respect and foster a self-crafted reputation through non-traditional avenues, ties with “traditional deference” remained significant in the youthful colony.

Most unusual, all four libraries advertise their meeting/elections for the same month—the Amicable Library and the Library Company even share the same date. This simultaneous meeting schedule speaks to a competition for members, and more blatantly, to the detailed reproduction of the Library Company’s system of operation—possibly because of the publication of the library’s rules and regulations. Going beyond textual indications of emulation, the mere existence of four libraries competing for membership concretely shows that citizens in colonial Philadelphia actually ascribed to the belief that the Company embodied “the quality, or fact, of being highly regarded or esteemed” (i.e. wielded respect) and sought to achieve such esteem for themselves.¹⁶³ This visible emulation in Philadelphia acts as a microcosm of the proliferation of library societies throughout colonial America—the Charleston Library Society began in 1748 and the New York Society Library was founded in 1754, followed by *many* others. Extra-territorial upstarts also emulated the Library Company, as they too were subject to the newspaper notices enumerating the happening’s of Ben Franklin’s brainchild (as evident in the previously mentioned article from the *Boston Gazette*).

The discussed newspapers articles serve as a window into a now far-removed past, a time antedating the birth of nation when trans-territorial communication remained novel and

¹⁶³ Eventually, many members of these satellite libraries became members of the Library Company, as the progenitary institution incorporated all four companies by 1769.

organizations shaped their identity through literary disguise—as seen in Franklin’s donning of Plainman’s identity. Yet, extant articles do more than provide insight into a bygone era; they can indicate change over time within an institution while also displaying the impact of the published press within a community. The colonial community was a bustling synthesis of sights and sounds. This multisensory nature was integral to the consumption of print media, as pleasant layouts attracted readers and grandiloquent articles likely proved particularly pleasant to the ear. The multiplication of this multisensory genre has been shown to play a significant role in the colonial construction of identity. Although a nascent form of communication, the colonial newspaper acted as a commercial and social lifeline in the British colonies and has proven to be a vital lifeline to the past for modern historians. This chapter endeavored to explore the newspaper’s contemporary importance while focusing on the Library Company’s adept use of the medium as a conduit of select information—a weighty endeavor, but one of utmost value.

Obviously, more published compositions formulated by the Library Company exist than mentioned in this study; yet, the provided examples forcefully illustrate that the Company did, in fact, construct its reputation through the colonial press.¹⁶⁴ Three discrete genres of newspaper “articles” (the letter to the editor, the proprietary dialogue, and the organizational notice) have illuminated the discordant nature of the Library Company’s fostered reputation. This literary organization simultaneously sought to depict itself as an improving power among the common man, a unified body, and an elite organization. When taken together, these attributes appear contradictory [especially the discrepancy between a community of commoners and one of elites]; but, viewed individually these facets can be seen as an attempt to heighten the Company’s status among select demographics—the laborer, the ruling power, and the intellectual elite. Only able

¹⁶⁴ Other mentions of the Library Company in Pennsylvania Newspapers are listed in the bibliography under “Primary Sources.”

to construct this Janus-faced identity for trans-demographic appeal due to the hierarchically unsettled nature of colonial Pennsylvania, the Library Company exemplifies the inculcation of non-traditional respect in a unique colonial setting.

Going beyond the attempted creation of respect, the Company succeeded in constructing itself as a bastion of the community resulting in a flurry of copy-cat libraries across the eastern seaboard and eventually succeeded in garnering traditional respect through its remarkable longevity. The Library Company's self-fashioning epitomizes the dream of upward social mobility while also speaking to the larger renegotiation of identities endemic to late colonial America—as colonials decided whether they were English, German, a colonial citizen, or “American.” While representative of larger sociopolitical movements, the Company's individual accomplishments should not be undervalued, for they dramatically illustrate the power of a little ink, rough hewn paper, and little “Franklinian” ingenuity.

Conclusion

The previous chapters illustrated how the colonial Library Company acted as a site of identity formation. Concepts of self were negotiated and renegotiated through language and potent visual media—the visual oddities of the curiosity cabinet and the ubiquitous print newspaper. The Library Company’s tacit, and sometimes overt, support of the English language in polyglot Philadelphia reinforced the hegemonic language. This unifying focus on language, and not on presumed biological difference, illuminates how language superseded ethnicity in formulating otherness within this colonial setting. The Library’s cabinet of curiosities, also a site of *othering*, served as an easily co-optable site of societal emulation and attempted economic perfection. Members and non-members alike (i.e. Thomas Paine) utilized the cabinet’s contents to expound an ideal society selectively based on antiquity’s model and proposed heightened manufacturing through an emblematic discussion of fossils. The increased focus on America’s natural resources and their utility for colonists of European heritage showcases a growing feeling of manifest ownership over New World land, a process occurring shortly before the American Revolution. Finally, the Library’s utilization of newspaper articles provides an example of the exteriorization of self—the studied construction of identity within the larger community. Although the Library Company often illustrated itself in contradictory ways—as both a tool of the common man and an elite organization—it exemplifies the process of self creation and definition in hierarchically unsettled colonial America.

The discussed three sites of identity formation (language, visual objects, and newspapers) all speak to the larger process of “becoming American.” The elements of this process were earlier elucidated as: the separation from England with a concomitant creation of an identity tied to a specific location, a group identification based on shared language, a belief in class mobility,

and the construction of self in opposition to native and Old World cultures. Not a linear, inevitable development, this thesis illustrates the ambiguity and plurality of late colonial life. While this work aims to elucidate a highly complex process, it in no way makes assumptions concerning the actions or beliefs of all Library Company members (for they remained a highly diverse lot throughout the colonial period)—it instead expounds often simultaneous processes that shaped the organization’s principles and reputation in addition to setting forth societal ideals for the greater Philadelphian community.

Numerous well written histories on the Library Company exist; this thesis does not attempt to elucidate the history of an overlooked organization. Yet, the study of this organization provides a window into the novel creation of an “American” identity as constructed by American colonists, not British playwrights (as in the case of Behn’s *The Widow Ranter*). Still operational today as a research library, the Library Company continues to inspire the self creation of academics and modern-day virtuosi—an amazing impact considering the relatively meager beginnings of a few clubbed books, a smattering of laudatory letters, and some malodorous animal skins.

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