THE STORY OF "PHILOSOPHICAL HALL"

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(Read November 4, 1949)

I

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Historic buildings have always held a prominent place in both cultural and political history. Adding atmosphere and significant expression to the story of the past, they speak a language quite as eloquent as do written documents. In some instances they rise conspicuously from the local to the higher levels of national and even international significance. Appreciation of this has varied greatly from time to time. In general, however, an instinctive feeling for the importance of historic sites and buildings has prevailed in every age from the building of the pyramids of Egypt to the determined efforts of war-stricken Europe to salvage the shattered remains of its historic shrines. About the middle of the last century this feeling became very pronounced in intellectual and artistic circles, and gradually found expression in a widespread movement for conservation and restoration. Archaeologists, historians, architects, and engineers following the lead of the eminent French scholar, Viollet-le-Duc, developed rules and canons to govern the process, till there emerged, if not a new science, at least a new discipline. Historic survivals in the form of buildings and other shrines were heralded as important historical sources—concrete evidence of the continuity of history, interpreting the past to successive generations in terms young and old could understand.

In our country the movement, now closely associated with city planning, has grown rapidly in recent years. Under the impact of two world wars, the great depression of the thirties, and the challenge to our national heritage, it has assumed a national as well as a local character, and is today in full stride. Through the Department of the

1 The story of "Philosophical Hall" as here published has been expanded considerably to include important material which was of necessity omitted from the address on the occasion of the Society's re-occupation of its Hall after the reconstruction of 1948-1949. The name did not originate with the erection of the building which has now served as the home of the Society for 160 years. It appeared earlier in the advertisements of the fortnightly meetings, especially in the 1770's in connection with the Christ Church School on Second Street. Even in later years it was sometimes used to designate the particular quarters in the Hall reserved by the Society. In general, however, the building on Independence Square erected by the American Philosophical Society held in Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge became known as "Philosophical Hall," and it is in this sense that it is used in this study.

2 Interest in historic buildings and sites which had long been rather sporadic and without direction in this country was greatly stimulated during the depression of the thirties by the superb work of the National Park Service in cooperation with the American Institute of Architects and the Library of Congress, and on a somewhat more popular and different level, by certain activities of the W.P.A. Attention was attracted to its national, as well as its local significance. Thousands of communities became somehow conscious of their local history and its relation with the history of the country as a whole. With World War II and the bombing of cities abroad, its universal importance also became evident. Impressed with this and the richness of our cultural heritage, President Roosevelt set up state commissions for the conservation of cultural resources. Through their efforts, state and local historical societies, the schools, and many private organizations were enlisted to coordinate their efforts, and an amazing awareness of the nation's cultural resources was awakened. For most of the period the writer served as Director of the Pennsylvania Comission for the Conservation of Cultural Resources, which had its headquarters in our Hall. At the close of the war, interest had become so broad that it was decided to take advantage of the momentum and carry on. Under the leadership of our State Historian, Dr. S. K. Stevens, and others, steps were taken to organize the state and local history organizations on a national basis, our Society making a substantial grant toward that end for a two-year period. The results have already exceeded the most sanguine expectations. The membership throughout the country has increased by leaps and bounds, while a new magazine, American Heritage, has been established to coordinate the interests of the many state and local history publications. Here in Philadelphia sentiment was thoroughly aroused by the conditions surrounding Independence Square, the nation's most historic area. The Independence Hall Association was organized, and largely through its efforts so ably directed by Judge Edwin O. Lewis, Independenced Square and its buildings, including Philosophical Hall, were officially declared a national shrine.
Interior, and the Advisory Board of the National Park Service, the federal government has been cooperating with state, municipal, and private efforts in the conservation and restoration of historic shrines. Outstanding among hundreds of such projects throughout the nation are Colonial Williamsburg; the historic sites, buildings, and streets in Boston; Old St. Augustine; and the large-scale restoration project in St. Louis by the federal and state governments at a cost of over forty million dollars.

Until the present decade official Philadelphia, although solicitous in the care of Independence Hall, remained unresponsive. The survey by the Philadelphia Chapter of the Institute of American Architects showing the extraordinary number of fine historic buildings still standing in Old Philadelphia went almost unnoticed. Only after the repeated and devoted efforts of individual citizens, civic and patriotic organizations has Philadelphia become really conscious not only of its obligations, but of its opportunities. Today we have in addition to a number of historic projects in the program of the City Planning Commission, three major developments of an historic character, involving both conservation and restoration, one financed by the State, the other by the federal government. The story of these two projected improvements, malls as they are called, has been so widely discussed in the public press that comment here is unnecessary. Suffice it to say that the Independence National Historical Park, with which Philosophical Hall is so closely integrated, is being inaugurated at this very moment. The national government has appropriated the money, the President has appointed the advisory commission, and a staff of specialists from the National Park Service has set up its offices here in Old Philadelphia to direct the work.

It is, therefore, a matter of particular satisfaction to our Society that an important initial step in the process took place under its auspices when the Independence Hall Association was organized here in Philosophical Hall, and that the Society has sponsored the formation of the nationwide State and Local History Association. Further-

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3 See the Report of the Mayor to the Citizens of Philadelphia for 1948.
more, as the plans for the Independence National Historical Park began to mature, the Society promptly gave consideration to putting its own house in order.

The ungainly third story added to the Hall in 1890 not only destroyed its original character architecturally, but put it out of harmony with the other buildings of the Independence Hall group. The desirability of restoring Philosophical Hall to its eighteenth century appearance by removing the incongruous superstructure had been discussed before, but without results. In 1946 under the presidency of Thomas Sovereign Gates the Society voted to do this, and at the same time modernize and fireproof the Hall. This has now been done with eminent success. Philosophical Hall has been restored to its original exterior design, and the interior remodeled in accord with the best colonial tradition by our architect, Mr. Sydney Martin, working in close cooperation with the officers of the Society. The cost has mounted to well over $200,000, or about five times the amount it took to erect the third story superstructure fifty-nine years ago. Nevertheless, it has met with unanimous approval. Philosophical Hall not only is again in perfect harmony architecturally with the other fine old colonial buildings of our great historic Square, but its own Quaker-like simplicity and loveliness has been recaptured—an historic shrine in perfect keeping with the scholarly and scientific purposes of the Society (fig. 1).

II
FIRST STEPS TOWARD A PERMANENT HOME

For twenty years after the union in 1769 of two societies to form the American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge the new Society, like its parents, did not have a home of its own. Even after its incorporation under the Charter of March 15, 1780, and graduation from Pewter Platter Alley, it met here and there in Carpenters' Hall, at the College or University and later at Christ Church School on Second Street. On the other hand, the question of a permanent home appears to have been a matter of especial concern to the members from the very beginning. On May 20, 1769, less than five months after the merger, the Society ordered "that application be made to the Assembly for a lot of ground in the state house square, whereon to build a house to accommodate the Society." A committee was appointed "to draw up & present to the Assembly the petition for that purpose." 4

Although the Committee was later continued, and the matter came up now and then during the next decade, it was not again vigorously advocated till 1783. An entry in the Minutes for July 19 of that year reads:

It having been long in Contemplation of this Society to purchase a Lot in some convenient Part of the City for the Purpose of erecting a Hall for the reception of the Books, & natural Curiosities belonging to the Corporation, & as a Place of Meeting for the Members; & it being now mentioned that a convenient Lot may be purchased on reasonable Terms in Fifth Street near Arch Street. . . .

On Motion, it was resolved that a Committee be appointed to confer with the Proprietors of the said Lot respecting the Purchase, & to know from them the lowest Price at which it may be had for ready money.—

The Committee was appointed and in February, 1784, it recommended that Measures be immediately taken for erecting a suitable building for the accommodation of the Society; and [the committee] are of the Opinion that if a Lot of Ground were purchased for the Purpose, it would not be difficult to raise by Subscription a Sum sufficient for compleating a convenient Building—at least they think it ought to be vigorously attempted without delay . . . and that as soon as £1000 shall be subscribed a Committee be appointed to plan a suitable Edefice to be laid before the Society for Approval. . . . 5

Accordingly, when the lot on Fifth Street near Arch belonging to Francis Hopkinson was purchased, Mr. Samuel Vaughan, Mr. Rittenhouse, and Mr. Hopkinson were elected "a Committee to consider of the most eligible means of providing the Society with a suitable Building." 6 Before anything was done, however, a radical change of attitude toward the lot on Fifth Street near Arch took place. A proposal to join with the Library Company in an appeal to the Assembly for two lots in State House Yard met with approval. At the meeting of March 19, the Committee reported that they had met with a Committee of the Directors of the Library Company of Philadelphia and had in conjunction with them, drawn up and presented to the

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4 Amer. Philos. Soc. Archives. Minutes of the American Philosophical Society . . . 20 May, 1769. At the same meeting the report on the preparations for the observations of the Transit of Venus was made.
5 Ibid., February 6, 1784.
6 Ibid., March 5, 1784.
General Assembly a joint Petition for two Lots of
Ground on the East and West Sides of the State-
House Square for the Purpose of erecting two suit-
able Buildings. . . .

A copy of the joint petition was thereupon read,
and a resolution passed that "this Society highly
approve of the conduct of their Committee." Un-
fortunately, differences arose between the two or-
ganizations over which should get the lot on Fifth
Street, Sixth Street being "too far west!" On
December 17 Samuel Vaughan, who had been
trying to adjust the difficulties, "reported that the
Library Company having declined to join in the
petition to the Assembly upon the terms proposed
by this society the committee had, agreeably to the
directions of the society, presented a petition in
the name of the society alone."

THE LOT ON INDEPENDENCE SQUARE

To the surprise of some, the Assembly, after re-
fering the question to its Committee on Ways
and Means before adjournment, took the matter
up promptly when it reconvened, and by the Act
of March 28, 1785, gave to the Society the lot of
ground on which Philosophical Hall now stands
and the right to erect a building. Section 2 of the
Act reads:

Be it enacted and it is hereby enacted by the Repre-
sentatives of the Freemen of the Commonwealth of
Pennsylvania in General Assembly met, and by the
Authority of the same, That a certain Lot or piece
of ground being part of the State House Square situ-
ated on the West side of Fifth Street and beginning
ninety six feet Southward from Chesnut Street and
thence extending along Fifth Street aforesaid seventy
feet South towards Walnut Street thence 
Westwardly on the State House square fifty feet, thence North-
ward in a line parallel to Fifth Street seventy feet and
thence Eastward fifty feet to the Place of Beginning, shall
and hereby is given and granted to and vested in the
American Philosophical Society and their Successors for ever;
for the purpose of erecting thereon a Hall, Library and
such other buildings or apartments as the said Society may think necessary for their proper
accommodation.9

The favorable action of the Assembly is quite
remarkable when viewed in the light of its earlier

resolutions on February 29, 1735–36, and again on
February 17, 1762:

That no part of the said ground lying to the south-
ward of the State House as it is now built be converted
into or made use of for erecting any sort of buildings
thereupon, but that the said ground shall be enclosed
and remain a public open green and walks forever.

There were, therefore, special reasons for the
somewhat precipitous rush to begin excavating for
the cellar and the foundations, even though the
campaign for funds had hardly started. A special
meeting was called for April 1, 1785, at which it
was agreed, that "a Subscription be opened immedi-
ately," and "that Mr. Vaughan and Mr. Magaw
be a Committee For the Purpose of soliciting and
procuring Subscriptions." The form of subscrip-
tion as drawn was submitted to the Society on
April 15 and "after receiving a few alterations,
adopted." The text is found in a number of places in the Society's Archives.

BUILDING PHILOSOPHICAL HALL

At the meeting of April 1 it was also voted
that Edward Shippen, Samuel Powel, Francis Hop-
kinson, and Samuel Vaughan, Esquires, be a Com-
mittee to procure Stone, and other necessary Materials
for laying the Foundatn. of the Building aforesaid.

In accordance with the practice of the times, the
committee assumed direction, not only of drafting
the plans, but of procuring supplies and looking
after the construction. Working from books like
Gibbs, Langley, and others based on Sir Chris-
topher Wren, they gave us an American renais-
sance which, to quote our fellow member, Dr.
Wertenbaker, "flowered from New England to
America, the most beautiful church structure and
scores of handsome residences."10

What has just been said, explains the fact that
no architect's plans for the Hall have been found,
though the dimensions of the rooms, cellars and
vaults appear in several places, as for example in
the following entry for the Minutes of June 17,
1785:

The Plan of a Building for the use of the American
Philosophical Society, to be erected on the Lot granted
by the General Assembly, was delivered in by Mr.
Vaughan, for the Society's consideration.—and ap-
proved of.

10 Wertenbaker, Thomas J., The Golden Age of Colonial
Culture, 74, N. Y., N. Y. Univ. Press, 1942.
Dimensions of the Plan ———
Passage ——— 12 Feet by 47
Hall, or largest Room on the South side, 27’ by 47
Room on the N.E. side 27’ by 23
Room on the N.W. side, 27’ by 23
Height of the 1st Floor, 14 Feet
Second floor, 10 d°
——— Cellars to be 7 Feet high.
——— Vaults, under them, of equal height.

Since the campaign for subscriptions proved somewhat disappointing, the Committee was given the option “to begin this Work immediately; or to defer it Some time longer;—as they may judge most expedient.” Furthermore, as so often happens, plans had to be altered to conform to expediency and available funds. At the meeting of June 16, 1786, the question of the underground vaults was discussed, and it was resolved that they be built.

The same meeting also ordered that as the intended Hall will for the most part, be used after Sunset; that it may be built on the North side; and that the two Rooms may be built on the South Side, for the advantage of having more Light and air.

The Minutes of the meetings of the late summer and autumn of 1786 reveal clearly that matters were not progressing to the satisfaction of some. On October 20 the Committee on the Building reporting itself not “able to concur,” was discharged, and Samuel Vaughan, Thomas Clifford, and Dr. Thomas Parke were empowered to “carry on the said building.” To add to the general embarrassment, Mr. Hopkinson begged “leave to resign his Office of Treasurer,” and asked that a committee be “appointed to examine his accounts.” Fortunately, he was persuaded to reconsider, which he did, the Society ordering that “the committee for carrying on the Society’s building in the State-house-square be appointed to collect the money subscribed or which may be subscribed for that purpose and pay the same into the hands of the Treasurer.”

Strong appeals were again made to the public as is shown in the list of early subscribers printed in the issue of November 8, 1786 of the Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser (fig. 2):

To the Public.

The Legislature having granted to the American Philosophical Society a lot of ground in the State House Square, on which to erect a convenient building for the accommodation of the Society at their stated meetings, and for the reception of the apparatus, Library and other valuable donations of which they are now, or may hereafter be possessed, the Committee appointed by the society to carry on this building have, by the generous subscriptions of a few citizens, been enabled to make some progress in this business; which is however necessarily deferred till next spring, when they are determined to complete the same, if possible; as the society will be thereby enabled more effectually to prosecute the ends of their Institution, namely, the promoting of Useful Knowledge, especially as it relates to Agriculture, Manufactures, and Natural History of North America.

Such Gentlemen as have not yet had an opportunity of subscribing, will be particularly waited upon by the Committee, when it is hoped they will add their names to the list of those who have already subscribed to this laudable undertaking, viz.

His Excellency Benjamin Franklin, Esq. £ 100 0
Samuel Vaughan, Esq. £ 30
William Hamilton, Esq. £ 25
John Penn, junior, Esq. £ 25
Robert Morris, Esq. being his pay as Member of Assembly for city of Philadelphia. £ 5 0
William Bingham, Esq. £ 20
Charles Tompkin, Esq. £ 5
Thomas Hutchins, Esq. Geographer General, £ 10 0
Mr. John Vaughan £ 10
Mr. George Fox £ 5
Dr. John Morgan £ 10 0
John Rains, Esq. £ 5
Henry Hill, Esq. £ 5
Charles Biddle, Esq. £ 5
Mr. Robert Patterson £ 5
Samuel Heiffer, Esq. £ 5
Mr. Levi Hollingsworth £ 5
David Rittenhouse, Esq. £ 5
Mr. A. Elliott, of Baltimore £ 5
Matthew Clarkson, Esq. £ 5
Mr. Benjamin Wyncoop £ 5
Mr. John Dunlap £ 5
Rev. Dr. John Ewing £ 5
Dr. William White £ 5
Dr. Samuel Magaw £ 5
Dr. Henry Holmes £ 5
Mr. Robert Blackwell £ 5
Mr. James Davison £ 5
Hon. Thomas McKean £ 5
William Augustus Atlee £ 5
George Bryan £ 5
Jacob Rule £ 5
Francis Hopkinson £ 5
Samuel Miles £ 5
Edward Shippen, Esq. £ 5
Plunket Fleson, Esq. £ 5
We. Erlandford, Esq. Attorney General £ 5

Fig. 2. Form of subscription and partial list of subscribers published in the Pennsylvania Journal.
NEAR FAILURE

Matters didn't improve greatly during the winter and spring of 1787, and by midsummer of 1787, while the Constitutional Convention was meeting in Independence Hall, the Society was unable to meet its bills. In July a committee was appointed "to make inquiry concerning some proposals of the Library Company, relative to the Society's Lot, & the intended Hall, in the State-house Yard." A month later on August 17, the Committee reported

That they have had a Conference with the Board of Directors of the Library Company; and proposed to them, that the Company should either jointly finish & occupy the Building, on terms of equality and mutual convenience: or that the Company should take the Lot & Building altogether, and pay on demand a Sum equal to what hath been expended on the preparing and constructing of the Cellars; and also the value of the privilege of the Ground —— The latter proposition seemed to meet the inclinations of the Directors; but they desired meanwhile to deliberate a little farther; and to have the full ideas of their Constituents on the subject. It is probable they may be authorized to agree to the Proposal.

Signed,

Sam. Magaw
Fra. Hopkinson
Jonathan Hoge
Thos. Ruston

Upon receiving the foregoing Report, Ordered, That the Company be informed, that the Society are not yet able to exhibit an exact account of the expence of the Cellars; neither are they yet prepared to come to any definitive agreement on the subject of the late Conference.

As the days passed, the Society's financial difficulties grew steadily worse till some of the members were ready to sell the Hall to the Library Company. At a stated meeting on September 7, 1787, it was moved

That a Committee be appointed to treat with the Directors of the Library Company concerning the disposing of the Society's Lot & Cellars; & that they be empowered to close the bargain of Transfer to said Directors, or Company, on the Terms already suggested to them.

But an amendment was moved and carried that the "matter be postponed" and "made the special Order of the Evening, on Friday the 14th Instant." The situation was obviously extremely critical.

FRANKLIN TO THE RESCUE

Fortunately Franklin had returned home in the summer of 1785. The records of the special meeting on Friday, September 14, if held, cannot be found. On the other hand, the moot question was made the special order of meeting for the evening of September 18. Franklin presided. Characteristically, however, he gave precedence to a scientific communication from the Professor of Astronomy at Glasgow on "the construction of Mr. Hirchel's [sic] forty Feet Telescope," and a letter from New Jersey on plaster chimneys with "mortar mixed with Salt." Only then did he bring up the question of the Hall. The action of the meeting on it is recorded in the following minute:

Sept. 18, 1787.

At the House of His Excellency the President.

The Phil. Society met, pursuant to special Appointment.

...Mr. Vaughan produced his account of the Subscriptions received towards the Society's Building; and of the Expenditures already made.—

On considering the Motion made by Dr. Hutchinson, at the meeting of the 7th of this inst. viz. "That a Committee be appointed to treat with the Directors of the Library Company concerning the disposing of the Society's Lot, &c"—which motion by postponement, was set over to the present evening;—being now brought forward, and argued upon; it was determined in the negative——

It was then

Resolved, That the said Committee are immediately to proceed; and with all convenient dispatch to have the Walls carried up, & covered in ——

The Society adjourned; to hold their next stated meeting, at the President's House, agreeably to his Invitation.

The defeatists were defeated! But as yet there was no formal assurance that the necessary funds were forthcoming. On the other hand, the confident tone of the resolution suggests that provisions had been made at least informally. There is evidence of at least one meeting during October, but we can only surmise what occurred. The Minutes are silent. Unfortunately Franklin's correspondence and memoirs do not help us either. His letters for these years, like his great speech before the Constitutional Convention on September 17, 1787, deal with larger issues, and the account of the addition to his own house for his sister, Jane Mecom, a year earlier was written in direct response to her inquiries. While the reference there to the "high cost of labor" may have been partly inspired by the difficulties over Philosophical Hall, the remark that "building is an Amusement" was hardly applicable. The silence of the memoirs is,
of course, explained by the fact that they do not go beyond the late fifties, else we might have had the same spirited account of these critical days in the story of Philosophical Hall, as those on other enterprises he either started or rescued from failure. The minutes of the meeting for November 2, 1787, tell the story in part. The pertinent paragraphs read:

Whereas the President of this Society, his Excellency Benjn. Franklin, Esq; to enable this Body to complete the Building begun for their use, in the State-House Square, and which was lately at a stand, for want of sufficient Funds to prosecute the intentions of the Society;—has subscribed a second Hundred pounds in addition to his former Donation; and has also offered a Loan of what money may be requisite to raise & cover the Building, upon legal interest; it is therefore,

RESOLVED,

That the Thanks of the Society be returned to his Excellency Benjn. Franklin, Esq; President of this Society, for his generous additional contribution. . . .

A committee was appointed to wait on the President in order to confer with him on the form of the security to be offered. This was promptly done, and upon the report of the interview, it was

RESOLVED

That the Society give to his Excellency Benjn. Franklin, esq; a Bond for the money he may advance for carrying on, and covering their Building in the State-house Square—not exceeding Five hundred Pounds; . . .

TRIBUTE TO SAMUEL VAUGHAN

Meanwhile, the campaign for subscriptions was vigorously resumed under the direction of Samuel Vaughan and in recognition of his services it was resolved at the meeting on December 21,

That the Society entertain a very high sense of the services rendered them by Samuel Vaughan Esq;— and that the Thanks of this Body be presented to that Gentleman, for his disinterested and successful attention to their Interests.

His Excellency the President did, accordingly, present the Society’s thanks to Mr. Vaughan (fig. 3).12

12 This portrait has had a curious history in that it was for years held to be a portrait of Francis Hopkinson by Charles Willson Peale. Some years ago Charles Henry Hart proved conclusively that it was the portrait of Samuel Vaughan by Robert Edge Pine, willed to the Society by his son John Vaughan. This is in thorough accord with the accessories in the painting—the bust of Franklin, the glimpse of Independence Square with a suggestion of the elms Vaughan had planted in connection with its landscaping, Philosophical Hall which he did so much to build, and the titles of the volumes in the lower left-hand corner of the picture.

Samuel Vaughan of London, a successful Jamaica trader, came to America with part of his family in 1783. A friend of Franklin and fellow-member of Franklin’s London Coffee House “Club of Honest Whigs,” he received a cordial welcome in Philadelphia. Being a man of broad interests, he soon threw himself with much enthusiasm into the intellectual and social life of the city (cp. “The Philadelphia Sojourn of Samuel Vaughan” by Sarah P. Stetson in the Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, Oct. 1949). In January of 1784 he was elected to the Philosophical Society, and for four years he gave much of his time and energy to its affairs. In a letter to Richard Price of August 2, 1786, Dr. Rush wrote: “He has been the principal cause of the resurrection of our Philosophical Society. He has even done more, he has laid the foundation of a philosophical hall, which will preserve his name and the name of his family among us for many, many years to come.” Mass. Hist. Soc. Proc. 2nd ser. 17: 349, 1903. While this is somewhat overdrawn, it is, as we have seen, correct to attribute the progress of the building of the Hall in large measure to his hard work and loyalty. Following his return from Jamaica where he had gone to look after his business interests, he left Philadelphia permanently for London in 1790. His bachelor son John, however, continued in Philadelphia and was for many years a secretary and the distinguished librarian of the Society. An older son, Benjamin, was a devoted friend of Franklin’s, the first to publish his work in English (1779) and, as Lord Shelburne’s personal representative, was intimately associated
This formal tribute to Samuel Vaughan recalls his extraordinary service to the Society. His subscriptions and those of his friends toward the building of Philosophical Hall mounted up to over £700. With Rittenhouse and Francis Hopkinson he helped to initiate the plan and continued throughout its principal promoter. Additional proof that the tradition that the suggestion for the building had come from Franklin is wrong is found in several letters by Vaughan to Franklin, and a third by Francis Hopkinson to Thomas Jefferson.

On March 8, 1784, Vaughan wrote to Franklin of the plan for two lots on State House Square, one for the Society, the other for the Library Company of Philadelphia:

... They wish to make an application to the Legislature for a grant of Ground on the S.E. & S.W. corners of the Statehouse yard for the erecting of two buildings one for the library, another for the Society, which are meant to be sufficiently ornamental not to interfere materially with the views of making a publick walk—Committees from the two bodies meet tomorrow to Confer on the proper mode of application—Many advantages will result from this arrangement: if it meets with Success, some of them will necessity Strike you—The Society felt the necessity of a resting place so strongly that they a few meetings ago purchased a lot of M. Hopkinson near the observatory upon which they propose building, if the assembly reject the petition, and we flatter ourselves that Subscriptions will not be wanting to enable them to do it; should they succeed which is not improbable it may either be resold or be converted into a Botanical Garden.

In a short letter of May 3, wrongly dated 1783 instead of 1784, he repeats the statement about the two lots and suggests that, if Franklin shares his views, he communicate his sentiments which would carry great weight. On the same day Francis Hopkinson wrote to Thomas Jefferson, concluding his letter with:

I have scarce left Room to tell you that there is a Design on foot to erect two elegant Buildings on the State house Square, one for the philosophical Society the other for the City Library, to which is to be united

with Franklin in the important peace negotiations in Passy. Their correspondence covers a wide range of subjects, and it is, therefore, very fitting that the Vaughan Family Papers are now being added to the manuscript collections of our Library.

13 Cp. Amer. Philos. Soc. Franklin MSS. 31: 106 and 28: 75. The latter is dated May 3, 1783, which is obviously in error, since Vaughan had not yet arrived in Philadelphia, and the subject was not considered or acted upon by the Society until 1784.

But if Franklin didn’t initiate the project for a lot and “House,” his staunch support after his return from France was obviously a determining factor in making possible its successful realization.

BUILDING COVERED. FIRST MEETING IN THE HALL, NOVEMBER 20, 1789

Franklin’s loan of £500, his second subscription of £100, and a renewal drive to collect others even at the point of the law for those already pledged, at last furnished the funds “requisite to raise and cover the Building.” During the next two years Franklin himself took a very active part in the affairs of the Society, presiding at most of its meetings. Meanwhile, work on completing the Hall proceeded steadily. At the stated meeting on August 21, 1789, at which Franklin was not present, it was resolved

That the future meetings of the Society shall be in the Philosophical Hall; unless on occasions, when the President’s health may allow him to be present: then, they shall be held in his house. Respecting this circumstance, the Secretary who advertises, is directed to make due inquiry some days before the times of meeting.

In editing the Minutes Peter Lesley inserted “[not]” after the word “may” in the third line, erroneously changing the meaning as appears below in the letter of September 17 addressed to Franklin by the secretary, R. Patterson.

There are no minutes for the two dates on which the Society would normally have met after August 21. The next recorded meeting was September 18. On the day preceding, the Secretary, acting in accordance with the instructions of August 21, wrote to Franklin as follows:

Sir

The Philosophical Society, at their last meeting, directed that one of their Secretaries should wait upon you previous to their next meeting to know whether it was probable that your state of health would permit you to attend, and that the meeting should be held at your house for that purpose.

If this should not be the case, their Hall in fifth street being now in some degree prepared for their

14 Francis Hopkinson to Jefferson, 12 Mch. 1784 (Lib. Congr., Jeff. Pap. 10: 1647). I cite the original because I am indebted to Mr. Lyman H. Butterfield for drawing my attention to this paragraph, which for some reason is deleted in the letter as published in Hastings’ Francis Hopkinson.
reception, they proposed to hold their meeting there, and directed me to advertise accordingly.

Your pleasure on this point, signified by the bearer, will much oblige —

Sir

Your obedient humble Servant
R. Patterson
Sepr. 17

Honble Dr. Benjamin Franklin

That Franklin's reply was favorable is attested by the advertisement in the Pennsylvania Packet of the meeting on September 18 to be held at Franklin’s house. Other meetings on October 2, 16, and November 5, were also held there as advertised. On the thirteenth the officers and counsellors met in the Hall, and, according to the minutes, the Society itself met there on November 21, the editor of the printed minutes adding “[First regular meeting of the Society in the New Building.]” If he had checked the date against the advertisement in the Pennsylvania Packet, he would have found the following in the issue of November 20:

A stated meeting of the American Philosophical Society will be held at their hall This Evening at six o'clock.16

Moreover, Friday, and not Saturday, was the day of the week on which the Society customarily met. It can therefore be accepted that the first regular meeting of the Society in its own Hall occurred on Friday, November 20, 1789.17

The exact day when the Society first met in Philosophical Hall is not of great significance. The important fact is that after four years Philo-

16 My attention was called to this discrepancy by Mrs. Hess to whom, and Mrs. Duncan, I am indebted for other valuable assistance.
17 While the manuscript Minutes are the basic source for the story of the Hall and of the Society in general, even they must be used with care. The successive recording secretaries were by no means all adapted to the task. Inclination and circumstances were allowed to interfere with the prompt recording of the proceedings, and since the Minutes were not, as at a later period, read and approved at subsequent meetings, errors and omissions do occur. Hence, when important questions are involved they should be checked against other sources, like the reports of Committees and other archival materials of the Society, the records of the Assembly and of City Councils, and, for the sake of richness and human interest, the contemporary newspapers, diaries, memoirs, and correspondence of members and others. A systematic study of the Minutes from this standpoint is greatly needed and the plans for the work are being developed.
series of agitations to sell the Hall, and leave Independence Square, developed in the late thirties and early forties. A committee on a new site and building was appointed in 1834. Negotiations with the City, which was seeking accommodations for its rapidly expanding administrative and judicial departments, resulted in the ordinance of 1841 authorizing the purchase of the Hall by the municipality. The financial depression of 1838–1842, and disagreement over the price, led to the withdrawal of the offer. Unfortunately, the Society, in anticipation of a satisfactory accord, had already bought the Chinese Museum building on Ninth Street, even mortgaging its Library and cabinets for the purpose. Literally left “holding the bag,” the Society’s very existence was threatened, the Sheriff instituting foreclosure proceedings on behalf of the creditors. Once again, however, the loyalty of the members came to the rescue. The obligations were met, the debts paid, and the Hall and Library saved.

In the meantime, plans to join with the Athenaeum to erect a new building on another site were made. Toward this end, an Act of Assembly was obtained “for relief of the American Philosophical Society.” The Act authorized the sale of the Society’s building on Independence Square, for “the accommodation of Courts of Justice and officers connected therewith, or for public uses of the City and County of Philadelphia,” nothing in the Act of Assembly granting the lot to the Society to the contrary notwithstanding. But the proposals to affiliate with the Athenaeum, and the sale of the Hall to the city again came to nought with the abandonment by the municipality of its plans. Instead, certain rooms were put at the disposal of the Mayor.

THE HALL SOLD TO THE UNITED STATES

In the fifties, the United States Government sought and obtained accommodations in the Hall for the use of the Federal Courts of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. In a letter of May 18, 1854, addressed to Charles B. Trego, the Treasurer of the Society, United States Marshal, F. B. Wynkoop, wrote:

Dear Sir:

I desire to rent a portion of the building now occupied by your association for the purpose of accommodating the wants of the United States Courts. That portion of the building which we will require is the ground and 2nd floor, now occupied as offices and used by the Mayor of the city as his reception room. . . .

Two years later in 1856, the Government offered to buy the Hall and lot outright for $78,000. A formal agreement of sale was drawn up, Congress voted the money, the State approved by legislative action, and the Society actually tendered the conveyance. But again fate interfered. The Attorney General refused to consummate the sale because of the limitations on the use of the property imposed by the Act of 1784 giving the lot to the Society. This created a curious dilemma in which the United States Government had obtained a property which it refused to accept, despite the fact that the highest authorities had officially endorsed the transaction. The impasse gave rise to an extraordinary situation. Aroused by the plan of the federal government to use Philosophical Hall for the courts and build a new post office in the Old Philadelphia area, a wave of opposition

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\(^{18}\) Amer. Philos. Soc. Archives.

\(^{19}\) Amer. Philos. Soc. Archives. Copy of the Articles signed and sealed with seal of the Secretary of the Interior.
developed. According to an editorial in *The Morning Pennsylvanian* for May 18, 1859, more than 60,000 persons petitioned Washington to abandon the plan, sell Philosophical Hall and the Pennsylvania Bank, which had also been bought by the government, to the City, and use the money to build a post office and a new court house “further uptown.” Authorities in Washington were agreeable. Philosophical Hall and the Bank were placed in the hands of Thomas & Sons, auctioneers and were advertised for public sale (fig. 4) on May 17, 1859. On its part, City Councils passed an ordinance empowering the Mayor to bid up to $78,000 for the Hall. In accordance with this mandate, the Mayor attended the auction at the Merchants’ Exchange on the evening of May 17, but refused to bid, despite the auctioneer’s protracted efforts. The hints of the editor of the journal just cited, that there was collusion between the Mayor and “the sharp gentlemen of the Philosophical Society” do not concern us. What is important is the fact that there was no sale, and the ownership of Philosophical Hall again lay between the United States and the Society. Since the former didn’t want it, and the Society naturally paid no attention to the gratuitous advice of the editor to “give it to the City,” the Hall remained in its possession.

**PLANS FOR NEW CITY HALL ON INDEPENDENCE SQUARE**

During the next decade the City finding itself more and more in need of accommodations for its courts, again made overtures for the purchase of Philosophical Hall. An ordinance of 1863, authorizing the lease of the first floor and basement at an annual rental of $3,000 carried the *proviso* that the American Philosophical Society agreed to sell its Hall to the City for a sum not exceeding $78,000 at any time within a period of five years. Expecting the City to exercise its option, the Society on its part secured an option for the purchase at $16,000 on the Butt Doble Stables on South Penn Square. But the City again withdrew from its proposal, and the Society surrendered its right to the Penn Square lot, which was later appraised at over a million dollars.

In the meantime the population of Philadelphia had grown from 54,000 in 1790, when the City Hall and Congress Hall on the Square were large enough to accommodate the administration and courts to 674,000 in 1870, and to 1,046,964 in 1890. Overcrowding had become intolerable. New municipal buildings were absolutely necessary. Moreover, since the old ones were on Independence Square, City Council seemed to assume that the Square was the logical site for the new buildings. Hence the extraordinary ordinance of 1868. On December 31 of that year Select and Common Councils passed an ordinance which appointed Commissioners for the erection of Public Buildings for the accommodation of the Courts and all the City and County offices . . . that the said buildings shall be erected on Independence Square [and,] that upon completion of the buildings herein authorized to be erected, all the present buildings upon Independence Square, with the exception of Independence Hall, shall be taken down and removed by the said Commissioners.

One shudders to think of the crushing weight of Philadelphia’s vast City Hall on this historic Square, and its transformation into the rialto of Philadelphia’s city politics (fig. 5). Fortunately the proposed desecration aroused public opinion to the point of action. A veritable furor of opposition developed, not only because of the threat to Independence Square, but because population and business had already moved westward, and the preponderant element was anxious to have the public buildings uptown. Appeal was made to the Legislature at Harrisburg, and the State intervened. On March 30, 1870, an act was passed...
setting up a special commission with extraordinary powers for "the erection of the public buildings" in Philadelphia, and
to locate the said buildings in either Washington square or Penn square as may be determined by a vote of the legally qualified voters . . . at the next general election in October . . . and provided further that . . . upon the completion of a sufficient portion of said buildings to accommodate the courts and municipal offices, the buildings now occupied by them respectively, shall be vacated and removed, and upon the entire completion of the new buildings, all the present buildings on Independence square, except Independence Hall, shall be removed, the ground placed in good condition by said Commission, as part of their duty under this act, the expense of which shall be paid out of their general fund provided by this act; and thereupon the said Independence square shall be and remain a public walk and green forever.

The mandate to remove all the buildings on Independence Square, of course, included Philosophical Hall, and for the next two decades the threat hung like the sword of Democles over its deliberations. Moreover the fact that the highest authorities in the State had ordered the removal of the three companion buildings to Independence Hall seems to have drawn attention to the private ownership of Philosophical Hall. This appears repeatedly in the hostility of part of the public press in the late eighties and early nineties. A rather mild editorial in the Public Ledger of November 21, 1889, reads:

ANCIENT AND HONORABLE

The Hall which in its external architecture and general dinginess of appearance resembles the City and County buildings on the Chestnut Street corners of the Square, is generally understood to be a city building. Very few . . . know that it is occupied in any other way than to furnish rooms for the judges, jurors, suitors, witnesses and officers for the Court of Common Pleas Number 1.

On its part the Society seemed to accept the necessity of removal. In his address on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the occupation of Philosophical Hall President Fraley speaking with deep emotion said:

I feel embarrassed when I have to talk of our parting with our ancient home. It is associated in my mind with so much pleasure, with so much instruction, that perhaps I ought to hope that I may not live to see

the Society part with it. But there are considerations connected with this subject which I think ought to weigh with the members of the Society, when they consider the vast amount of precious treasures that we have accumulated here in the shape of our library, our collections, our manuscripts, our portraits, and so many things of which all feel pride in the possession.

Philosophical Hall with Congress Hall and City Hall was set apart for demolition, it being supposed, as President Fraley expressed it with rather mild sarcasm, that Independence Hall "would be sufficient monument to perpetuate all the patriotic thoughts that cluster around the City of Philadelphia." Strange as it may seem, however, his anxiety even at the time was no longer necessary. The public and the legislature had lost interest, and the Society proceeded to meet the need for space in a new and surprising manner.

THE FOLLY OF THE THIRD STORY

Finding its Hall increasingly inadequate and overcrowded, the Society appointed a special committee, called the "Committee on Extended Accommodations," and on its recommendation voted to add a third story to accommodate its library. To do this, the walls had to be strengthened and iron pillars installed in the rooms on the first and second floors to carry the extra load. The entire improvements including the new book cases in the large upper library room cost the sum of $41,449.72.

The costly addition of the "dungeon-like" superstructure (fig. 6) to the exterior violated all the

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22 Italics are mine.
canons of conservation and reconstruction, destroying completely the original harmony of the buildings on the Square. Moreover, to add insult to injury, the Society publicly solicited tenants, drawing attention to the attractiveness of the rooms since the remodeling, and offering further alterations on long-term contracts. This again raised the question of profits and competition by a tax-exempt institution. Hostility flared up once more, and a strong movement to dislodge the Society from the Square got under way. An ordinance to that effect was introduced in City Council with the vigorous support of a number of civic and patriotic organizations, private individuals, and the city press. But again wiser counsel prevailed, and the Society's occupation of the Hall was not again officially challenged. Instead, despite President Fraley's fears, it continued to occupy Philosophical Hall with a satisfied feeling that the building with the added story was now adequate for its needs.

The fallacy of this assumption was not, however, long in appearing. In less than two decades, evidences of overcrowding again appeared (fig. 7). This, coupled with worries over finances and other conditions, led to a prolonged agitation within the Society itself to abandon the Hall.

Exchange of Hall for Lot on the Parkway

Troubled by the steady increase of its library and cabinets, and the consequent overcrowding of its own quarters, a decided change occurred in the attitude of some of the officers and members of the Society toward the Hall following the first decade of the twentieth century. Equally, if not more important was the drastic decline in rentals caused by the exodus of business and financial institutions from the downtown area. To these very substantial considerations was added still another, in the attractions of the new Franklin Parkway to which the city authorities tried earnestly to bring as many of the learned and cultural institutions as possible. The prospects had a strong appeal for many members of the Society, the more so because it was expected that the State Legislature would make a generous contribution. The two hundredth anniversary (1906) of Franklin's birth furnished a favorable occasion. An application was made to the Legislature for $350,000. Although received favorably by the Senate, the House refused to approve the proposal. Instead a modest appropriation of $35,000 which Governor Pennypacker cut to $20,000 was voted to celebrate the Bicentenary.

Nevertheless the agitation continued. A committee appointed to study the question strongly recommended removal to the Parkway. In a printed circular of May 9, 1911, signed by sixty members, calling for a special meeting of the Society to consider the matter, vigorous arguments in favor of the proposals were advanced. Denouncing sentimentality in a matter that offered such alluring material advantages, it pointed out that all other venerable institutions, save the Athenaeum, had moved westward; that the American Philosophical Society could not afford again to let opportunity pass it by—"to neglect this chance," it declared, "is to throw away a treasure. Three times did the Sibyl tender leaves of wisdom, and it was wise to act, even though tardily." The minutes of the meeting of May 10, at which the report was adopted show fifty-seven yeas and only seven nays. On the other hand, it should be noted that it represented the local rather than

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26 Cp. editorials and articles in the newspapers—Telegraph, Record, and Bulletin in the summer of 1891, and the Records of City Council for the nineties.

Fig. 7. The overcrowded library quarters several decades after the addition of the third story.

27 It was in response to this celebration of the two hundredth anniversary of Franklin's birth that the Federal Government appropriated $5,000 to enable the Secretary of State to have a medal struck to commemorate the event, a single impression in gold to be presented on behalf of the President of the United States to the Representative of France, and two hundred in bronze for other purposes.
28 Printed call for "the special meeting on Wednesday evening, May 10th," 1911.
the general membership, the latter, at this period of the Society's history, rarely attending special meetings. However, in accordance with this resolution, an agreement was entered into on November 11, 1911, with the City to exchange Philosophical Hall for a lot on the Parkway in the vicinity of Logan Square.29

Efforts to raise a building fund were again made. As on an earlier occasion, they failed, and for some years no progress was made. In the late twenties, however, a concerted and altogether extraordinary campaign proved more successful. In addition to the usual publicity on such occasions, two special publications were issued; one, an attractive folio

volume entitled *When Aristotle Comes Again* (fig. 8), the other a smaller volume with the equally intriguing title, *Mankind Advancing, A Message of Progress*. As examples of effective promotion by a learned and scientific society, they are remarkable. The names of ranking scientists and scholars are found in the list of contributors to the Aristotle volume. In fairness to the scholars, however, it should be noted that most of them had in mind contributions for a new Franklin House without apparently realizing the significance of removal from Independence Square. Many of the finest statements, therefore, stress the value and importance of the opportunities for cooperative efforts and achievements in science and learning afforded by the Society, rather than the removal so strenuously advocated by some of the officers.

In the introduction and in the campaign generally, however, much emphasis was laid on the inadequacy of Philosophical Hall and the fire-hazards, not only because of the old and defective interior appointments, but because of the proximity of other buildings in the neighborhood (fig. 9). Nearly a million dollars was subscribed. While reasonably large, this was obviously inadequate for so large an undertaking. But the enthusiasts for the project were in command, and for a time it looked as though the Society would voluntarily abandon its historic home for a very questionable venture, without adequate endowment in a palace on the Parkway. Fortunately opposition to the plan was becoming quite pronounced when the problem of financing the Society was happily solved.

**Contract for Exchange of Hall Cancelled**

In 1932 the Society received nearly four million dollars bequeathed to it by its late member, Dr. Richard A. F. Penrose, Jr., of Philadelphia (fig. 10). Added to other funds, it completely eliminated all financial reasons for removal from Independence Square. Temporary quarters were found for the Library in the old home of the Philadelphia Stock Exchange in the Drexel Building in 1934, and at its Annual Meeting in 1936, the Society by a unanimous vote instructed its officers to seek the annulment of “the agreement or contract between the City of Philadelphia and the Society, dated November 24, 1911.” On their part, the Mayor and City Councils were agreeable. The contract was annulled and the Society’s title to its lot and Hall on Independence Square was again officially confirmed by an Ordinance of March 30, 1936. After reciting the contractual agreements between the city and the Society, and the Ordinances of 1911 and 1933, it says:

*And Whereas, It is the desire of both parties to the said contract of November 24, 1911, to withdraw from the negotiations and contractual duties, rights and obligations therein more fully described, to cancel and annul the said contract and to repeal the enabling legislation above described; now therefore. . . .*

The Mayor is then empowered to implement the cancellation provided in the Ordinance, and the City Solicitor is ordered to cooperate in the execution thereof and in having the proper record made of the matter in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds.

Approved the thirtieth day of March, A.D. 1936.

S. Davis Wilson,
Mayor of Philadelphia

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lemma. To clarify the situation, steps were immediately taken to ascertain the wishes of the individual subscribers as to the disposition of their contributions to the fund for the building on the Parkway. Practically all agreed to have their pledges transferred to the general funds of the Society.

Important as the final outcome of this last crisis was for the future of the Society, it also had considerable influence in the promotion of the great civic improvements soon to be inaugurated in the area of Independence Square, and now in process of realization. This expression on the part of the membership at large of loyalty to, and appreciation of, old traditions and environment was properly regarded as a tribute to the foresight of the Founders who in the beginning established the close association of Philosophical Hall—symbol of science and learning—with Independence Square, the nation's foremost shrine dedicated to liberty and patriotism.

IV

RENTALS AND SUCCESSIVE TENANTS

Quite early in the planning of the Hall proposals were made for renting the parts of the building not required for the use of the Society. Since nothing was said in the Act of March 28, 1785 about leasing the building, or parts of it, the Society petitioned the Assembly for the right to do so. This was readily granted by the supplementary act of August 14, 1786, the pertinent sections of which read:

... Be it therefore enacted. ... That the American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia, for promoting of useful knowledge, shall be and they are hereby vested with full and sufficient power and Authority to let, or lease out, such Vaults, or Cellars as they may think proper to make under the Building to be by them erected on the Lot aforesaid, and shall have like power and Authority to let or lease any other parts of said Building for such purposes as may have affinity with the design of their Institution and for no other —

... that the Issues, or profits arising from such parts of the Building shall be applied to the purposes for which the said Society was Originally instituted, and to no other, anything in the Act to which this is a Supplement to the Contrary notwithstanding.31

In accordance with the provisions of this Act, tenants were selected with considerable care. An application from the Masons was rejected as not sufficiently in "affinity with the design" of the Society. On the other hand, John Vaughan, for many years librarian, in 1787 rented the cellars for "the storage of wines and liquors." Until the second decade of the present century, rents and dues were the principal source of income, the presence of successive tenants, usually of a quite distinguished character, making the story of Philosophical Hall both more complicated and more colorful.

The University of Pennsylvania was the second successful applicant for space. In 1789 it obtained a lease for five years of Philosophical Hall, except for the two south rooms and the cellars for a rental of $85 a year, on condition that it furnish materials to complete such parts of the interior as was necessary, the cost to be deducted from the rent. By special agreement with the Assembly the Liberty Bell proclaimed not "liberty through all the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof," but the call to classes beginning at six in the morning for eager, if sleepy, students. In 1791 the two south rooms on the second floor were ordered to be finished, and later occupied by the Society and other organiza-

tions for their weekly or monthly meetings. Moreau de St. Méry reports that the College of Physic- 
sians met in the Hall of the Society every Wednesday evening and on special occasions. One of these occasions during the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1793, described by Dr. Powell, in his excellent book, Bring Out Your Dead, is of especial significance:

On Sunday afternoon, trudging through the fury of the northeast storm, Dr. Hutchinson made his way to State House Yard. He entered the little building of the American Philosophical Society and climbed up the stairs to the chamber of the College of Physicians. The Fellows were gathering. It was an extraordinary thing, this special meeting the Mayor had requested. It was the first time the city had ever asked the Fellows a sheerly medical question. Indeed, it was the first time in American history any organized medical society had been appealed to by a government, and the Fellows were sensible of their responsibilities. The city expected leadership . . . the best of medical science could give.32

PEALE'S MUSEUM AND OTHER TENANTS

Upon the expiration of the University's lease, the Society raised the rent and, according to the record, found a more "desirable tenant" in Charles Willson Peale and his Museum (fig. 11). For the next fifteen years the Hall witnessed the animated domestic and intensely interesting professional life of this remarkable man—artist, educator, and inventor, a close friend of Jefferson and of all liberals. His large family and famous museum crowded the Hall beyond capacity, and a section of a part of State House Square was leased to accommodate the constantly increasing specimens and menagerie of native animals. Of passing interest is the fact that of his two sons born in Philosophical Hall, the younger, Franklin, was formally named by the Society. Apparently the father, hard put to it to find another appropriate name to add to Rembrandt, Titian, Rubens, and Raphaelle, proposed such an impossible name that the mother, being of the New York DePeysters and strongly attached to family names, objected vigorously. The matter was submitted to the Society which resolved that the boy should be named "Franklin." This was, of course, only an interesting incident in the busy life of Philosophical Hall which housed America's earliest successful museum from 1794 to 1811 (fig. 12). The first insurance policy on the building was taken out on May 7, 1794, pos-

sibly because of the increased risk. Lightning rods had been put up in 1791. Whether this was done out of respect for Franklin, or belief in their efficacy, doesn’t appear in the record. Some years before, the Society seriously debated the question: “May we place Rods on our Houses to save them from Lightning without being guilty of Presumption”?

After Peale moved the museum to Independence Hall in 1811, other tenants gradually secured accommodations in different parts of the building. Just what the conditions of tenancy were, or what parts of the Hall each occupied is not important. The following letter by John Vaughan, acquired by the library since this study was begun, is very suggestive on this score:

Dr. Thomas Parke
V.P. of the College of Physicians

Philad April 6, 1818

Dr. Sir

The American Philosophical Society, having been applied to by the Agricultural Society to be allowed to hold their meetings monthly on such days as the College do not meet, are disposed to make the arrangement with them—The Athenaeum have also applied to hold their meetings so as not to interfere with the College—Will you please to lay this before the College— . . . That the necessary arrangements may be made by the A.P.S. with the other Societies.

I remain with respect
Your obt Servt.
Jn. Vaughan.
Libn of Am. Ph. Soey

Vaughan himself had bachelor apartments in the Hall, and the well-known painter, Thomas Sully, advertised his studio and gallery from there (fig. 13).  

THE CITY AND THE FEDERAL COURTS AS TENANTS

Mention has been made above of the use by the City of certain parts of the first floor and the basement for the Mayor’s reception rooms in the late forties of the last century; to the occupation of the same quarters by the United States District Court for Eastern Pennsylvania; and the return of the City as a tenant in 1873 for the accommodation of the Court of Common Pleas No. 1. Having completely renovated the building and added the third story to accommodate the Library, the Society terminated the City’s lease in 1891, and made the special appeal for new tenants referred to above.

With the Stock Exchange directly across the street in the Drexel Building, the new Bourse less than a square to the north, and the imposing solidity of numerous late Victorian bank and insurance company buildings, the area was entering the last period of prosperity as the city’s financial center. Prospects for profitable rentals were excellent. The attractive character of the new quarters in the Hall was conspicuously advertised, and in the decades that followed investment and insurance brokers and others paid rental in excess of $5,000 annually.

RENTS DECLINE AS BUSINESS LEAVES OLD PHILADELPHIA

Toward the end of the period, however, the removal of the Stock Exchange to other quarters, the competition of the new Bourse Building with its more than four hundred offices, and the increasing exodus to the uptown area led to a drastic falling off in the rentals. In 1913 the Committee on Hall reported:

The changes incident to the removal of the Stock Exchange have affected the renting of the offices most unfavorably. The entire first floor is vacant, and so far even very decided concessions in the amount of rental asked, has failed to attract tenants.  

By the end of 1915 conditions were almost desperate: “only one of the four offices in the building is rented, and although every effort has been made it seems impossible to get tenants for the others at any rental whatsoever.”  

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33 I am indebted to Mr. C. C. Sellers for a copy of the advertisement by Sully, the original of which is at the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia.
34 Report of the Committee on Hall, December 1, 1913.
came somewhat better later, the improvement was not sufficient to overcome the financial stringency which became a major cause for the campaign to exchange the Hall for a lot on the Parkway. From this dilemma the Society was finally rescued by the generous bequest of Dr. Penrose. The rental policy could now be discontinued. In 1934 all leases were terminated, and the Society for the first time took over all of Philosophical Hall for its own purposes.

V
MORE THAN BRICKS AND MORTAR

Buildings like Philosophical Hall, and those to which it is companion on this historic Square, are much more than bricks and mortar, no matter how successfully these may have been translated into beautiful structures. They are what they are, and they speak the language they speak, because of the events, the men, and the ideas that have been associated with them. As for Philosophical Hall with its fine new-old look within and without (fig. 1), more than incidental notice should be made of the very successful remodeling of the interior so completely in accord with the best colonial tradition. The difficult problem of the steep ascent of the stairs opposite the Fifth Street entrance caused by the city’s demand, when the Hall was under construction, that the steps be brought from the sidewalk into the interior of the Hall, has been very successfully handled. An attractive marble stairway quite original in design; the semicircular treatment of the wall on either side of the doorway to conceal the dumbwaiter shaft and unsightly pipes; and the introduction of a five-point depressed arch adding width and dignity, have together greatly reduced what used to be an excessively high and angular approach to the main hall. It now has, not only an attractiveness all its own, but is closely integrated with the rest of the interior into a harmonious whole.

PORTRAITS AND MEMORABILIA WITH ASSOCIATIONS

But while this and the remodeling of the rest of the interior has been done with a sympathetic feeling for the spirit of colonial building, it is the portraits, memorabilia, and archives that create the atmosphere which gives it warmth and life. Hence brief comments on some of the more outstanding features of this character as they appear in the Hall today is necessary. This is all the more so because of the present effective distribution, for there is much more of purpose and motivation in the new arrangements than at first appears. The main principle was recognized in the Lecture Room after it was remodeled by our late fellow member, Dr. Paul Cret. The well-known thumb portrait of Franklin by Charles Willson Peale after Martin is appropriately in the place of honor over the chair of the presiding officer (fig. 14). Its prestige is greatly enhanced by the portrait of Washington by Gilbert Stuart on the right and that of Jefferson by Thomas Sully on the left. Like so many of the others, they have an especial association with the Hall and the Society.

The three original Martin portraits were ordered by Sir William Alexander out of gratitude to Franklin for reading and commenting on Alexander’s scientific papers. The first was done for Alexander himself. Later when he offered to have Martin do one for Franklin, Franklin had the elaborately carved chair of the original replaced by the simple one more in harmony with the rest of the picture as seen here in Peale’s copy. The papers Franklin is reading are supposedly those sent him by Alexander, the bust of Newton suggesting their scientific character. Our painting was given to the Society by Peale in 1785, and accepted with thanks on December 16 of that year with the request that the artist keep it until the Society got a proper place for it. In our printed Minutes the editor says the portrait was done by Peale from life at the request of the Society on July 17, 1789. This is incorrect because the Martin portrait of Franklin shows him in robust middle life, and, according to Peale’s own account, Franklin was too ill for a sitting when he, accompanied by young Rembrandt Peale, went to Franklin’s home at the behest of the Society to make the portrait. The portrait by Peale of Franklin late
In conformity to a resolution of the Society at a State Meeting of Dec. 27th, 1790 - A Portrait of the late General Washington, painted by Stuart was presented for their inspection. It was referred to a Committee of Mr. John Hamilton - Mr. Leblon, and Dr. J. B. Bache, to report on its merits, previous to any order for its purchase.

Fig. 16. The Minute on the Washington portrait.

in life at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania reveals a very different Franklin. The fine portrait of Washington by Gilbert Stuart (fig. 15) was definitely done in response to a commission from the Society and duly purchased (fig. 16). When it was finished, a Committee was sent to view it, and happily reported it as satisfactory. Jefferson by Thomas Sully, the most highly appraised financially and artistically of all our portraits, was presented to the Society by William Short in 1830, a gift that fitly commemorates Jefferson’s presidency of the Society for eighteen years, and his active interest in its work for even a longer period (fig. 17).

On the rear wall of the Lecture Room are portraits of early officers of the Society including Caspar Wistar and Du Ponceau. The Society’s commission for the portrait of its second president, David Rittenhouse (fig. 18) is clearly told in the following Minute under date of December 2, 1791:

Resolved, that Dr. Rittenhouse be requested to sit for his Portrait, and the same be painted by Mr. Peale, at the expense of the Society, to be placed in their Hall.

At the same time it was

Resolved, that the Portrait of Dr. Franklin presented some time ago by Mr. Peale, shall be framed in the best manner that the work can be executed for a price not exceeding Six Pounds.

Pine’s portrait of Samuel Vaughan (fig. 3) has been discussed above.

Across the hall from the Lecture Room, the portrait of former President Morris appears conspicuously on the south wall of the secretary’s office, appropriately placed because of his devotion to the cause of keeping the Society in Philosophical Hall in Old Philadelphia, and his close cooperation with Presidents Russell and Conklin, whose portraits are now hung on the east and west walls of the office. In the reception room to the left are now seen portraits of Priestley, Heckewelder and others including the remarkable portrait by Thomas Sully of Benjamin Rush (fig. 19) which may prove to be the original of the many familiar Rush portraits.

One other feature on the first floor merits attention. Not only is the treatment of the interior of the Hall on the Fifth Street side best seen from the west entrance, but the door on the yard (fig. 20) is in itself quite lovely, and should, as President Conklin has frequently suggested, be made our main entrance. Since our location on Independence Square is unique, and all discordant notes, architecturally speaking, have been removed, we can in this way not only show appreciation of our historic environment, but greatly increase the dig-
On the second floor, the north room, immediately over the Lecture Room, has been changed more than any of the others. The vault, which was built at a late date, and intruded into the southeast corner of the room thus destroying its original character entirely, has been removed. This affords a clear approach to a concealed dumbwaiter by which luncheons and dinners can now be brought from an up-to-date kitchen in the basement direct to the serving tables at the east end of this room, eliminating what has for years been a nuisance and inconvenience arising from bringing refreshments from the third floor. The north room is now restored to its original proportions, except, as in the rest of the rooms, for a lowering of the ceiling and a furring of outer walls to conceal pipes and other structural installations. Two fine colonial fireplaces, similar to those in the Members' Room, on the wall opposite the entrance give period atmosphere appropriate to one of the very rare treasures of the Society—the original of William Penn's great Charter of Privileges of 1701 (fig. 21). In excellent state of preservation with the Great Seal intact, it has recently been returned to its place in this room after being on tour with the Freedom Train. Granted by the Founder upon leaving for England at the end of his second visit to the province, it recalls his well-known comment:

Ye shall be governed by laws of your own making, and live a free and if you will a sober people.

The south, or Members' Room, across the hall on the second floor is dominated, as one enters, by the portrait over the President's chair of Alexander von Humboldt (fig. 22), the great philosopher of nature, when philosophy still included nearly all fields of learning. It brings to mind his *Cosmos*, possibly greatest of those books of universal knowledge, before the development of the intense specialization of the last century and a half; a trend admirably illustrated by the two former presidents of the Society whose portraits flank von Humboldt—Dr. W. W. Keen and Professor William B. Scott, the first an eminent surgeon, the other an equally eminent geologist. The room as it used to be is seen in figure 23. Behind the President's desk is the intriguing library step-ladder chair invented by Franklin and presented to the Society by his son-in-law, Richard Bache, as "the chair in which his Father-in-Law, Dr.
Franklin, used to sit when the Meetings of the Society were held at his House." In the new arrangement Franklin’s chair (fig. 24) is no longer used by the presiding officer, but occupies a place of honor on his right, while Jefferson’s revolving arm chair with the wide arm desk (fig. 25) on which he wrote the Declaration of Independence is on the left of the rostrum. Rittenhouse’s clock still accurately ticking the seconds, his telescope used in the observations of the transit of Venus in 1769 are now back in their accustomed places while the electrical apparatus used by Franklin with other memorabilia are in the cabinets on the north wall.

Above these to the right of the door as one enters there is a remarkable, and heretofore unknown portrait of Franklin (fig. 26). Acquired this year through the enterprise of Dr. Chinard, it is a superb addition not only to the room, but to the portraits of Franklin in general. The artist is not known, but the provenance is thoroughly established. Presented by Franklin to the daughter of Madame Helvétius on the occasion of her marriage, it remained in her family till its recent acquisition by the Society. A strong, understanding, and somewhat quizzical Franklin now takes his place in the Executive Sessions of the Society he founded, and served as president for more than two decades. On the other side of the door on the same wall is the portrait after J. Vanderbank of Sir Isaac Newton (fig. 27), another recent and appropriate acquisition—the mathematical genius and philosopher of the Principia (1687) on one side, and the speculative empiricist of Opinions and Conjectures on Electricity (1749) on the other.

Philosophical Hall as it stands today again meets the aesthetic demands of its environment, as well as most of the practical needs of the Society. Although space has been lost in the removal of the third story, some has been regained in the remodeling of the west end of the basement formerly occupied by the caretaker and his family, affording room for current publications and the new vault. On the other hand, the activities of the Society have increased to such an extent that even with the separate housing of the Library, the Hall is used to capacity. An account of the numerous worthwhile projects, organizations, and publications that have emanated from the collective thought and association in the Hall would take us too far afield. On the other hand, more than a casual reference should be made to the marked change in recent years in the character of the membership and a corresponding change in the activities in and about the Hall.

The general meetings of the Society, begun early in the century and finally established in 1912, have served to bring together members from far and near, and this, coupled with the adoption of the new by-laws has led to the transformation of the Society from one that had become predominantly local to one more distinctly national in character.

The fortnightly meetings on alternate Fridays of former years have been discontinued. Instead there are now two, or at the most three, general meetings a year, with the emphasis on the Annual Meeting and elections in April. This doesn't mean, however, that there has been a decline in the work of the Society. Quite the contrary. Today the meetings extend over several days instead of being confined to a single evening.

Moreover, and this is of especial significance, the effective work of the Society is now done by standing and special committees. The former meet four times or oftener a year; the latter on call of the chairman as occasion dictates. As a result, there are regularly more than one hundred

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For an excellent survey of these activities in recent years, see Dr. Conklin's *Brief history of the American Philosophical Society* revised and brought up-to-date in the current *Year Book.*
members actually occupied with the Society's problems of research, publication, meetings, finance, library, and general policy. In all cases, discussion, rather than formal papers, mark the procedure. This usually follows a carefully developed agenda prepared in advance of the meeting. It focuses attention on the issues involved and facilitates the formulation of the collective opinion of the different groups on the major problems of the Society. Neither the work of the committees, nor that of the officers and staff engaged in its promotion and integration is on display as are our portraits and memorabilia. But even the brief survey of it as it is presented annually in the Year Book clearly reveals that the story of Philosophical Hall today, more than ever before in its history, presents a constantly increasing devotion to the ideals projected by Franklin in his Proposal of 1743, two hundred years ago.

A PROPOSAL AND AN OPPORTUNITY

For a learned and scientific society, the value of an attractive and distinguished home like Philosophical Hall cannot be easily overestimated. In the past it did much to hold the membership together in days of depression and crisis, providing the physical basis for continuity in the association of its members, promoting and assisting projects of research and publication, and bringing together historical and scientific collections of great value in our Library. It has served as a powerful magnet for gifts and bequests which, with acquisitions acquired through purchases, in the heyday of prosperity in 1929 were appraised at thirty million
dollars. Even if considered only as a real estate venture, Philosophical Hall is by far the most successful investment made by the Society in the more than two hundred years of its history. The lot on the Parkway offered in exchange for our Hall in 1911 had cost the city over a million dollars. To these gratifying positive returns should be added the strong influence of an attractive and dignified home in keeping the Society alive and active. To any one familiar with the record, the fate of the Society, had Philosophical Hall not been built, is fairly obvious. It makes one wonder how posterity would appraise an investment the Society might make some time during the next decade in a library building to house our great collections of manuscripts, imprints and books, and enable scholars to put them to work more efficiently. We need research and conference rooms; a reading room adequately lighted and equipped with all the necessary works of reference; up-to-date laboratories for photography and microfilming, restoring manuscripts and books; a general work room for the staff; vaults secure against fire and water hazards, and air conditioning as far as possible.

In all the early proposals for a building, housing of the library is definitely associated with a place for meeting. The Minutes of July 19, 1783, for example, express it as follows: "It having been long in contemplation of this Society to purchase a lot . . . for the purpose of erecting a Hall for the reception of the Books and natural curiosities. . . ." This responsibility of providing for the Library has been accepted as axiomatic throughout the entire history of the Society. Again and again, as we have seen, it raised problems, the attempted solution of which, seriously influenced policies. After wandering from place to place before Rittenhouse, its first librarian, brought it together in his home, and later to "one of the chambers" in Philosophical Hall, it remained in the Hall till 1934. Since then it has occupied the old quarters of the Philadelphia Stock Exchange in the Drexel Building, developing rapidly as a highly specialized library in accordance with the policy approved by the Society in 1941. Now, however, it is again under the necessity of moving. As progress in the acquisition of properties by the Government in the Philadelphia National Historical Park area develops, the present home will probably disappear. Fortunately, the south end of the Old Custom House (fig. 28), which was taken over by the Government as a national shrine, and leased to the Carl Schurz Foundation, is available. Negoti-
ations for its occupancy by the Library are in progress.

Opinion on the question as to whether this will solve the library problem for the future differs radically. The Parthenon, which served as the model for this fine example of the revival of classical architecture in this country, was not designed for library purposes. Moreover, its massive construction within and without makes remodeling of even a minor sort extremely difficult and costly, quite apart from the watchful care of the Department of the Interior against structural modifications in national shrines. With this in mind alternative solutions should not be dismissed without serious consideration. Hence, a proposal, although suggested before in these pages, is here presented in a somewhat different form in the light of recent developments.

Almost directly across from Philosophical Hall on the corner of Fifth and Library Streets, stood the fine old Georgian building (fig. 29) designed by William Thornton and erected in 1789–1790, for the oldest circulating library in the country, founded by Franklin and his friends in 1731. Till its unfortunate demolition in 1887, it was an integral part of the Independence Square-Carpenters’ Hall group of buildings. The proximity of the site to Philosophical Hall, and the consequent ease of consulting the Library located at, or near, this spot by the publication and other departments of the Society, would make this an ideal location for practical, as well as historical and esthetic reasons. The lot on the corner of Chestnut and Fourth Streets at present owned by our Society could in all probability be exchanged for this site or some other in this area of the East Mall.

If the Society were to restore the Library Company building in its exterior design, giving careful consideration to the need of modernizing the interior, it would meet the present and future needs of the Library in a thoroughly practical and efficient manner. At the same time it would be making

![Fig. 29. Library Company of Philadelphia. Engraving by Birch (1799).](image-url)
another contribution toward the restoration of the most remarkable group of historic buildings in this country (fig. 30). More than that, Philosophical Hall and Library Hall taken together would be a monument to Franklin vastly superior to the Franklin House on the Parkway. It would be located amid the places he knew, where he walked and consorted with his friends. It would be less than three squares removed from his home in Franklin Court, now being studied for improvement and possibly restoration in connection with the Independence National Historical Park (fig. 31). The significance of such a solution of our library problem cannot be easily overestimated.

Moreover, the foresight of members and patrons of our Society in the past provided for just such a contingency. Two substantial funds for building, carefully guarded in the terms of the bequest by the donors against other uses, have been made to the Society. Although a modest amount was used for the current restoration of the Hall, the principal should, in accordance with the compound interest curve, increase rapidly enough to meet the proposed restoration. Few investments, even from a purely financial standpoint, would net an equal return either on a short or long-term basis.

The story of Philosophical Hall, and of other historic buildings and sites, as for example, the great conservation and restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, prove conclusively that the return in the form of those imponderables, frequently implied in this narrative, far exceeds even the highest financial or material returns.

Libraries, it cannot be too often repeated, are not just bricks and mortar, or even just books and manuscripts. They are the custodians of ideas, and ideas are the dynamics of progress. No better illustration of this could be found than that afforded by the Declaration of Independence of which our Library has happily preserved, what might be called, three significant originals. The first, a broadside on vellum from the papers of David Rittenhouse; the second, a contemporary broadside on paper said to have been used by Colonel John Nixon as he read it on July 8, 1776 from the observatory erected by our Society in Independence Square in the summer of 1769 to observe the transit of Venus, and the third, the priceless manuscript copy of the Declaration in Jefferson’s own hand indicating minor emendations by Franklin and John Adams. While the importance of the ideas of the Declaration in American history are well known, their impact on the political history of Western Europe and on the world in general is far from being appreciated. Indeed, even here in Philadelphia at the present time few realize how important a factor they have been, and are, in the great civic and patriotic developments so frequently referred to in this study (fig. 31). Ideologies dominate the present cen-

40 The accompanying plan of the federal and state projects (fig. 31) was executed by Grant M. Simon, the architect for the Philadelphia National Shrines Park Commission. The state project includes Fifth and Sixth Streets and the land between, from Chestnut to Vine Streets, to the Delaware River Bridgehead adjoining Franklin Square, one of the open spaces provided by William Penn for his “Greene Towne.” The federal project, to be known as Independence National Historical Park, comprises four separate areas indicated respectively as Federal Area A, B, C, D. The main section includes the area between Walnut and Chestnut Streets from Independence Square at Fifth Street to, and including, Second Street toward the east. Area B, as shown
Fig. 31. Plan of federal and state projects for Old Philadelphia. Courtesy of the Philadelphia National Shrines Park Commission.
tury even more than the eighteenth. At the moment they are engaged in a portentous struggle for the international control against the unlicensed use of the atomic bomb. The millions we are spending on the Marshall Plan will be fruitless unless the liberty of the individual and freedom of peoples, scientifically integrated with equality of opportunity and social justice are associated with them. Franklin, our first and still ranking diplomat, had neither money nor guns. He represented ideas. These he disseminated as only he knew how, through the most powerful weapon of his age, the modern printing press. More dynamic and enduring than the armies of Napoleon or the subsidies of Pitt, they are alive and operating today.41

Science and invention are multiplying the powers of production and control over nature in incredible geometric progression. Time for leisure and cultural pursuits are increasing correspondingly. A forty-hour work week and atomic energy present a challenge Franklin would be eager to meet. For him leisure meant opportunity for culture and better living:

The first drudgery of settling new colonies, which now confines the people to mere necessaries, is now pretty well over and there are many in every province in circumstances that set them at ease and afford leisure to cultivate the finer arts and improve the common stock of knowledge.

or, as Jefferson expressed it in his letter of January, 1797, accepting the presidency of the Society:

to see knowledge so disseminated through the mass of mankind, that it may at length reach the extremes of Society, beggars and Kings.

The wisdom of the Founders, coupled with the extraordinary faith in ideals, organized the American Philosophical Society, the oldest scientific and learned society in America, and built Philosophical Hall on Independence Square. For one hundred and sixty years the Hall has been a symbol of the freedom and universality of science and learning at home and abroad. To rise to the standards the Founders set, the present and future generation of members must, to paraphrase the words of Sir Isaac Newton, stand on their shoulders and see farther.