

The Age of Nicholas Biddle

1825-1841

by Nicholas B. Wainwright

Philadelphia is a city to be happy in. . . . Everything is well conditioned and cared for. If any fault could be found it would be that of too much regularity and too nice precision.

— NATHANIEL P. WILLIS

Mr. Biddle represented the money power of the country. . . . These causes, combined with his personal qualities, his manners, talents, varied accomplishments and the triumphant success which appeared for a long time to attend all his measures, gave him a degree of influence & popularity among the monied and educated classes equalled only by that of Genl. Jackson with the populace.

— SIDNEY GEORGE FISHER¹

To the extent that any period of time in the history of a great city may be linked with the name of a single one of its citizens, there is justification in characterizing the Philadelphia years 1825-1841 as "The Age of Nicholas Biddle." These were the years of his prominence—a nationwide prominence unequalled by that of any other Philadelphian of the day, and approached by few in any other day. They were also years of impressive growth and prosperity for the city. If there is a parallel in the careers of the man and the place where he lived, however, it is nowhere closer than in the dismal year 1841, which brought catastrophe to both.

Nicholas Biddle was, to be sure, merely one in a sizable group that constituted Philadelphia's leadership, but in this group he was the "delight & ornament."² It was a compact, cohesive group, the last full flowering of colonial origins. At the head of many organizations—civic, cultural, and commercial—were men who in general shared the same attributes: descendants of well-established families, they composed the local aristocracy; of superior education, they were endowed with a deep sense of civic responsibility and were blessed with talents that brought them to the fore; through their wide range of interests they were perhaps the last representatives of the Enlightenment, as reflected by the memory of Franklin. Narrow specialization, concentration on a single goal, did not characterize them. When Nicho-

las Biddle left the scene, their predominance had also reached its end, and the old control, handed down generation to generation from early times, fell into the hands of a new order. As an entity Biddle's circle failed to leave successors able and willing to perpetuate the traditions of service suggested by their family names. Their descendants preferred to become "mere men of business," as Sidney George Fisher expressed it, or mild philanthropists, worthy gentlemen content to live in quiet ease on inherited wealth.

Biddle, on the contrary, devoted his life to "always seeking and achieving results."³ Born in Philadelphia in 1786, he was named for his uncle, a captain in the Continental Navy who was killed in action during the Revolution, trying to overcome the odds favoring the sixty-four-gun *Yarmouth* over his thirty-two-gun frigate *Randolph*. Charles Biddle, father of the second Nicholas, came of a hardy breed, as his career and those of his formidable brothers proved. He was evidently the underlying influence in his son's life. From Charles, a former sea captain, Nicholas inherited an intense patriotism and also a sense of obligation to his community. His father's record was worth emulating. Among Charles Biddle's many public services was his office as vice-president of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania during the ailing Franklin's presidency. Charles left to Nicholas a book-length autobiography, which Nicholas must have read with considerable pride in his father's indomitable courage.⁴

Although he was never to compose so enthralling a narrative, Nicholas Biddle was the literary man his father never aspired to be. As a scholar, writer, and orator, he had few equals in the city. From his youth Biddle's progress had attracted attention. He was undeniably precocious. To begin with, he graduated in 1801 with highest honors from Princeton at the age of fifteen. Back in Philadelphia he read law, without much enthusiasm, and then in 1804 went off to Paris as secretary to the American minister. There he attended Napoleon's coronation, traveled extensively in Italy, and was the first American to visit Greece in the pure and simple role of a tourist. Contemplating the remains of ancient temples, he was seized with the lasting conviction that there were only two perfect truths in the world—the Bible and Greek architecture.⁵ His European wanderings ended in London, where he served as secretary to James Monroe before returning to Philadelphia in 1807.

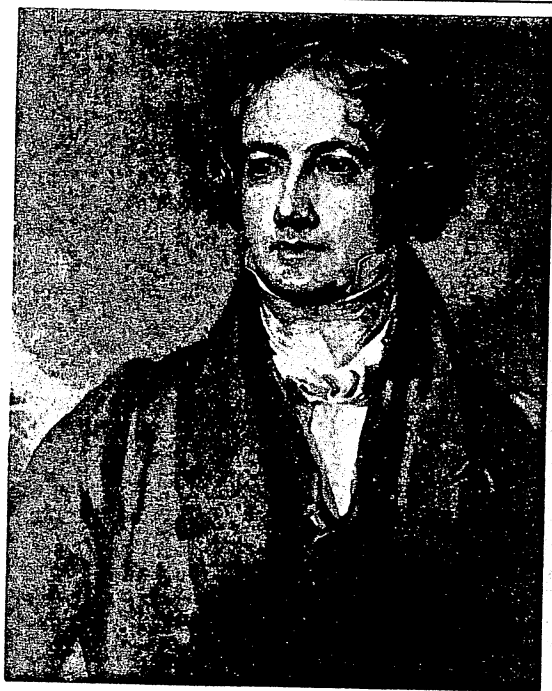
The practice of law interested him less than his association with Joseph Dennie, literary leader and editor of *The Port Folio*; when Dennie died, Biddle assumed its editorship. Before that event he edited the journals of Lewis and Clark at the request of Col. William Clark, who had been steered to him by Thomas Jefferson. While this work represents Biddle's chief literary contribution, an effort of greater personal value to his career was his digest of the laws of foreign nations affecting the commerce of the United States, a study suggested to him by Secretary of State John Quincy Adams.⁶

Biddle married an heiress, Jane Craig, and settled down to farming at Andalusia, his country seat on the Delaware. Always the student, he became an authority on farming, horticulture, and animal husbandry, subjects he

pursued with intense interest throughout his life. His successful culture of grapes in Andalusia's extensive forcing houses, his importation of the first Alderney cattle to the United States, and his speeches before agricultural groups made him an authority in areas that were typically Jeffersonian. For many years Biddle served as president of the Philadelphia Society for the Promotion of Agriculture.

From time to time his literary and agricultural pursuits had been interrupted by legislative duties. In 1810 he was elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, and there he gained some applause for his defense of the first Bank of the United States. On his twenty-fifth birthday Biddle made a reputation for himself as an expert on banking in a three-hour speech before the legislature, urging the recharter of the bank.

In 1819 President Monroe called him back to a measure of public life by appointing him one of the five governmental directors of the recreated Bank of the United States, the other twenty being elected by the stockholders. At this time the affairs of the bank were in bad shape. Its president, William Jones, was not qualified for his task, and under his administration the institu-



Nicholas Biddle (1786–1844), engraved by John Sartain (1808–1897) after a portrait painted by Thomas Sully (1783–1872) in 1831. The portrait by Sully was destroyed in a fire in the 1850s.

NICHOLAS B. WAINWRIGHT

tion had become much embarrassed. To rectify matters, curtailment of loans, attended by serious losses, became the order of the day. Jones resigned during the resultant financial crisis and Langdon Cheves of South Carolina took his place. Through strenuous deflationary policies and years when the bank paid no dividends, Cheves resolutely restored its capital—"the Bank was saved but the people were ruined."⁷ Cheves's banking ability seems to have been limited to keeping the bank solvent; he refused to make it useful. Money remained scarce, credit difficult to obtain, and a nation verging on a period of unusual economic growth was kept on a leash. However, Cheves had no desire to preside long over the institution he had in large measure saved. On his retirement, Nicholas Biddle was elected president in January 1823. Hitherto, in Biddle's opinion, the bank had made more enemies than money. He reversed Cheves's tight-money measures and opened the bank's facilities to the legitimate requirements of the nation's growing credit needs.

Biddle's first major accounting of his stewardship was laid before the stockholders in September 1825 at their triennial meeting. His address on that occasion was summarized by newspaper publisher Zachariah Poulson: "The luminous and masterly statement of the present flourishing condition of the affairs of the Bank, presented by the President, was received with feelings of the strongest and most universal satisfaction."⁸ On occasions such as this senior citizens were always present to extend their mark of approbation. This time it was Mathew Carey's turn. On behalf of the stockholders he arose to move their thanks to the president and directors "for their able, faithful, and successful administration."⁹ Thus the condition of the national bank was sound, its future bright; but the future of Philadelphia had grown less promising.

On the surface all seemed well with the city, were one content with limited aspirations. At a testimonial dinner in 1825 Commodore John Barron held forth his glass and declaimed: "Philadelphia—justly acknowledged to be the first in the arts, and second to none in whatever can contribute to the grandeur, respectability, and comfort of a city!"¹⁰ Yet in the arts Philadelphia was fast losing her place, and she had already lost her rank as the country's largest city and most important trading center.

I

To be sure, numerous vessels continued to ascend the Delaware—about 500 a year from foreign ports, two to three times that many plying the coastal trade.¹¹ Unloaded on the wharves that lined the city's front were cargoes of rice, cotton, and tobacco from the South; spermaceti oil from New Bedford; horse hides from Montevideo; coffee from Brazil and Java; toys from Germany; linen from Ireland; rum from St. Croix and Jamaica; sherry, madeira, claret, muscatel, and teneriffe from their points of origin; armagnac, bordeaux, and brandy from France; whisky from Scotland; mahogany from Nicaragua and Santo Domingo; indigo from Bengal; pepper from Sumatra; and opium

from Turkey. The most princely imports of all came from Canton, consigned to merchants specializing in that trade. Every year about a dozen richly laden ships hove into port from the Pearl River. Shortly after the ice had melted in the early spring of 1825, the *Caledonia* sailed majestically upstream to discharge her store of silks, curry powder, window blinds, umbrellas, porcelains, camphor trunks, bamboo baskets, fans, kites, fireworks, and vast quantities of tea—Hyson, Gunpowder, Imperial, Pouchong, Souchong.¹² These Chinese luxuries found a ready market, but Philadelphia had little to export to China in exchange. Her ships went out lightly freighted with gold and silver to balance her trade with the Orient.¹³ As a consequence her merchants sought substitute markets. By 1820 English and French porcelain had largely supplanted Chinese articles in that line,¹⁴ and by 1825 the city had its own porcelain factory, where the famous Tucker china was made. Tucker's masterpieces were said to surpass European imports "in soundness of body, smoothness of glazing, and beauty of lustre."¹⁵

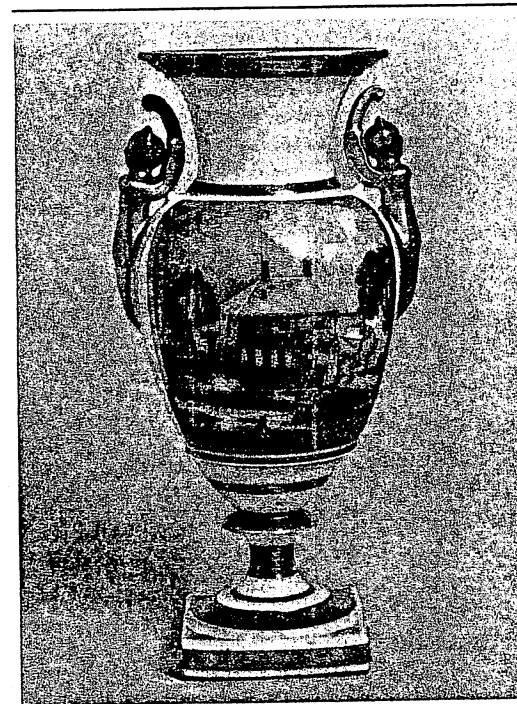
Part of the bullion exported to China was gained in Philadelphia's favorable trade with Latin America. In 1825 about a third of her foreign exports—flour, lumber, furniture—went to Mexico and South America, bringing back much hard money in exchange. Henry Pratt, Matthew Bevan, and Manuel Eyre were prominent in this trade, which was the largest with Latin America of any North American port.¹⁶ Trading ties brought social ties. Many young South Americans and Cubans were sent to school in Philadelphia, among them Simon Bolívar's nephew Fernando, who attended Germantown Academy in the mid-1820s.¹⁷

In the order of their value, the city's largest foreign exports in 1825 went to Mexico, Cuba, and England. In the same order, the largest foreign imports came from England, China, and Cuba.¹⁸ Most of this trade, which was so vital to the city's economy, was carried in American ships, many of them Philadelphia-owned and built in the extensive Kensington and Southwark yards. Six to ten thousand tons of new shipping slid annually down their ways into the Delaware. In 1825 the 6292 tons launched were represented by seven ships, eleven brigs, two schooners, one sloop, and one steamboat.¹⁹

Most of these vessels were built for the coastwise lines which furnished regular service between Philadelphia and New York, Boston, Baltimore, Charleston, New Orleans, and other ports. The city also had two Liverpool lines, one owned by Thomas P. Cope and the other by John Welsh. The Liverpool packets, with their ample cabin space—the trip to England cost \$133—and large holds for cargo, were among Philadelphia's most highly prized vessels. Cope's *Tuscarora*, *Montezuma*, *Algonquin*, and *Alexander* and the "New Line's" *Colossus*, *Delaware*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Bolívar* were proud sights as they cleared the river under clouds of canvas.²⁰

II

But commercially the city might have done better had she not been so relaxed and comfortable. Philadelphia's easy-going southern overtones were



Vase made at the Tucker porcelain factory (1826–1838), c. 1832–1835. The building painted on the vase was the Tucker factory on the Schuylkill riverfront near Market Street.

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART, GIVEN BY ELIZA AMANDA TUCKER IN MEMORY OF THOMAS TUCKER

in marked contrast to the hurly-burly, the raucous bustle of New York. Her ties with the South were close. During the sickly season families from South Carolina and Virginia summered in her vicinity, and there was much intermarriage. From Charleston came Draytons, Hugers, Middletons, and Izards, some of them to remain as Philadelphians. The Virginia contingent, Carters, Tuckers, Pages, Riveses, was most distinguished.²¹ In addition much of Philadelphia's business was with the South. Seasonal visits filled her hotels with southern and western merchants, come to replenish their stocks of merchandise by large purchases from the local commission dealers.

Out-of-towners looked forward to their Philadelphia visits. The city was so neat and clean, its market the best in the country. The better stopping places, such as the United States Hotel, facing the Bank of the United States across Chestnut Street, were noted for their cuisines. Joseph Head's Mansion House at Third and Spruce Streets boasted French cooking, a style evidently considered unrivaled,²² while Parkinson's celebrated restaurant at 161 Chestnut Street advertised "Coffee à la mode de Paris."²³ Of all the exponents of the French mode, M. Latouche was unquestionably the leader. For eight years

Latouche had cooked for the prince D'Ecmuhl, then for three years he had presided over the kitchens of the duc de Rovigo. Coming to America, he had been employed in Washington by the Russian minister before settling in Philadelphia as a restaurateur and caterer. In addition to the oyster cellar he conducted under his Market Street restaurant, well stocked with the choicest wines, Latouche offered take-out dishes such as oyster pies (100 oysters), \$1.25; fourteen mutton chops, \$1.00; eight quail, roasted and larded, \$1.00; sixteen pounds of beef à la mode, \$3.00; and hogs' heads, trimmed with jelly, \$2.50.²⁴ The prices seem low, but when it is realized that the pay of Philadelphia weavers averaged only five dollars a week, there could not have been too many calls for hogs' heads from the workingman.²⁵

Latouche and his fellow caterers were kept well employed at public and private entertainments, which were numerous and to which visitors of distinction were ever welcome. Hardly anyone was more cosmopolitan in this regard than Nicholas Biddle. While some social leaders were rigorous in excluding all but the well-born elect, Biddle invited anyone whom he found of interest, and his tastes were catholic. Many hosts had not yet reached the point of inviting actors to their houses. By and large society frowned on wealthy Pierce Butler's marriage to Fanny Kemble,²⁶ and even Thomas A. Cooper, an English actor of tremendous popularity in Philadelphia, had experienced the local censure with which so many of the citizens regarded his profession. One day Cooper found himself closely scrutinized by a pair of filthy chimney sweeps. "I say, Bill," said one of them. "Look! there goes Cooper the player man." "Hold your tongue, John," returned the other, "who knows what you may come to yourself."²⁷

In accordance with the custom of others in their position the Biddles gave at least one ball a year in their large town house, now 715 Spruce Street. Dances such as these were largely under the professional care of black men. One Shepherd, as an instance, was a waiter seen everywhere. Another, Robert Bogle, was even better known, for he united the vocations of public waiter and undertaker, frequently officiating at a funeral of an afternoon and at a party that evening, presenting on both occasions the same unchanging gravity of demeanor, although, so it was whispered, when the evening grew late he did rather well with the punch and performed a few *pas seuls* in private. In July 1829 Biddle wrote an eight-verse "Ode to Bogle," of which the following verse is an example:

On Johnson's smooth and placid mien
A quaint and fitful smile is seen;
O'er Shepherd's pale, romantic face,
A radiant simper we may trace;
But on the Bogle's steadfast cheek,
Lugubrious thoughts their presence speak;
His very smile, severely stern,
Like lighted lachrymary urn.
In Church and State, in bower and hall,
He gives, with equal face, to all

The wedding-cake—the funeral crape—
The mourning glove—the festive grape;
In the same tone, when crowds disperse,
Calls Powell's hack or Carter's hearse,
As gently grave, as sadly grim
At the quick waltz as funeral hymn.²⁸

Even more famous than Bogle was Frank Johnson (he of the "smooth and placid mien" alluded to in the first line of the verse above), whose Negro band played at Biddle's parties. In addition to conducting his orchestra, the best in the city, Johnson gave music lessons, adapted tunes from new operas for use in quadrilles and cotillions, played these novel airs at social gatherings, and published them as sheet music. Ultimately, so great was his success that he took his band to London for a concert series. There, curiously enough, his musicians were mistaken for Indians.²⁹

III

Although parties were frequent and life pleasant, the city lived to an excessive extent on the diminishing returns of a direction given to its economic life by men long since dead. A bold, aggressive new leadership was necessary lest Philadelphia's drowsiness lapse into a deep slumber. Profoundly agitated at the portents of the times, the city's men of business fully recognized the seriousness of the crisis. Comparing the past with the present, they were faced with figures that proved how badly their city had fallen behind her rivals.

Historically Philadelphia had prospered as the "bread basket" of the colonies and the young Republic; but the westward shift of population had cost her primacy in the export of flour. This was not because Pennsylvania was producing relatively less—59 of the 100 members of her House of Representatives were farmers in 1825³⁰—but because her flour was slipping away to other ports. The produce of the western part of the state now went down the Susquehanna to Port Deposit, at the head of tidewater navigation. There, thousands of barrels of Pennsylvania flour and whiskey and vast quantities of wheat, corn, pork, and bacon were loaded on schooners for shipment to Baltimore.³¹ Fleets of lumber rafts, which had floated downstream, were towed off to the same place. In 1820 Baltimore had exported 577,000 barrels of flour, already exceeding Philadelphia, which had only 400,000 barrels to ship out, but was still far ahead of New York's 267,000. The measure of Philadelphia's decline in this trade is seen in the comparable figures for 1825: Baltimore, 510,000; New York, 446,000; Philadelphia, 351,000. The completion of the Erie Canal, as Philadelphians were aware, would not improve the situation. In 1828, for example, New York was to ship out 722,000 barrels; Baltimore, 546,000; Philadelphia, 333,000.³²

Brought up in the belief that their prosperity depended on foreign commerce, Philadelphians were dismayed at how, year by year, the shipping tonnage registered at their port was falling behind their competitors. Tonnage

figures for 1825 showed New York in the lead with 304,484; Boston next with 152,868; Baltimore totaling a surprising 92,050; and Philadelphia trailing with 73,807.³³ As far as the rivalry between New York and Philadelphia was concerned, the figures were in balance with the values of their foreign imports and exports. In 1824 New York's imports were valued at \$36,113,000—Philadelphia's at \$11,865,000; New York's exports came to \$22,897,000—Philadelphia's to \$9,634,000.³⁴ The state of New York, having surpassed Pennsylvania in population before 1820, had a growth rate in the 1820s twice that of Pennsylvania, and that rate approximated the growing difference in size between her metropolis and Philadelphia.³⁵

IV

Philadelphians realized that the economic health of their city depended on internal improvements, access to the interior wherein lay the future wealth of America. The turnpike spree was still in progress—by 1832 Pennsylvania chartered 220 turnpike companies which had built some 3000 miles of roads³⁶—but for the shipment of heavy freight turnpikes were outmoded; canals were now the cry, and New York was in the lead. Her great state-built canal, 362 miles long and eight years in the building, was completed in 1825. Philadelphians had financed two lesser improvements: the Schuylkill Navigation Company, which was opened to Reading in 1825, and the Union Canal, which would soon permit canal navigation between Reading and the Susquehanna. Philadelphians were also heavily interested in the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, but these three improvements did not reach the heartland of the country, the great western reaches that New York had tapped through her Erie Canal.

Determined that their city should not lose what was left of her commercial prestige, a group of Philadelphians, headed by John Sergeant, eminent lawyer, congressman, and champion of Henry Clay's American System, had founded the Pennsylvania Society for the Promotion of Internal Improvements late in 1824. The activities of this society resulted in a public meeting in January 1825, presided over by Chief Justice William Tilghman. Sergeant, the principal speaker, pointed out that canal navigation between the Delaware and the Susquehanna would soon become a reality, and that this development called for the next step—water communication between the Susquehanna and the Allegheny. Furthermore, from the Allegheny a canal to Lake Erie should be undertaken, and built at the expense of the state. The meeting enthusiastically endorsed Sergeant's resolutions. A suitable memorial to the legislature was prepared, and William Strickland was sent abroad by the internal improvements society to procure information on canals and railroads. "A large proportion of the western trade has been withdrawn from this city," reported the improvements society, "and the present exertions are calculated not merely to regain what is lost. The struggle assumes a more serious aspect. It is to retain what is left."³⁷

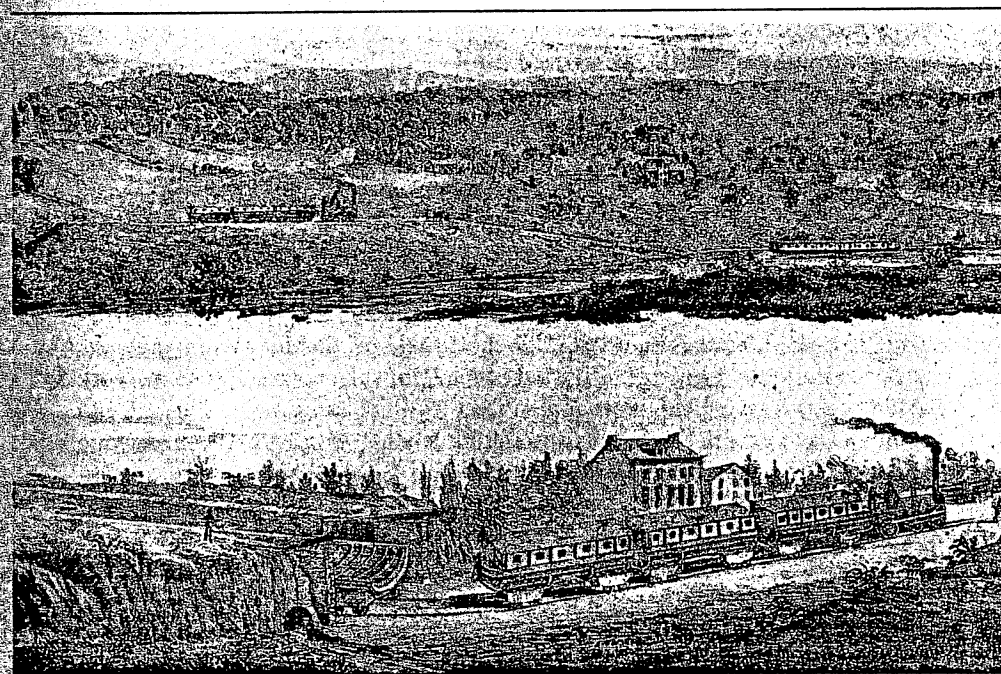
Philadelphians next convened a canal convention at Harrisburg, attended

by 113 delegates from thirty-six counties.³⁸ After a year of ceaseless effort by Sergeant and his friends the legislature passed an act that opened the way for the building of the canal at state expense. Ultimately the state improvement program embraced a railroad from Philadelphia to Columbia, the point on the Susquehanna where much of the western produce reached the river, and various lesser projects. A 394-mile "main line" of State Works was projected and completed in the mid-1830s: the Columbia Railroad, 82 miles; the Eastern Division Canal from Columbia to Hollidaysburg, 171 miles; the Allegheny Portage Railroad over the mountains to Johnstown, 37 miles; and the Western Division Canal from Johnstown to Pittsburgh, 104 miles.³⁹

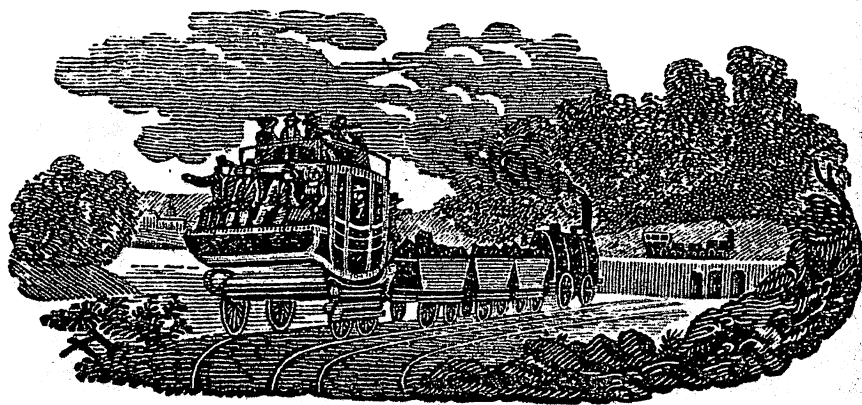
Long before all this was accomplished Strickland had returned from his foreign travels and published his influential *Reports on Canals, Railways, Roads, and Other Subjects*, which so much favored railroads over canals that his sponsors required him to tone down the emphasis.

V

After all, Pennsylvania was by this time committed to canals, and it was especially through the Schuylkill Navigation Company, a gilt-edged Phila-



Advertisement for portable iron boats used in the 394-mile system of rail and canal transportation between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Lithograph by P. S. Duval after George Leberman (d. 1870), c. 1840.



The Columbia Rail Road, part of the State Works, from Daniel Bowen, A History of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1839).

LIBRARY COMPANY OF PHILADELPHIA

delphia-owned investment, that the city was experiencing the promise of better days. Back in 1817 the company's managers had suggested the possibility that coal might eventually be carried on the canal; they had had no concept that, shortly after it went into operation, coal would constitute two-thirds of its traffic. Flour, lumber, whiskey, and all the multitude of country products were to take a back seat to anthracite. In 1826 coal accounted for half the canal's total freight of 32,000 tons; in 1840, of the 658,000 tons brought down the river, 452,000 came from Schuylkill County mines.⁴⁰

The first coal of consequence to reach Philadelphia had been 365 tons brought down the Delaware from the Lehigh area in 1820. Under the guidance of its manager, Josiah White, the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company struggled to make the mines at Mauch Chunk profitable. When the state agreed to build the Delaware Division of the Pennsylvania canal system, work began in 1827 on the Lehigh canal planned by White and Erskine Hazard, and within a few years both projects were completed.⁴¹ At Easton, the Delaware Division of the state-owned works united with Josiah Wright's heroic enterprise, and provided slack-water navigation down the Delaware to tidewater.⁴²

Coal worked miracles in Philadelphia. The city had always been a wood-burning community, its houses heated by hickory, oak, and maple. Wood was used for cooking and to fire the boilers of the recently invented steam engines—indeed, the appearance of steamboats on the rivers had caused the forests to recede, so great was their hunger for fuel. At first there was much suspicion and dislike of coal, but as stoves, grates, and furnaces were perfected for its use it won a grudging acceptance based on its cheapness. In the late 1820s central heating was introduced into some Philadelphia homes, but the change from wood to coal in domestic uses came slowly; in 1833, \$741,000 worth of wood was burned in the city, only \$404,000 of coal.⁴³

The most notable physical change imposed on Philadelphia by the coming of coal was to be seen along her Schuylkill River front, where a solid mass of wharves was built. These were usually crowded with canal boats from the mines and bristling with the masts of the coastal shipping which distributed anthracite to ports along the Atlantic seaboard. Philadelphia's first exports of coal went out in four vessels in 1822. In 1837 some 350,000 tons in 3225 carriers cleared the port for coastal destinations. Gone forever was the old colonial concept that the city's economic life depended on foreign trade.⁴⁴

An innovation in these years, made possible by the abundance of coal, was the application of steam power to industry. Philadelphia led early in the manufacture of steam engines for this purpose—stationary engines as opposed to those designed for steamboats and locomotives. By the late 1830s the role of the stationary engine was fully appreciated and steam was being used in every conceivable type of manufacture.

To keep up with New York, Philadelphians had done all they could to encourage manufacturing, but waterpower for mills was limited, as neither the Delaware nor the Schuylkill had sufficient fall to generate a great amount of power. Steam supplied the alternative. By 1838 there were more steam engines in Pennsylvania than any other state, with nearly all of those in Philadelphia of local manufacture. Made by forty-four different individuals or firms, they serviced twenty-five types of mills, supplying the power for such enterprises as carpet weaving, breweries, flour mills, and the iron industry. Rush & Muhlenberg and Levi Morris were among Philadelphia's leading enginemakers, and so famous were the city's workers in this trade that Joseph Harrison, Jr., later recalled: "Philadelphia skill has been sought for to fill responsible places in all parts of the United States, in the West Indies, in South America and in Europe, and even in British India."⁴⁵

Now that factories were no longer dependent on the geographical necessities of waterpower, manufacturers were free to concentrate their mills wherever they wished, in Frankford and Kensington, where waterpower had first attracted industry and which had become textile centers, but also throughout the city. The stationary steam engine helped make possible another long step in changing Philadelphia from a commercial to a manufacturing town with all the implications that would have for the city's future.

V I

Philadelphia's prosperity continued, however, to depend in large measure on her port, and various steps were taken to make it more available to the outside world. A canal connecting Delaware and Chesapeake Bays, it was believed, would greatly enhance Philadelphia's southern commerce, and into such a project Philadelphians poured a great deal of money. In the fall of 1829 the thirteen-and-a-half-mile length of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal was completed. To celebrate its opening, a large party of Philadelphians embarked on the steamer *William Penn*, chartered by the canal's directors. On board were two companies of militia in full dress, Frank Johnson's band, and

the best caterer available. The paddlewheel vessel churned her way down to Delaware City at the eastern end of the canal, where her guests left for their tour of inspection.⁴⁶

The year that saw the completion of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal was notable also for the commencement of work on the great breakwater, designed by William Strickland, at the entrance to Delaware Bay. Storms and ice had brought disaster to 193 vessels in that vicinity during the past twenty years, losses that would not have occurred had there been a place of shelter.⁴⁷ Now that *Pennsylvania* was at the threshold of a new era to be created by its system of internal improvements, safe navigation of the Delaware was more than ever necessary to protect the increased commerce that was expected on her waters. Philadelphians believed that the canals converging on their city would provide the flourishing interior of the nation with its shortest route to the Atlantic; Philadelphia, they hoped, would be the place to which the western trade could be carried at the cheapest rate.⁴⁸

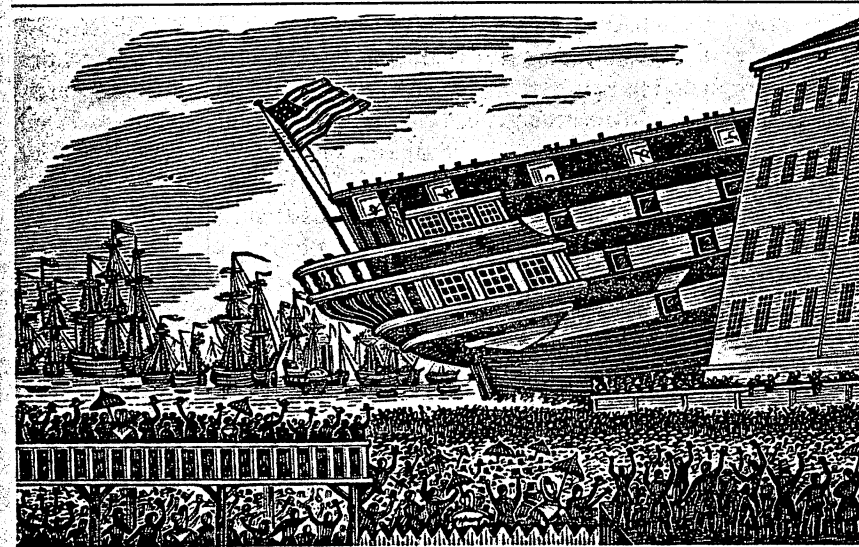
There was, unfortunately, a fly in the ointment; Philadelphia was not an ice-free port. The winter of 1831–1832 was unusually severe, and the port iced in. On January 26, 1832, there were no fewer than 126 vessels listed as ready to sail as soon as the ice broke up. The eventual departure of this large number of ships, all sailing together, brought thousands of spectators to the wharves. It was a beautiful sight.⁴⁹ In 1835–1836 the solid sheet of ice that spanned the river again kept the shipping from coming up for more than two months. Not until the middle of March was a passage between Chester and Philadelphia possible, and then it was hammered out by the new steamer *Pennsylvania*, built at Kensington by John Vaughan & Son and not designed primarily to clear ice but to tow up ocean-going ships from the breakwater, thereby creating “a new era in our foreign trade.” “It was a cheering sight to see the white canvas again on the river,” wrote an observer. “Fully fifty square rigged vessels arrived at the wharves, swelling the whole number of arrivals to near one hundred.” Many of the boats were loaded with firewood, which had been in short supply. The day they unloaded, the price per cord dropped from fifteen dollars to seven.⁵⁰

While steam tow boats were a valuable navigational aid (in 1836 the *Pennsylvania* towed up 247 sail), the need for a real ice boat remained. In 1837 the Delaware was again ice-fast and the public's patience was exhausted. As usual the stoppage of trade threw hundreds of laborers out of work and drove merchants to New York to buy their goods.⁵¹ Urged on by resolutions adopted at a town meeting, the city Councils appropriated \$70,000 to build an ice boat, which was launched the following August at Van Dusen and Byerly's Kensington yard. The next year this boat, commanded by Capt. Levi Lingo, was battling Delaware ice piled in ridges five feet thick.⁵²

Launchings at Van Dusen and Byerly's and Philadelphia's other shipyards were popular, well-attended affairs, but there never was such a launching as that of the U.S.S. *Pennsylvania* in July 1837. It attracted the largest crowd, estimated at 100,000, that had ever assembled in the county. Fifteen years

a-building and a-setting on the stocks in the giant shiphouse at the Navy Yard, the 120-gun ship-of-the-line *Pennsylvania* was the largest ship in the world and the most heavily armed man of war ever built. Designed by Philadelphia's naval architect Samuel Humphreys, her main gun deck was 212 feet long, and her beam 58.⁵³ To the delight of the multitudes clustered on rooftops and crowding the more than 200 vessels assembled for the event, the *Pennsylvania* glided smoothly down the ways. On board were several hundred guests and a German band playing patriotic American airs. Just as the vessel touched the water, Nicholas Biddle's brother, Commodore James Biddle, a veteran of thirty-seven years in the navy, christened her by smashing on her figurehead a bottle of *Pennsylvania* whiskey made in Union County in 1829, and a bottle of madeira, hoary with age, its label bearing a single word, the name “Cadwalader.”⁵⁴ The career of the *Pennsylvania* was not fated to be as glorious as her launching. She was to spend many years tied up at the Norfolk Navy Yard, and there she was scuttled in 1861 to prevent her falling into the hands of the Confederates.

With navigation improved by the breakwater, tow boats, and the ice boat, its life stimulated by coal and other cargoes carried on the canals, the port of Philadelphia had never been more active. About five-sixths of the shad taken by Gloucester County's forty shad fisheries was marketed in Philadelphia. Every year about 1000 lumber rafts containing fifty million board feet in all descended the river from New York's Delaware and Sullivan Counties and Pennsylvania's Wayne County.⁵⁵



Launch of the U.S. Ship *Pennsylvania*, wood engraving by R. S. Gilbert (July 1837), from *A History of Philadelphia* (1839).

But the enormous increase in the city's coastal trade was accompanied by a decline in her foreign commerce. Of her two packet lines to Liverpool, only Cope's remained. At New York, on the other hand, many lines provided regular sailings to a number of European ports, and it was to New York that the English steamers *Sirius* and *Great Western* made their way in 1838. With the practicability of transatlantic steam navigation established, Philadelphians yearned for steam packet service of their own, through whose "potent aid" they could "restore our city to the first rank among our commercial sisters . . . and bring back to the shores of the Delaware the forests of masts which in former times cheered the hearts of our fathers and laid the broad foundations of our wealth and power." But the \$550,000 required to set up a steam line could not be raised. The effort was evidently unrealistic, based on nostalgia for the city's lost position and a desire to regain her former prestige in commerce. Philadelphia's destiny lay in other directions, in other kinds of wealth and economic might.⁵⁶

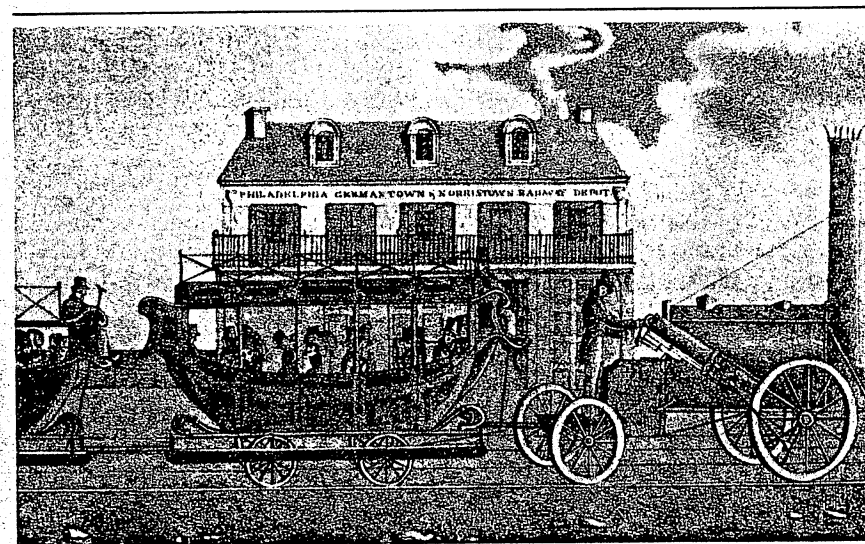
VII

For Philadelphia was to have as much steam power as any other city, steam applied not to ocean-going lines but to railroads and factories, with the first locally financed road stimulated by a Germantown gathering in October 1830. Among those who thought that a railroad to Philadelphia would be profitable were Benjamin Chew, Jr., of Cliveden, P. R. Freas, editor of the *Germantown Telegraph*, and John F. Watson, the antiquarian whose *Annals of Philadelphia*, the city's first history, had just been published. The line these men wanted was to have a branch, crossing the Wissahickon near its mouth, to Norristown, where mills produced 40,000 barrels of flour a year. The possibilities of heavy freight and passenger service were so favorable, and the understanding that the line would eventually be connected with the coal regions so well understood, that the stock of the Philadelphia, Germantown & Norristown Railroad, when offered for sale, proved insufficient to meet the demands of frantic speculators who scrambled for it in riotous fashion.⁵⁷

The railroad celebrated the successive opening of its divisions with much pomp. In June 1832 the Germantown run was inaugurated with thousands of curiosity seekers in attendance and the usual band of music. The cars, which resembled large stagecoaches, each seated about twenty passengers inside and fifteen outside, and were drawn by horses. The road's first locomotive, *Old Ironsides*, made by Matthias W. Baldwin, was placed on the rails the following November, but at first was used only in fair weather because its weight of a mere five tons did not give it enough traction to hold the rails in rain. Under the supervision of William Strickland, the Norristown branch reached Manayunk late in 1834, and in August 1835 service was initiated to Norristown. From there, arrangements were made with the Philadelphia and Reading to continue a railroad along the margin of the Schuylkill.⁵⁸

Chartered in 1833, the Reading was to be the masterpiece of Virginia engineer Moncure Robinson. Financed in part with money Robinson had

raised in England, the railroad was completed to Reading in 1838, thereby providing competition for the canal of the Schuylkill Navigation Company. A feature of the Reading was mine-to-ship transportation, from the coal regions to the port, for its line extended across Philadelphia County to Port Richmond at Kensington on the Delaware, where the railroad had its own wharves.⁵⁹



Rail Road Depot at Philadelphia, Ninth and Green Streets, lithograph by David Kennedy and William Lucas after William L. Breton (c. 1773-1855), 1832. On November 24, 1832, the *United States Gazette* reported, "The beautiful locomotive engine and tender, built by Mr. Baldwin, of this city . . . were for the first time placed on the road. The engine traveled about six miles, working with perfect accuracy and ease and with great velocity."

LIBRARY COMPANY OF PHILADELPHIA

Not content with a railroad to Reading, Philadelphians had their eyes on the trade of a vast area of productive land along the branches of the Susquehanna. As early as 1830 they were calling for a railroad from Danbury and Sunbury to Pottsville, where it would connect with the Schuylkill Navigation Company's canal. Assisted by Mathew Carey and Thomas P. Cope, Nicholas Biddle had been the leading figure in this move to establish the Danville and Pottsville, or the Central Railroad as it was generally called. Moncure Robinson located the line, but funds for its complete construction could not be had. Still, by 1836 it had been run twelve miles beyond Pottsville to Girardville, the site designated for a town by the great Philadelphia merchant. In 1830 Girard had purchased at auction from the trustees of the old first Bank of the United States 30,000 acres in the rich Mahanoy coal region of Schuylkill County. Its

cost to him, including the improvements he had made, was \$170,000 at the time of his death, when he bequeathed it to the City of Philadelphia, probably the best investment ever made by one of her citizens.⁶⁰

Philadelphians had not forgotten the importance they had placed back in 1825 on an access to Erie. The state-owned canal system had been opened to Pittsburgh in 1834, but a canal to Erie had not been undertaken from that point. Moreover entrepreneurs now favored railroads, because unlike the canals they did not have to shut down for the winter months. In 1836 a convention stimulated by Philadelphians was held at Williamsport to formalize plans for a railroad from Pittsburgh to Erie. Nicholas Biddle was elected president of the convention, and through his efforts a charter was obtained for the Sunbury and Erie Railroad with Biddle as president.⁶¹ Surveys were run and some preliminary work on the road undertaken, but the Philadelphia and Erie, as it was later known, was not completed until long after its first president's death.

Meanwhile the Columbia Railroad's double-track line to the Susquehanna was completed in 1834, with horse-drawn, flanged-wheel coach connections from various points in the city across the new Columbia Avenue Bridge to an inclined plane up Belmont Hill, at the top of which the coaches were hooked together for the trip westward. Later this railroad's tracks were extended from Broad Street down Market to the Delaware (causing the demolition of the old Court House which had stood on Market at Second Street since 1708). It was also in 1834 that the Philadelphia and Trenton's thirty-mile line went into operation. Earlier the same year the Camden and Amboy Railroad across the river replaced the forty to fifty stagecoaches that had carried passengers, freight, and the mail overland from opposite Philadelphia to New York.⁶² One remaining line of importance to Philadelphia continued in progress, the railroad to Baltimore. This road was built by three companies, with Latrobe laying out the Baltimore-Havre de Grace section, his former student Strickland in charge from Wilmington to the Susquehanna, and Strickland's former student Samuel H. Kneass handling the engineering of the Philadelphia-Wilmington division. The completion of the first two sections in July 1837 called for a celebration at their juncture on the Susquehanna, where a steamboat provided the unifying link. The next year the double-track line from Wilmington to Gray's Ferry was completed, a railroad bridge built over the Schuylkill, replacing the old Gray's Ferry floating bridge, and the rails laid to a depot on Broad Street at Prime (now Washington Avenue). The city now had its rail access to the South—the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore Railroad.⁶³

VIII

With coal and iron in nearby abundance it was inevitable that Philadelphia in her transition from a mercantile center should become a manufacturing center. She had the raw materials and she had the men. John Bristed, in his *The Resources of the United States*, published in 1818, noted the city's trend in that

direction: "There is no part of the world where, in proportion to its population, a greater number of ingenious mechanics may be found than in the City of Philadelphia and its immediate neighbourhood; or where, in proportion to the capital employed, manufactures thrive better."⁶⁴ *Niles' Register* in 1829 noted the improvement and wealth of Philadelphia, and the extension of her manufactures: "more than half the business of selling goods in our commercial cities, for the direct supply of the interior, is in domestic production. The *back shops* of Philadelphia are more valuable to her than the ranges of stores on the Delaware."⁶⁵ So great and swift was the rise of factories in Philadelphia that Peter S. Du Ponceau, in toasting the city in 1829, predicted: "Our good city of Philadelphia—In twenty years the Manchester and Lyons of America."⁶⁶

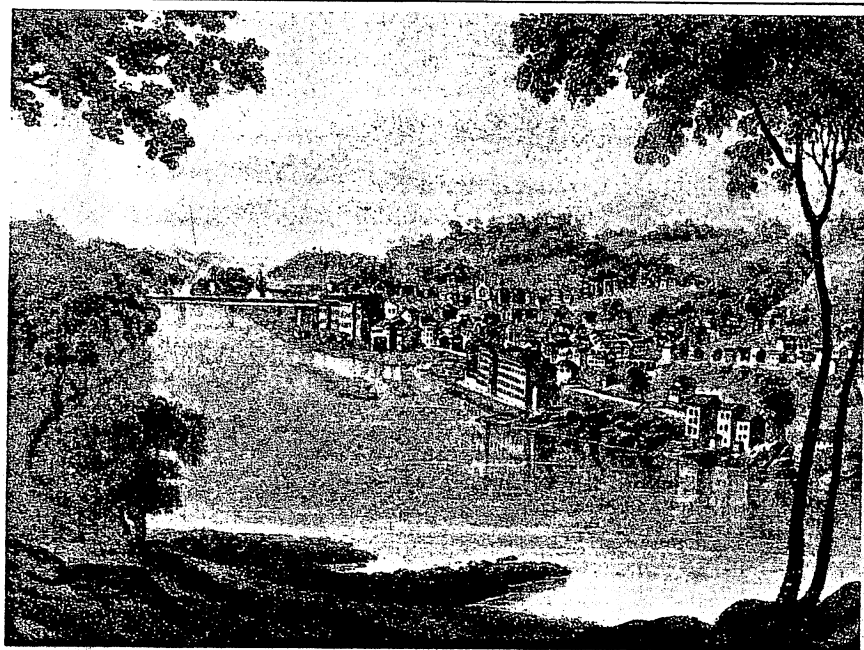
The degree to which Philadelphia had pulled herself out of the doldrums of the 1820s can be appreciated by the surprised comments of a New Yorker on visiting this "great, beautiful, rich, and self-complacent city" in 1830:

The foreign commerce of Philadelphia suffers much in comparison and by the all commanding advantages of New York. But such is the countless wealth of the former city—such her internal resources and her indissoluble connections with a vast and rich interior—such the acknowledged superiority of her artists [engineers and mechanics]—of almost every description—there are so many established and productive manufactures—she has so much literature, science, and professional talents in her own bosom—that Philadelphia makes a world in itself, altogether independent of the accidental superiorities of her rival sister. And her growth within a few years last past has been more substantial and more rapid than at any former period. I had expected to see this city decline. But it is no longer a question. She is destined to rise and grow with the country.⁶⁷

As these comments indicate, Philadelphia had continued to surge vigorously into the industrial revolution. Manufacturing and fine craftsmanship were encouraged by the Franklin Institute's annual exhibits, where all vied for the "premiums," or medals, awarded. In 1825 the institute offered prizes for the best specimens in eighty-two branches of manufactures.⁶⁸ Mathew Carey, president of the Pennsylvania Society for the Promotion of Manufactures and the Mechanic Arts, led the way in making Philadelphia the citadel of high-tariff theory.⁶⁹

Large mills for spinning cotton and weaving wool were built with astonishing rapidity. They were particularly numerous at Manayunk (the old Indian name for the River Schuylkill), near "Flat Rock," five or six miles above Philadelphia. In 1820 there was only a toll house there, but by 1825 it was a thriving factory town, soon boasted of as the "Lowell of Pennsylvania."⁷⁰ The source of waterpower for mills had always been there, but it was the transportation facility of the Schuylkill Navigation Company and its dam and millrace that created Manayunk and helped push Philadelphia into the first rank in the textile field. By 1828 the city's 104 warping mills employed 4500 weavers and more than 5000 spoolers, bobbin winders, and dyers.⁷¹

Philadelphia also excelled in heavy industry. By 1830 nearly one-fourth of the nation's steel production centered there, and the city was preeminent in



Manayunk, lithograph published by John T. Bowen (1801–1856), after John Caspar Wild (c. 1804–1846), 1838.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

the building of locomotives. Matthias W. Baldwin led off in this field with his first engine for the Germantown line in 1832, his Baldwin Locomotive Works soon becoming the largest producer in the country. By 1838, 45 percent of the domestically manufactured engines in use on American railroads bore his name.⁷²

In some respects William Norris was even more famous than Baldwin. Starting in the locomotive business in 1832 as a partner in the American Steam Carriage Company, he moved its shop from Kensington to Bush Hill in 1835, and there built the *George Washington* for the Columbia Railroad. This engine's tremendous power brought him an order for seventeen like it for an English railroad, the Birmingham and Gloucester. From then on Norris's foreign business grew rapidly. Many of his machines went to Austria and elsewhere on the Continent; they were to be found in Cuba and South America.

Still another locomotive builder of spectacular attainments was Joseph Harrison, Jr., who became foreman in 1835 for Garrett and Eastwick, one of Philadelphia's pioneer locomotive concerns. Before long the firm had become Eastwick and Harrison. It is best remembered as the company that moved to Russia to build the engines and cars needed by the czar.⁷³

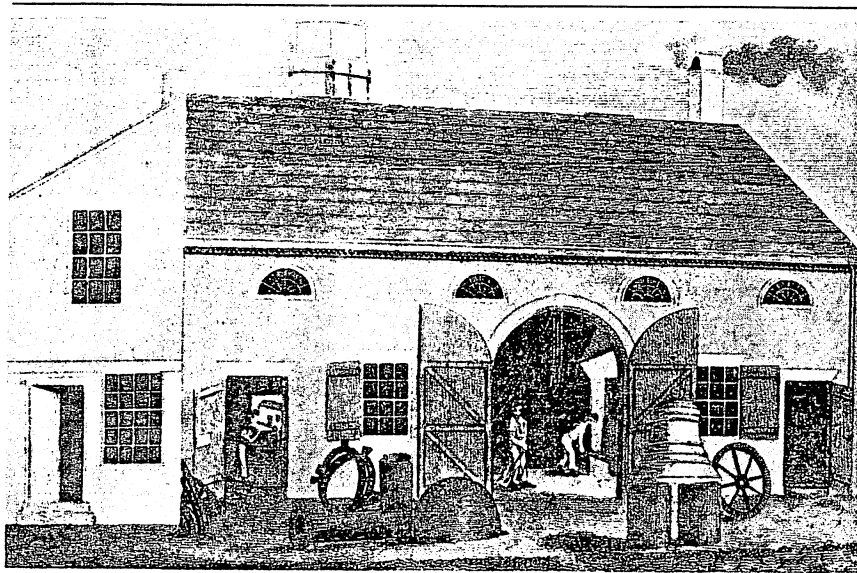
Samuel V. Merrick was another industrialist comparable in achievements to the locomotive builders. In the 1820s he and his partner John Agnew won fame for their construction of an improved type of fire engine. Next, with John H. Towne, Merrick established the Southwark Foundry for the manufacture of heavy machinery and boilers. A founder of the Franklin Institute and destined to be the first president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, Merrick was one of the most forward-looking men in the city. Many naval vessels were powered by engines made by his firm, in particular the steam frigate U.S.S. *Princeton*, built at the Philadelphia Navy Yard in 1843, the first propeller-driven man-of-war ordered by the navy.⁷⁴

The reputation of Philadelphia manufacturers spread far and wide. The city's famous coachmaker, William Ogle, exported many of his vehicles; his *volantes* went to South America and Mexico, and a record exists of his making a carriage for a gentleman in Scotland. In partnership with George W. Watson, Ogle constructed a factory near the Falls of Schuylkill, run by waterpower and a marvel of ingenuity and efficiency.⁷⁵

The making of fire engines was a separate line of business, one in which Philadelphia became well known as the supplier of southern and western communities. George Jeffries was one of the principal builders in this trade, but John Agnew, late of Merrick & Agnew, was outstanding. In 1839 he made an engine for a company in Mobile that was the largest Philadelphia had ever seen—a “hydraulic” capable of throwing a stream of water 192 feet. The sides of its gallery were carved in bold, bronze scrollwork by Samuel Hemphill. All of its metal ornaments were silver plated, even to the axle boxes, and much of this was beautifully engraved with appropriate inscriptions and devices by Gaskill & Copper. The front locker was covered with an inscribed plate of German silver, the back by a magnificent ornamental painting by John A. Woodside. The moldings and paneling were blue and black, relieved with gold.⁷⁶

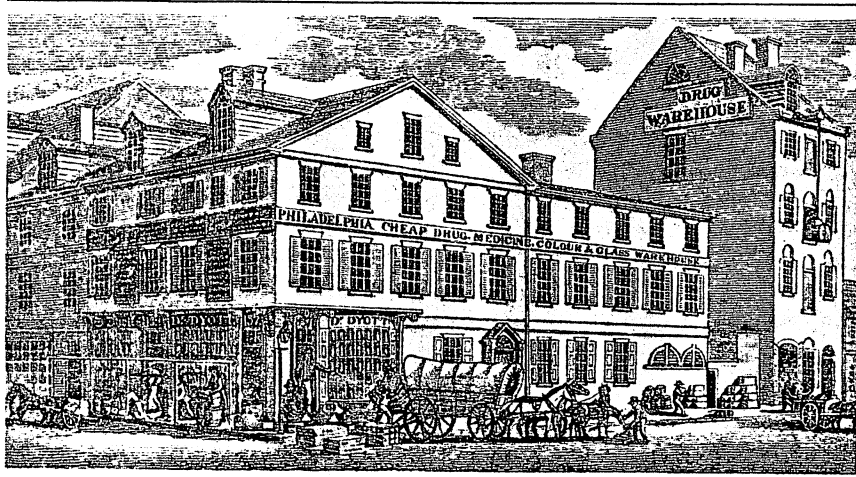
Foundries and factories of all sorts proliferated in the Philadelphia of this era. Cornelius and Company's chandeliers were unsurpassed in beauty, hung in places as exalted as the United States Senate, and won fame at the Crystal Palace Exhibition. In a more mundane line, this company provided the countless gas fixtures required by Philadelphians in the late 1830s. McCalla's carpet factory at Bush Hill had achieved such a position in the trade that it was known as the Kidderminster of America. Indicative of the city's ties with Cuba were twelve sugar refineries, which made Philadelphia perhaps the largest sugar-refining center in the country, one destined to be later accused of monopolizing the business. One of the most curious industrial plants of all was the extensive Dyottsville Glass Works, on the Delaware just above Kensington. Of its 300 employees, 225 were boys, some not eight years of age.⁷⁷

This kaleidoscopic view presents only a few of the fields in which Philadelphia's industry developed at such breakneck speed that by 1828 the city was recognized as the foremost manufacturer in the country.⁷⁸ Unfortunately the accomplishment achieved in transferring the making of products from the



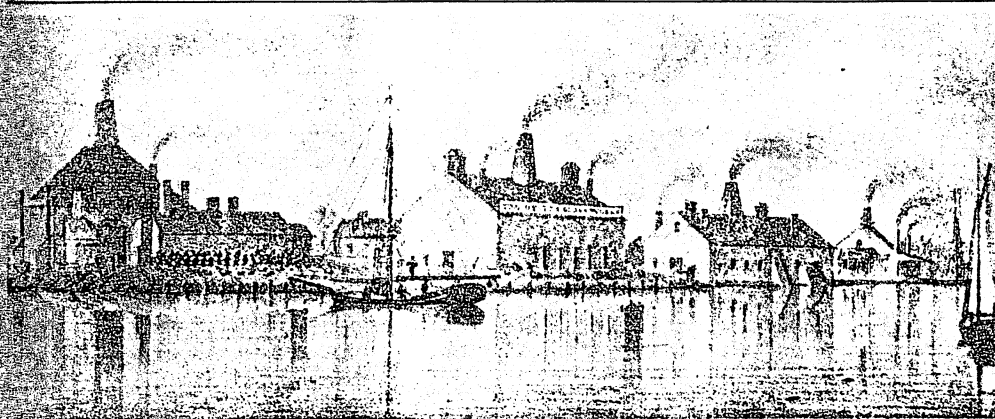
Parke & Tiers Brass Bell & Iron Founders, Point Pleasant, Kensington, Philada., engraving in *Picture of Philadelphia* . . . (Philadelphia: E. L. Carey and A. Hart, 1831). The foundry, built by C. B. Parke in 1819, also made sugar mills, soap boiler pans, anvils, and hammers.

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T. W. Dyott, Wholesale and Retail Druggist and Warehouse, northeast corner of Second and Race Streets, wood engraving from the *Philadelphia Directory and Register* for 1820.

LIBRARY COMPANY OF PHILADELPHIA



View of the Glass Works of T. W. Dyott at Kensington on the Delaware nr Philada., lithograph probably by David Kennedy and William Lucas after W. L. Breton (c. 1773-1855), from *Picture of Philadelphia from 1811 to 1831* (Philadelphia, 1831).

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home or small shop to the factory almost totally neglected the human factor involved. The result was a labor problem of novel aspect to employers, who saw no reason to respect the "rights" of laborers. They had no rights: if they were dissatisfied, let them go elsewhere; there were plenty of men available to take their places. The justness of this attitude was endorsed by the clergy, public opinion, and the law.

But the voice of labor began to be heard in Philadelphia. In 1827 the journeymen house carpenters struck, complaining of the "grievous and slave-like system of labor." The reaction of the master carpenters was to advertise for journeymen in other cities.⁷⁹ There was no security for the workingman. Living in fear of losing his job, he was crowded into unsanitary dwellings and tenements, working from sunrise to sunset for pitifully low wages which were subject to drastic reductions. Mill owners at Blockley and Manayunk expected a fourteen-hour working day, six days a week, for a weekly salary of \$4.33. Vacations were unknown, and July 4 was the only official holiday.⁸⁰

Given these circumstances it was no accident that the American labor movement had its beginnings in Philadelphia. In 1827 a young cordwainer, William Heighton, published *An Address to the Members of Trade Societies and to Working Classes Generally*. Later in that strike-torn year he formed the Mechanics Union of Trade Associations, which served as a coordinating body for constituent trade unions. It founded six new trade societies and once embraced as many as fifteen. Heighton was also editor of the *Mechanics Free Press*, established in 1828, the first labor paper in America. From 1828 to 1831 the Working Men's party nominated candidates for public office who were

proponents of such reforms as a universal free school system, abolition of imprisonment for debt, mechanics' lien laws, and other measures to protect the status and dignity of skilled craftsmen and artisans. As a class they fought against reduction to a proletariat; but as a party they could not compete successfully against the experienced politicians and the traditions of the major parties. Labor's antimonopoly and pro-hard-money views made it susceptible to absorption by the Democrats when Andrew Jackson undertook his war against the Bank of the United States.⁸¹

Long hours were the overt issue of the general strike of 1835, its basic goal the ten-hour day. Down at the grimy Schuylkill wharves the unskilled Irish coal-heavers walked off, and prevented others from working. The house painters went out next, denouncing the "present system of labor as oppressive and unjust and destructive of social happiness." Bricklayers, carpenters, masons, and many other trades also struck, parading with fife, drum, and banners which displayed their demands. When the city Councils accepted the ten-hour day for city employees, enough other employers reluctantly fell into line that the strike was considered won.⁸²

Labor next concentrated on winning better wages, but with small success. When the coal-heavers struck on this issue in 1836, the dealers would not budge from the old one-dollar-a-day standard, with twelve and a half cents an hour overtime. "This with constant employment," the workers were told, "is great encouragement to those who wish to 'make hay while the sun shines,'" an allusion to wintertime when, with the canal closed, most of them would be out of work.⁸³

Soon came the Panic of 1837, and the ensuing business depression and unemployment so weakened the bargaining position of labor that the Ten-Hour Movement of 1835 became the fond memory of a moment not to be approached again for generations. At that, the brief success of the movement was illusory. Though the ten-hour day was the tangible issue at hand, and though the unskilled participated in the Ten-Hour Movement, most of the impetus for the general strike of 1835 came from skilled artisans, whose basic concern was not the length of the working day but the loss of their historic status and independence. The independent artisan of the eighteenth century, who ran his own business from his dwelling place, was now losing control of his destiny to capitalists who bought up his products for distribution in a larger, big-city-wide or regional or national market, and who in the process reorganized the trades.

X

The enormous increase in the city's industrial output brought about startling changes in her population. In 1820 the number of people living in Philadelphia County already exceeded those in the city proper by 72,922 to 63,713. Over the years both sections gained in population density, but the county with its new factory areas grew faster than the city, and in 1840 had outstripped her by 164,474 to 93,652. The old sections of the city began to run

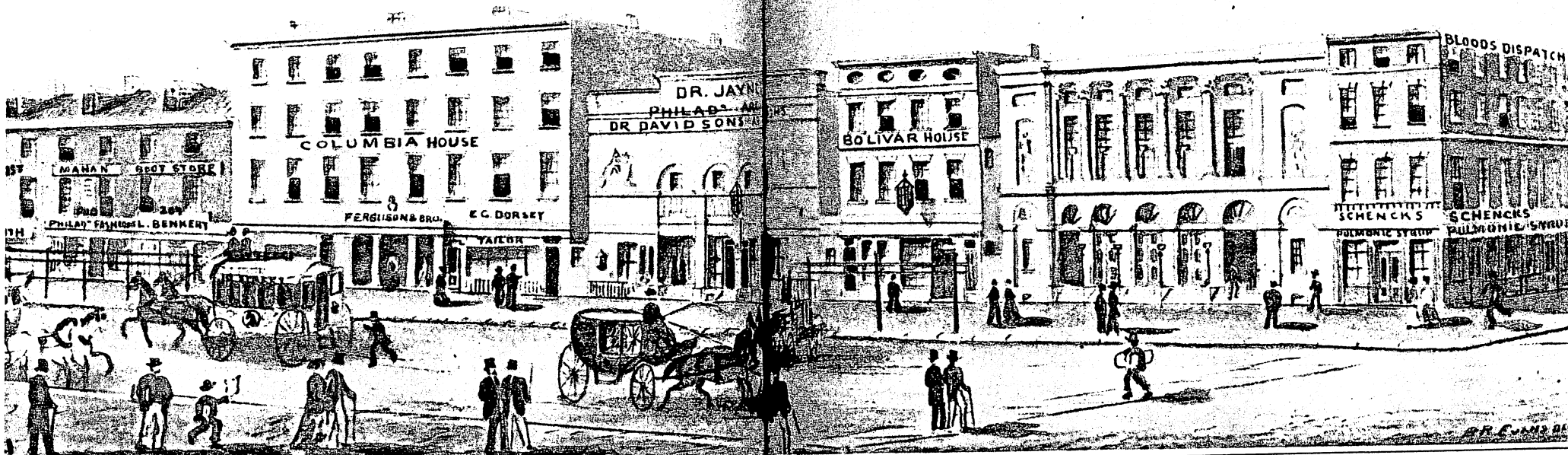
down. Few new buildings went up on the Delaware front; the houses once owned by wealthy colonial merchants were taken over as tenements or factories as blight set in. Back from the river more recent residential streets were transformed into rows of stores as the former residents moved westward. This drift was recognized as early as 1825 when the Middle Ward boundaries were extended from Fourth Street to Seventh. By 1830 the center of the city was around Sixth Street, since 37,500 people lived west of Seventh and 43,000 east of the new dividing line. The 1840 census shows a quickening of the westward trend—56,000 inhabitants west of Seventh Street, 37,500 east. Of course the areas to the north and south were also increasing in population. Southwark, the Northern Liberties, and Kensington doubled their numbers in this twenty-year period, while Spring Garden's jumped from 3500 to 28,000.⁸⁴

Surprised by such changes, an Old Philadelphian recorded in 1828 that "Below South Street, east of Broad, has recently sprung up a new town. Where last summer the boys played, there are now solid blocks of brick buildings, grocery stores and taverns [and the] clitter clatter of the weavers' shuttle."⁸⁵ The quantity of buildings being erected was astonishing. In 1827 more houses were built in Philadelphia than in any two years previous, and in 1829 and 1830 it was estimated that 5000 residences and stores were erected in the city and county, yet rents were higher than ever.⁸⁶

Building rows of handsome brick houses, three and four stories high, complete with baths and water closets, was one of Stephen Girard's favorite forms of investment carried on by him until his death: "He projects and executes schemes with the courage and ardour of a young man."⁸⁷ Examples can still be seen in the south side of Spruce Street between Third and Fourth. All were high in praise of Girard's superior and extensive building improvements. "He has been the means of beautifying this, his adopted city, and of employing large numbers of respectable artisans, who might otherwise have been thrown out of bread," observed a Chestnut Street merchant.⁸⁸

"Philadelphia," wrote Nathaniel P. Willis, "is a city to be happy in. . . . Delightful cleanliness everywhere meets the eye. The sidewalks are washed constantly; the marble steps are spotlessly clean. . . . Everything is well conditioned and cared for. If any fault could be found it would be that of too much regularity and too nice precision."⁸⁹ As Latrobe had observed earlier of Philadelphia architecture, "so it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be."⁹⁰ But change was on its way; granite fronts were coming into vogue,⁹¹ and among Girard's building efforts was the row of houses on Chestnut between Eleventh and Twelfth, which were distinguished by marble fronts and pillars. Rich men like Matthew Newkirk, railroad president, bank director, philanthropist, and, to his guest Henry Clay's dismay, teetotaler, built marble mansions.⁹²

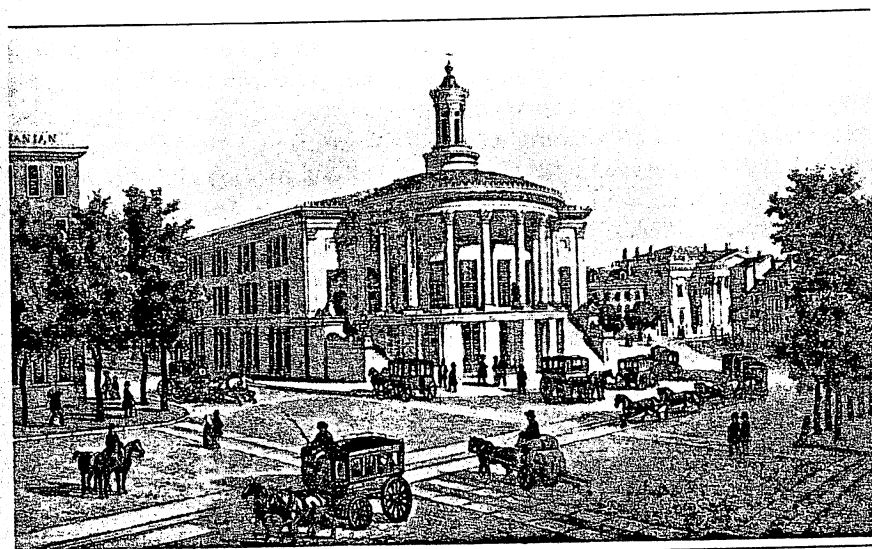
Of the three great architects of the period—Strickland, Haviland, and Thomas U. Walter—Strickland was probably the most outstanding. "He found us," said newspaper publisher Joseph R. Chandler, "living in a city of brick, and he will leave us in a city of marble."⁹³ The marble came from



North Side of Chestnut St: Extending from Sixth to Seventh St., watercolor by Benjamin Ridgway Evans (fl. 1840–1885), 1851. The Philadelphia Arcade, designed by John Haviland (1792–1852) stood between the Columbia House and Bolivar House hotels. The second Chestnut Street Theatre is just east of the Bolivar House. The Arcade was demolished in 1863.

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quarries in Montgomery County and owed its perfection in appearance to the Scotsman John Struthers, unquestionably the best marble mason in Philadelphia, if not in the country. Strickland's beautiful buildings did much to enhance the appearance of the city and to provide her with many of her "lions." His contributions were impressive: in addition to the second Bank of the United States (1819–1824) at 420 Chestnut Street, there were the Naval Asylum, near Gray's Ferry (1826–1829); a new building for the Unitarian church on the Tenth and Locust site (1828); the Arch Street Theatre, on the north side of Arch Street above Sixth (1828); the University of Pennsylvania's Medical Hall (1829) and College Hall (1829–1830); the United States Mint at the northwest corner of Chestnut and Juniper (1829–1833); the Almshouse at Blockley west of the Schuylkill (1830–1834); the Merchants' Exchange on the north side of Walnut between Third and Dock Streets (1832–1834); and the Philadelphia Bank on the southwest corner of Fourth and Chestnut (1836–1837), to mention some of the most notable. Of these, along with the Bank of the United States, only the United States Naval Asylum and the Merchants'



Merchants' Exchange, lithograph by Deroy after Augustus Kollner (1813–1906), 1848. The Exchange, designed by William Strickland (1788–1854) in 1832, is now part of Independence National Historical Park.

PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART

John Haviland's first important building was the Philadelphia Arcade, which, patterned on London's Burlington Arcade, owed its inception as the city's first office building to the restless energy of Peter A. Browne. Chief Justice William Tilghman having recently died, his ancient home, formerly the residence of Gov. Sir William Keith, was torn down and on its site on the north side of Chestnut Street between Sixth and Seventh Haviland's handsome marble building was erected in 1827. The tenancy of the ninety stores it housed was sold at auction, an odd way of establishing their rental value. Peale's Museum vacated Independence Hall to occupy the third floor. Interesting as the novel building was, it turned out a financial failure.⁹⁴

The year after he completed the Arcade, Haviland, again in conjunction with Browne, built an even more curious structure, a Chinese pagoda. This lofty pile stood in a pleasure garden near the Schuylkill at Fairmount, and represented a tower on the banks of the Ta-ho, between Canton and Hoang-pou.⁹⁵ Alas, it too was unsuccessful.

Haviland achieved his greatest fame in prison design: cell blocks radiating like the spokes of a wheel from a central administration building. In 1829 he completed Philadelphia's Eastern State Penitentiary at Cherry Hill—now Fairmount Avenue at Twenty-first Street—according to this plan and surrounded it with a stone wall twelve feet thick at the base and thirty feet high, with castellated towers at its corners and a massive fortress-like entrance.⁹⁶ Having demonstrated his virtuosity in Greek Revival buildings, such as his Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb on the northwest corner of Broad and Pine (1824–1825) and St. George's Episcopal Church on Eighth Street south of Locust (1822), as well as his familiarity with medieval fortresses and Chinese temples, Haviland was next entranced by the “pure Egyptian.” His plan for the Museum Building in 1835 was a transplant from the Nile.⁹⁷ In 1839 he designed a building for an insurance company on Walnut Street opposite Independence Square. This marble Egyptian edifice so took the fancy of a prominent New Yorker that the architect was commissioned to do one like it for that gentleman's residence. Haviland's work was well known in New York. After the great fire in 1835 he received several major commissions, including the building of the New York Exchange. This recognition of his worth caused a New York editor to write: “The best architectural taste in the country is found at Philadelphia, as her public buildings make manifest. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that we are indebted to the American Athens, instead of our own.”⁹⁸ The Eastern State Penitentiary; the original Franklin Institute (1826), on Seventh Street south of Market, now the Atwater Kent Museum; the Philadelphia College of Art and what is now St. George's Greek Catholic Church; and the much altered Walnut Street Theatre are the principal Haviland buildings surviving in Philadelphia today.

Philadelphia's third prominent architect, Thomas U. Walter, is noted for his Girard College, erected 1833–1847, but he also built the Philadelphia County Prison in Moyamensing in 1835 (demolished in 1967). This formidable Gothic stronghold, to which were transferred the prisoners from the antiquated Walnut Street Prison, was of granite from the Quincy quarries in Massachu-

setts. Next to it, Walter built an Egyptian-style debtors' prison of red Connecticut sandstone.⁹⁹ Many churches and other public structures owed their design to him, such as the Spruce Street Baptist Church at 426 Spruce. In domestic architecture, his outstanding work was the enlargement of Biddle's “Andalusia,” and “Portico Row,” west of Broad Street on Chestnut (not to be confused with “Portico Square,” of similar construction on Spruce Street). Between 1825 and 1840 Walter and his friends Strickland and Haviland created more architecturally important buildings in Philadelphia than had ever been built there before.

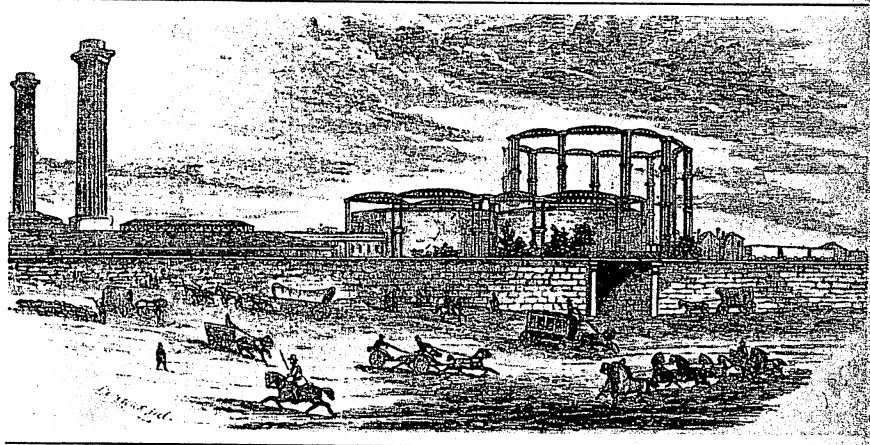
X

Although her appetite for building improvements seemed insatiable, Philadelphia was often slow in accepting technological advances. For years voices had been heard vainly urging the establishment of a gasworks. Baltimore, New York, and Boston had gas plants, but the city Councils were timid. In 1831 they averred that gas lighting had not yet been brought to the necessary degree of perfection. They feared health hazards, danger of explosion, nauseous odors, and other perils and inconveniences.¹⁰⁰ Irritated by this nonsense, Samuel V. Merrick, advocating gas lighting, was elected a councilman and went abroad to study gas manufacture. His report resulted in an ordinance establishing a gasworks which he designed and superintended for several years. This plant was erected on Market Street next to the Schuylkill and went into general operation in 1836. The following year the city's principal streets were lighted by gas. Philadelphians were thrilled with the new light. “This evening,” wrote Joseph Sill in 1836, “was rendered remarkable by the introduction of gas into my store and private entry of my dwelling . . . the most clear, dazzling, and bright light I ever saw.”¹⁰¹

Among other improvements which came to the city in the 1830s were several in transportation. Until 1833 Philadelphians went about town either on foot, in private carriages, or in hired hacks. June 1, 1833, brought a new method, for on that day omnibus service was inaugurated. The *William Penn*, lineal ancestor of the horse car, trolley, and bus, started its hourly runs between the Merchants' Coffee House on Second Street and the Schuylkill. Immediately afterward line after line went into operation, their gay equipages fancifully painted and individually named—*Stephen Girard*, *Independence*, *Lady Washington*, *Union*—until there was scarcely a major avenue in Philadelphia without its ponderous-looking omnibus service.¹⁰² Six years after the appearance of the *William Penn* another mode of conveyance, the cab, attracted favorable comment. Abbreviated from the French *cabriolet*, the cab carried two passengers inside and a driver outside on a box to the rear. Philadelphia's “Cab No. 1” was made by Robert E. Nuttle for Joseph M. Sanderson, the genial proprietor of the Merchants' Hotel on Fourth Street north of Market.¹⁰³

XI

Another change of the times, brought on by population growth and the inadequacy of church burial yards, was the commercial cemetery. In 1827



Representation of the Gas Works, *Philadelphia, Market Street at Twenty-Second*, drawn by Nicholson B. Devereux for Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion (1853).

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

James Ronaldson, type founder and the enterprising president of the Franklin Institute, opened the Philadelphia Cemetery (usually called Ronaldson's) on Shippen (now Bainbridge) Street between Ninth and Tenth, a city landmark until 1950 when it was removed. Next, the concept of cemeteries set in peaceful, rural settings, modeled on Mount Auburn, near Boston, and Père la Chaise, Paris, became popular. In 1836 Laurel Hill, Joseph Sims's former countryseat on the Schuylkill, was purchased by a stock company and converted into a beautiful cemetery in the new style. Before long other similar burial grounds were in operation—Woodlands Cemetery on the Hamilton estate in West Philadelphia, and Monument Cemetery at North Broad Street and Turner's Lane, removed in recent years and the grounds transformed into a Temple University parking lot.¹⁰⁴

The elaborate efforts to beautify cemeteries, particularly Laurel Hill where John Notman was employed as architect, were in the mood of the city's exceedingly appreciative interest in artistic endeavors. Traditional art activity in Philadelphia was sustained by the annual exhibitions of the Artists' Fund Society and of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, as well as by numerous special exhibitions at Masonic Hall and Earle's Gallery. This was the Philadelphia of Thomas Sully, her most popular portrait painter. He idealized his subjects, but he obtained likenesses and painted more Philadelphians than any other artists. His greatest triumph came in 1838 when he went to England to paint Queen Victoria. "The Queen, he told me," wrote Samuel Breck, "was exceedingly affable and granted him six sittings."¹⁰⁵

John Neagle did not obtain as good likenesses as Sully, but his composition was far more interesting. His portrait of Thomas P. Cope, for example,

shows one of Cope's packet ships in the background, while in the foreground, on a table, rests the charter of the Mercantile Library Company, of which Cope was founder and president. Neagle's best known work, *Pat Lyon at the Forge*, was completed in 1827. Behind Pat's brawny figure is the cupola of the Walnut Street Jail, where he was imprisoned in 1798 for a crime he did not commit. In his wealthy old age Lyon insisted on being painted not as the gentleman he had become but in the role of his early days, a blacksmith.¹⁰⁶

Rembrandt Peale, Jacob Eichholtz, and Henry Inman were all prominent portrait painters in Philadelphia in this period, many of their works being made into prints by John Sartain, the best engraver of the day. In prolific Thomas Birch, the city rejoiced in one of the best marine painters of the time, his canvases selling usually for thirty dollars. Russell Smith had come into public notice when, failing to gain adequate support for his landscapes, he turned scene painter and did extraordinary work at the Walnut Street Theatre.¹⁰⁷ In John A. Woodside the city had one of the best ornamental painters in the country, famed for his stirring allegories which decorated fire engines. His signs, such as the one that hung in front of Lukens' Tavern in Kensington—*The Landing of Columbus*—were unexcelled.¹⁰⁸

Visiting artists were invariably entranced by the Fairmount Water Works. In 1834 J. C. Wild's watercolors of Fairmount were exhibited at the Merchants' Exchange, and the next year Nicolino Calyo exhibited his large, highly colored city views at Masonic Hall. Scarce had Calyo been in town a month before he too had his view of Fairmount, and the ruins of the great fire that burned out fifty-five acres of New York City had hardly cooled before he was exhibiting pictures of the disaster.¹⁰⁹

William Rush continued in his great tradition. His favorite carvings were ship figureheads of Indian chiefs. Sometimes they were shown in the act of shooting an arrow, or in solemn thought, arms folded within a tightly drawn blanket, or else fiercely threatening with raised tomahawk. But Rush was versatile. When the ship *John Sergeant* slid into the Delaware from John Vaughan's yard in 1831, her figurehead was an excellent likeness by Rush of Philadelphia's prominent citizen. On Rush's death in 1833, it was acknowledged that as a carver he had been unequalled. However, John Rush, his son, carried on capably, carving the figurehead for the mighty U.S.S. *Pennsylvania*—Hercules dressed in a lion's skin, armed with a club.¹¹⁰

Whether the banker's head ornamented the brig *Nicholas Biddle* at her launching at Southwark in 1838 is not recorded. She was a first-rate ship intended for the Brazil trade, and not the first to be named for him. Fortunately a description survives of the *Joseph Cowperthwait*, a brig launched two months later, named for Biddle's cashier. Cowperthwait's bust adorned the vessel, but not in the usual place under the bowsprit; it was placed at the stern. To starboard of this effigy in bold carving was the front of the Bank of the United States, while on the other side were carved representations of the cashier's books, desk, and the charter of the bank.¹¹¹

Among the city's many excellent sculptors in marble was Nicholas Geve-

lot, whose statue of Apollo, god of music and poetry, was placed in the pediment of the Arch Street Theatre in 1830. It was Gevelot who carved the angels for St. John's Roman Catholic Church on Thirteenth Street, and who was commissioned to do the life-size marble statue of Girard at Girard College. His bronze busts of Edward Burd and William Strickland delighted Philadelphians who found them on exhibit at the Louvre in 1836.¹¹²

To provide Gevelot with some competition, E. Luigi Persico came to Philadelphia in 1831. Over a period of years Persico immortalized a number of Philadelphians in marble.¹¹³ Much excellent sculpturing was done by artists whose names are lost. However, it is known that the brothers Peter and Philip Bardi did the elaborate capitals for the columns at the Merchants' Exchange, and that the pair of lions that guard its front were carved by Signor Fiorelli of 31 Dock Street.¹¹⁴ At Struthers's marble yard highly skilled workers provided the city with its most elaborate mantelpieces, ornamented with delicately worked friezes of grapevines and Egyptian caryatids. Some of these men, such as Hugh Cannon, later set up their own studios. John Hill was presumably Struthers's best man, for it was he who lavishly executed Struthers's masterpiece according to designs provided by Strickland, the Washington sarcophagus.¹¹⁵ True proportions were the ideal of the day. A sculptor exhibiting his statue of Cleopatra in Philadelphia displayed a certificate testifying to its anatomical exactness, signed by several of New York's most eminent physicians.¹¹⁶

Nicolo Monachesi, who made Philadelphia his home from 1831 until his death twenty years later, was a master of painting in fresco. In this medium he decorated the ceilings of the great room at the Exchange, St. John's sanctuary, and other Catholic churches. Some of the city's most costly residences bore testimony to his skill: "This tasteful manner of decorating the walls of noble mansions is becoming fashionable and seems to offer some encouragement to the fine arts." For Matthew Newkirk's house he provided a brilliant ceiling of Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, showing her jewels to Capuano. Sidney George Fisher thought that George Cadwalader's parlors were the handsomest in town; their walls and ceilings were "beautifully painted in fresco by Monachesi."¹¹⁷

One of the city's most active art patrons was the engraver Col. Cephas G. Childs. It was he who procured for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Benjamin West's masterpiece *Death on a Pale Horse*. Between 1827 and 1830 Childs published in parts his *Views in Philadelphia and Its Environs*, and in 1829 he became interested in lithography, the city's first lithographic firm having been established the year before. His major contribution to this art of inexpensive reproduction was bringing to Philadelphia an expert French lithographer, Peter S. Duval. Duval, and his competitor J. T. Bowen, turned out some of the most important lithographic artwork of the times, notably Thomas L. McKenny's and James Hall's three-volume *History of the Indian Tribes of North America*, John James Audubon's octavo *Birds of America*, and also the naturalist's *Quadrupeds of North America*.¹¹⁸

A pictorial process cheaper yet than lithography was at hand. On the afternoon of October 16, 1839, Joseph Saxton leaned out of a window at the mint, where he was employed, pointed a contraption housed in a cigar box at nearby Central High School, and took perhaps the first American daguerreotype. Other inventive Philadelphians immediately turned their hands to this fascinating innovation. Ralph Cornelius, a lamp manufacturer, obtained the first picture of a human face ever taken by Louis Daguerre's process. Dr. Paul Beck Goddard of the University of Pennsylvania improved on the technique, and in January 1840 made the first successful attempt at interior photography.¹¹⁹ While many rejoiced at the prospect of cheap pictures, others had cause to mourn. Peter F. Rothermel, a promising young portrait painter, gave up portraiture, blaming loss of business on the daguerreotype.¹²⁰ The years that lay ahead were to bring a sharp decline in the quality of oil painting in Philadelphia, and with mass production and garish color processes, a falling off in the charm that had characterized lithographic work of the 1830s.

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However, Philadelphia in the 1830s survives visually in the hundreds of scenes drawn by its artists on stone. The elegance, color, ostentatious pride, and activity of the day vibrate in these exuberant prints. Never before had Philadelphians lived in so vivacious a style. The sober veil of Quaker origins had been rent to shreds; there was a sense of elation and gaiety in these times of accomplishment, of intense individualism held in check by pleasant formality, an ordered discipline.

Rowing clubs began to hold regattas on the Schuylkill in 1834, their members suitably dressed for the sport and their boats colored to suit their fancy. The *Metamora* barge was painted vermilion with a gold stripe; her rowers wore Canton hats, white jackets trimmed with blue, and white pantaloons. She competed against the *Sylph*, orange with red gunwales, her members clad in dark trousers, pink striped shirts, and red and white caps.¹²¹

There had never been so many stirring parades as in this day of fresh and ardent patriotism. The magnificence of the militia's uniforms was recorded by William H. Huddy and Peter S. Duval in their *U. S. Military Magazine*. The triennial processions of the fire companies were gorgeous, circus-like. Each company had its distinctive dress (one was garbed as Turks). Their engines and hose carriages, nearly all of them superbly decorated by Woodside, were drawn on these occasions by horses ridden by boys in fancy costumes. The officers, carrying silver speaking trumpets, were preceded by buglers and by standard bearers holding aloft imaginatively painted banners. Bands of music interspersed the column. Flowers and flags festooned the equipment. In the 1833 parade the William Penn Hose Company was led by members dressed as Penn, Indians, and Quakers, accompanied by seamen who bore gifts offered at the famous treaty.¹²²

The most stupendous parade in these years took place in 1832 on the centennial of Washington's birth. At 10:30 that morning 15,000 marchers fell

into line, headed by eighteen pioneers, large, athletic men in white frocks and leather caps, carrying axes. Next came a trumpeter and then the chief marshal, Col. Clement C. Biddle, whose father had been a marshal in the Grand Federal Procession of 1788. Included in the parade were the city's officials, the military, the fire companies, and the various trades, many of them in their individual full-dress attire. On elaborate floats, printers were busy with their press and handed out broadsides; the bakers served bread hot from their oven; tobacco-nists distributed "segars." The master mariners sailed up Chestnut Street in an amply manned full-rigged ship. From time to time a hand in the mizzen chains heaved the lead and announced the depth to the pilot. Every time the vessel came to a temporary halt her anchor was cast. The celebration, "the most imposing spectacle that has ever been exhibited at Philadelphia," concluded at Independence Hall, where William Rawle read Washington's Farewell Address and Bishop William White delivered a prayer.¹²³

Parades of another sort marked the passing of famous men. On Girard's death in 1831, Bishop White's in 1836, Dr. Philip Syng Physick's in 1837, and Mathew Carey's in 1839, those who did not follow the coffin to the grave lined the streets through which it passed. Girard's funeral was the largest the city had yet seen; there were 3000 in the procession and 20,000 watchers. The head of Dr. Physick's funeral column had nearly reached Christ Church burial ground before its rear had left his house on Fourth Street. Carey was followed to the grave by unprecedented thousands of mourners.¹²⁴ The interest thus expressed, the ceremonial attention, reflected the close, personal feelings of involvement that characterized the Philadelphian of that day.

The town meeting furnished another outlet for demonstrations of public interest. When Chief Justice John Marshall died at Mrs. Crim's Walnut Street boardinghouse in 1835, the public met to record its respect. Bishop White presided and Joseph R. Ingersoll delivered the eulogy.¹²⁵ Silver presentations were another form of tribute and appreciation. On July 4, 1834, Mathew Carey was honored with a silver service in testimony to his public conduct. The old printer's friends deemed Carey's "whole career in life an encouraging example, by the imitation of which, without the aid of official station or political power, every private citizen may become a public benefactor." Most presentation pieces were made by Thomas Fletcher, although Carey's came from another silversmith, R. & W. Wilson.¹²⁶ Yet another form of tribute was the testimonial dinner. The English dramatist James Sheridan Knowles was thus honored in 1834, and in 1837, 200 of the city's cultural elite dined with Edwin Forrest at the Merchants' Hotel.¹²⁷

In these prosperous years, fortunate Philadelphians lived very well, summing at inland watering resorts or at Long Branch and Cape May. Those who did not go out of town patronized Swaim's baths at Seventh and Sansom, an elegant establishment with forty-four baths and showers as well as a swimming pool for children. For ice cream there was no equal to Parkinson's, where one sat on sofas and dined off small marble tables. With its marble mosaic floor, its ceiling a glorious picture of the marriage of Jupiter and Juno

by Monachesi, Parkinson's represented refinement *par excellence*.¹²⁸

For bucolic pleasures, the drive to the Falls of Schuylkill was most picturesque, and the catfish and coffee to be had at the taverns there formed a favorite meal. Closer at hand, nature could be enjoyed at various botanical gardens and nurseries, such as Bartram's (run by Robert Carr), Daniel Maupay's, and the Landreths', which sold seeds and plants all over the country and also to Europe and South America.¹²⁹ In the city proper were the public squares. In 1825 the city Councils gave them names—Penn, Logan, Washington, Franklin, Rittenhouse, and Independence.¹³⁰ By 1837 when the cemetery on Franklin Square was obliterated, they had nearly all been extensively improved with walks and plantings. On Washington Square fifty varieties of trees flourished.¹³¹ Philadelphia's interest in flowers and shrubs was stimulated by the founding of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society in 1828 with Horace Binney as president.

The city offered a wide range of entertainment, the most rewarding of which was a visit to the new marble Museum Building, opened at Ninth and Sansom on July 4, 1838. After ten years at the Arcade, the Peale family collection was moved to this location, where could be seen some of the best exhibits in the country. Its "grand saloon," 233 feet long, 64 feet wide, and a towering 32 feet in height, was said to be the largest room in America. In its center stood the prodigious skeleton of Peale's mastodon. In one of its lower rooms was Nathan Dunn's Chinese Collection, which he had assembled during a long residence in Canton. Some seventy to eighty life-size figures in costumes from that of mandarin to coolie, Chinese rooms and shops, landscapes and portraits, ship models and numerous other objects illustrated the arts, manners, pleasures, and characteristics of the celestial race.¹³² A block from the museum, the Assembly Building offered the best facilities for balls and receptions. Its great hall, with its immense mirrors, rich pilasters, Corinthian capitals, and gilded moldings, was likened to Aladdin's palace.¹³³ Here Signor Antonio Blitz, one of the most popular entertainers of the time, performed with his trained birds, his sleight-of-hand and magical tricks, and his feats of ventriloquism.¹³⁴ And as for the theater, staid Philadelphians were surprised to note that in 1840 there were seven of them in nightly operation.¹³⁵

The glamor of the stage had its attractions for the city's men of letters. Dr. Robert Montgomery Bird, without doubt Philadelphia's ablest literary figure, created the role of Spartacus in *The Gladiator* for Forrest. In this part the famous thespian won ovations in New York, Philadelphia, and London. By 1853 this play had been performed a thousand times.¹³⁶ Another distinguished actor, Junius Brutus Booth, acted the principal role in *Sartorius*, a drama by David Paul Brown, one of the city's leading orators and criminal lawyers. Showing unusual modesty, Brown thought that it was not so remarkable that he "should have written two bad plays, but that he had been able to write any."¹³⁷ James Nelson Barker, collector of the Port of Philadelphia and former mayor, was yet another dramatist. In 1836 one of his plays was performed at the Arch Street Theatre.¹³⁸

For those not interested in the theater there was the field of sports to cultivate. Each year the United Bowmen celebrated their anniversary with a shoot attended by immense crowds. In white pantaloons, green caps, and frock coats trimmed with gold, the archers marched in ordered array from target to target, delivering their shafts with grace and precision to the music of Frank Johnson's band.¹³⁹ At Nicetown's Hunting Park, one of the leading tracks in the country in the 1830s, trotting races were all the rage. These races were under saddle, not sulky-drawn events. At Carlton, his Germantown estate, John C. Craig had his own racetrack and a large stud of race horses, whose portraits by Edward Troye hung on his walls.¹⁴⁰ Gen. Callender Irvine, a Philadelphian who seems to have preferred to race his horses at Saratoga, owned thirty-eight thoroughbreds at the time of his death in 1841.¹⁴¹ Probably the city's outstanding horseman was George Cadwalader, grandson of Gen. John Cadwalader who had presided over the Jockey Club during George Washington's visit to attend the races in 1773. In October 1840 a diarist who crossed the Delaware to see the races at the Camden track recorded that "A great crowd was there. Three horses ran 4 mile heats. . . . George Cadwalader was there in the most complete and stylish equipage I ever saw. A barouche and four superb dark brown horses. The celebrated Ned Forrest, the fastest trotter in the world, and a steed of matchless beauty, was one of the leaders. . . . I suppose no man in this country or elsewhere can turn out such a splendid team. He had two servants in livery with him."¹⁴²

A yachtsman and devotee of duck shooting, Cadwalader had a zest for all the good things in life and enjoyed the company of those similarly inclined. In 1834 he was a founder of Philadelphia's first city club in the modern sense, an organization appropriately named the Philadelphia Club. Sixteen years later the club moved into the Thomas Butler mansion at Walnut and Thirteenth Streets, where it remains to this day.¹⁴³

In the pursuit of business and pleasure Philadelphians did not overlook the promotion of worthy causes. While most leading citizens participated in such work, four men were outstanding: Bishop White, an Episcopalian, was remarkable, nothing ever keeping him from the ballot box or attendance at public meetings of a religious or philanthropic nature; Roberts Vaux, a Quaker, a leading promoter of public schools and abolitionism, was active in many charities;¹⁴⁴ Alexander Henry, a Presbyterian, was president of the American Sunday School Union, and an officer of most other benevolent organizations of note; and Mathew Carey, a Catholic, had closest at heart the welfare of the poor. The promotion of temperance attracted them all, while the more controversial Sabbatarian movement was led by Robert Ralston and Henry, whose followers pledged "to refrain from all secular employment on that day, from travelling in steam boats, stages, canal boats, or otherwise, except in cases of necessity or mercy." Attempts were made to persuade the packet lines operating between Philadelphia, New York, and Baltimore not to run on Sundays.¹⁴⁵

A more successful effort at moral improvement was that of Philadelphia reformers interested in penitentiaries. They championed the "Pennsylvania

System"—solitary confinement with labor—which was enacted into law in 1829 and was subsequently copied all over Europe. Cherry Hill, the Eastern State Penitentiary designed by Haviland, had large cells suitable for one-man workshops, and the cells were provided with high-walled exercise pens where individual prisoners could secure fresh air while remaining completely secluded. The theory was that solitary confinement prevented the prisoner from being contaminated by others and afforded the assurance that when he left prison he would at least be no worse than when he entered it. Solitude, forcing reflection, was considered a powerful moral medicine. Labor was necessary because it calmed the mind, made solitary confinement possible, and restored self-respect.¹⁴⁶

Another reform, akin to the above, dealt with the growing concern over the treatment of juvenile delinquents, who were miserably lodged in the jails and almshouses. New York had opened its House of Refuge for juvenile offenders in 1825, and Boston had followed in 1826. Under John Sergeant's leadership the Philadelphia House of Refuge was built at Fairmount Avenue and Fifteenth Street, and received its first inmates in 1828.¹⁴⁷

Yet another reform was the abolition of imprisonment for debt, just in time to render purposeless Walter's new Egyptian debtor's prison at Moyamensing. Of the 817 persons imprisoned for debt in Philadelphia between June 1829 and February 1830, it is of interest to note that 30 owed debts of less than one dollar; 233 owed between one and five dollars; only 98 owed more than \$100.¹⁴⁸

The benefactions of the period, which included Dr. Jonas Preston's bequest of the Preston Retreat, a lying-in charity for married women in indigent circumstances, and James Wills's bequest of the Wills Hospital "for the Indigent Blind and Lame," were overshadowed by Stephen Girard's action in leaving virtually all his estate to the city. The richest man in the country, Girard's property had a book value of more than \$6 million; its true value was beyond anyone's wildest imagination. The chief feature of his will was the creation of Girard College for "poor white male orphans."¹⁴⁹

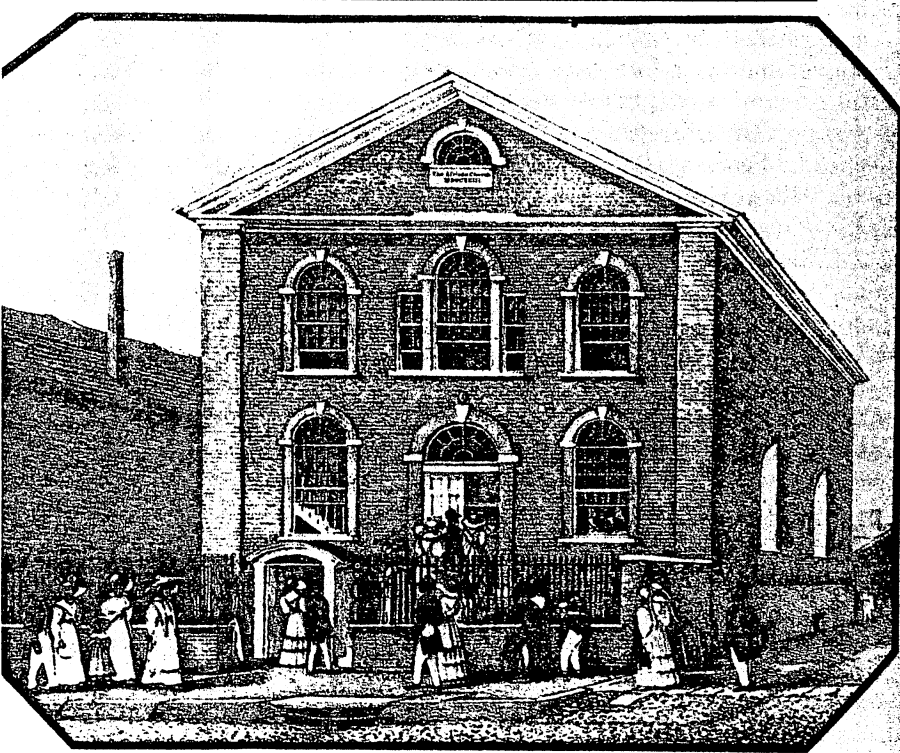
It is doubtful that the city's black population—about one Philadelphian out of twelve in 1830¹⁵⁰—was irritated by Girard's restriction of his college to whites. Segregation was the practice of the day. By coincidence the year of Girard's death, 1831, was the year that the first major effort was made by people of color in America for the improvement of their general condition. A "national convention" consisting of sixteen delegates from five states met in Philadelphia that June. Although not much was accomplished, the call for the meeting points up the fact that there was a growing black middle class in the city. It supported a Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons, various debating societies, lyceums and literary clubs, sixteen churches, and sixty-four benevolent organizations. James Cornish, Robert Purvis, and the Rev. William Douglass were among the leaders of the black community. Philadelphia black Protestantism grew rapidly, for blacks found religion the most congenial sphere in which to develop their talents.¹⁵¹

The feelings of the white laboring class were easily incensed against the

blacks. Negro competition in the labor market was resented, and the activities of abolitionists frequently infuriated the mob and led to race riots.¹⁵² It was an indication of the mood of the times that the Pennsylvania constitution of 1838, otherwise a Jacksonian document widening popular participation in state politics, deprived black men of the franchise which they had exercised under the constitution of 1790.

Although the mayor claimed with some reason that 99 percent of Philadelphia's citizens were opposed to abolition,¹⁵³ the city nevertheless maintained its Quaker-led priority in the antislavery movement. It was in Philadelphia that the American Anti-Slavery Society was founded in 1833, and the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society in 1837,¹⁵⁴ and it was there that John Greenleaf Whittier took over the editorship of the *Pennsylvania Freeman* the following year.

Although the crescendo of antislavery activity was directed solely toward

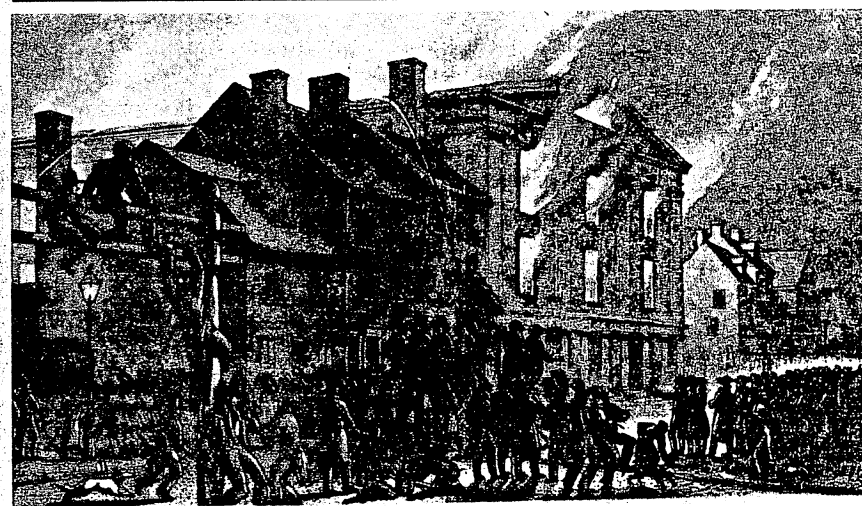


A Sunday Morning View of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas in Philadelphia—Taken in June 1829, lithograph by David Kennedy and William Lucas (act. 1829–1835) after W. L. Breton (c. 1773–1855). The church, on the west side of Fifth Street below Walnut, opened for services in 1794.

the good of the African race, it brought disastrous consequences to Philadelphia's Negro community in the 1830s and sadly worsened that community's position. Antislavery came to be regarded as subversive; any action taken against it seemed legal. Mobs saw themselves in the role of patriots defending the established order against enemy encroachments. The abolitionist movement was deemed by many a conspiracy against the nation fomented by British agents. The alternative to slavery was regarded as either race war or miscegenation, and the charge that abolitionists desired a mixture of races could always stir up the brutality of the mob. The reaction to the antislavery crusade was thus an upsurge of violence in America in the mid-1830s. It affected all parts of the country and became a feature of American life.¹⁵⁵

Those who bore the brunt of this disorder were the Negroes rather than the abolitionists. Turning public opinion against the blacks also was the rancor of the newly arrived Irish who found themselves competing with them for jobs. Attacks on Negroes by the Irish and others during the 1830s were distressingly frequent for a City of Brotherly Love.¹⁵⁶ Houses were burned, people were injured, several were killed in a series of race riots. In August 1835 rioters indulged themselves somewhat more picturesquely by emulating the Boston Tea Party. They seized a mass of antislavery pamphlets, took them to the middle of the Delaware River, and consigned them in small pieces to the water.¹⁵⁷

The most spectacular violence of the period occurred in May 1838, when the unpopular abolitionists, unable to secure meeting rooms, dedicated a large,



Frontispiece from *Pennsylvania Hall Association*, History of Pennsylvania Hall, which was Destroyed by a Mob, on the 17th of May, 1838 (Philadelphia: Merriew and Gunn, 1838).

handsome building of their own, Pennsylvania Hall, as a place where freedom of speech could be enjoyed. The Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women met there shortly after the hall was opened, and blacks and whites promenaded arm in arm. This was too much for the temper of the times. Inflamed beyond control, a mob burned the building to the ground. "Such is the force of public opinion when provoked!!!" approved the usually liberal Samuel Breck. "The abolitionist must be put down, or the Union of these states will be dissolved."¹⁵⁸ But the burning of Pennsylvania Hall only strengthened the antislavery cause. A reaction set in and the far more serious violence that was to mark Philadelphia's ensuing decade was to be directed at Irish Roman Catholics rather than at Negroes, a stroke, it might seem, of poetic justice.

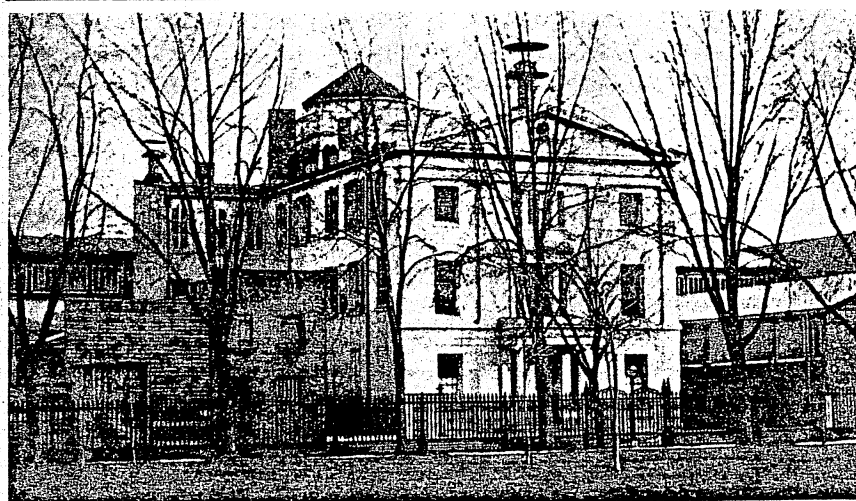
Much of the city's laboring class, its factory and dock workers, was composed of recent Irish immigrants, a factor that presented a massive challenge to the Roman Catholic bishop. He found himself faced with an urgent need for more priests and churches. The Diocese of Philadelphia in 1828 had only thirty-two priests, twenty-five of them of Irish birth. To train new ones, Bishop Francis Patrick Kenrick established the seminary of St. Charles Borromeo in 1832. The 1830s were a great church-building period for the Catholics. Wherever manufacturing interests had attracted many Irish a church was built—among them St. John's in Manayunk in 1831; St. Michael's in Kensington in 1834; for the coal-heavers, St. Patrick's on the east bank of the Schuylkill in 1839; and St. Philip de Neri in Southwark in 1840. Also to serve the constantly increasing Irish-Catholic population, Bishop Kenrick established St. Mary's Moyamensing Cemetery.¹⁵⁹

Probably the denomination most severely affected by the egalitarian impulse that characterized the Age of Jackson was the Society of Friends, which experienced in 1827 the Hicksite-Orthodox Separation, dividing it into two parts which have been reunited only in recent years. The causes for the separation were complex. In part it was a reaction against the wealthy, urban-dwelling businessmen who dominated the Philadelphia meetings, a struggle between aristocracy and democracy. The Hicksites, who took their name from Elias Hicks, were mainly traditionalists driven by a desire to preserve old ways of worship and to function under a weak central organization.¹⁶⁰ Whether Hicksite or Orthodox, the Quakers zealously adhered to the basic elements of their discipline. When Mrs. Roberts Vaux, for example, learned in 1838 that her son, a future mayor of Philadelphia but at the time a young attaché of the American legation in London, had danced with Queen Victoria at her coronation ball, the old lady remarked: "I hope my son Richard will not marry out of Meeting."¹⁶¹

Another influence in the Age of Jackson that disquieted religious circles was the rising controversy over slavery. The Unitarians were particularly affected by it. In 1825 William Henry Furness started his fifty-year career as the first full-time ordained minister of the city's small Unitarian congregation. His success was extraordinary. Three years after his installation the Unitari-

ans found it necessary to build a new church seating nearly three times the number accommodated by the former building. The serenity of Furness's congregation was severely jolted in 1839, however, when he became an ardent, tireless, and outspoken abolitionist. Many influential parishioners abandoned his church in protest.¹⁶²

Throughout these years agitation of a less alarming and more acceptable kind was directed toward the necessity of establishing a system of free public education. This was one of the goals promoted by William Heighton in the interest of labor. Another persistent advocate was Joseph R. Chandler, himself a former schoolteacher. Editorials in his *United States Gazette* consistently backed proposals that the necessary laws be passed. The man who spearheaded the drive for legislative action from 1818 to 1834 was the ubiquitous Roberts Vaux, head of the Philadelphia school system and president of the Pennsylvania Society for the Promotion of Public Schools. Thanks largely to Samuel Breck, a Philadelphia legislator, and to much favorable propaganda, the Pennsylvania Assembly passed the Free School Law of 1834, which, as amended in 1836, became the basis of a statewide system of tax-supported schools. Grade schools now replaced the primitive, monitorial Lancastrian system. The act of 1836 also authorized the establishment of Philadelphia's Central High School. The first in the country, Central High opened in 1838 on Juniper Street east of Penn Square, where its building was photographed a year later by Joseph Saxton. Alexander Dallas Bache served as its first principal.¹⁶³



Central High School, Juniper Street (photograph made c. 1854). Originally on the present site of John Wanamaker's Department Store, Central High School is now at Ogontz and Olney Avenues.

Professional life in Philadelphia went more even-tempered, or complacent, ways. In the second quarter of the century the city's bar, continuing its leadership in almost every facet of civic and cultural life, was brilliantly headed by William Rawle, Horace Binney, John Sergeant, Charles Chauncey, Joseph R. and Charles J. Ingersoll, and John M. Scott. When the bar assembled of a morning, the courtroom, thronged with elegantly dressed gentlemen of refined manners, more nearly resembled a drawing room.¹⁶⁴ Distinguished for learning, ability, and eloquence, these were men of high professional honor and moral worth. Many of them served a term or two in Congress.

Their versatility was well expressed in their historical interests. William Rawle, first president of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, contributed articles to its *Memoirs*. Charles J. Ingersoll found time to write a four-volume history of the War of 1812; his brother Joseph R. Ingersoll was the Historical Society's fifth president. From Binney's pen came *The Leaders of the Old Bar of Philadelphia* and countless pamphlets. "C. C." and "J. S.," the authors of a history of the French Revolution published in Philadelphia in 1830, are believed to be Charles Chauncey and John Sergeant. Sergeant's eminence in law and government is attested by his selection as the Whig vice-presidential candidate in 1832, and by the offers he received of a seat on the United States Supreme Court, a cabinet position, and the mission to England, all of which he declined.

The city's medical profession was no less eminent than its lawyers, for Philadelphia was still the most advanced medical center in America, with the oldest and largest medical schools, hospitals, and libraries.¹⁶⁵ Even after the death of the famous Dr. Physick, when his son-in-law Dr. Jacob Randolph became the leading surgeon, Philadelphia more than held its own. In fact with the establishment of Jefferson Medical College by Dr. George McClellan in 1825 the city strengthened its position. By 1841 Jefferson had an outstanding faculty, including such notable names as Robley Dunglison, Thomas D. Mütter, Charles D. Meigs, John K. Mitchell, and Franklin Bache.¹⁶⁶

In addition to the activities of its many distinguished practitioners, specialists, and professors in the medical schools, notable advances were made in hitherto neglected areas of medical science and rehabilitation. In 1833 Julius R. Friedlander, backed by John Vaughan and Roberts Vaux, founded Philadelphia's famous school for the blind, with Bishop White as its first president.¹⁶⁷ About the same time Dr. Thomas Kirkbride undertook his pioneer work in the treatment of mental diseases, which led to his becoming superintendent of the Pennsylvania Hospital's department for the insane, better known as "Kirkbride's." In another area of medicine Dr. Isaac Hays, a specialist in diseases of the eye and an outstanding surgeon, was from 1826 to 1869 the editor of the *American Journal of the Medical Sciences*, which had been founded under another name in 1820 by Dr. Nathaniel Chapman.¹⁶⁸ In publishing medical material, the city had early won an unequalled reputation, one that it has retained.

Unquestionably the most dramatic and terrible challenge faced by the

physicians of this time was the cholera epidemic of 1832. The disease had appeared in India on the banks of the Ganges in 1817 and started on its course around the world. In 1832 it reached Canada and then spread over the eastern part of the United States, arriving in Philadelphia in July. Carey and Lea, the country's leading publisher of medical books, promptly issued the *Cholera Gazette*, edited by Dr. Isaac Hays. This weekly publication informed the public of the progress of the disease and its treatment. With sixty to seventy people dying daily of the plague, Henry Carey wrote to James Fenimore Cooper: "The People now read only the Cholera Gazette."¹⁶⁹ Some 2314 cases of cholera and 985 deaths were reported by October when the pestilence disappeared. As a testimonial to the heroic role of the medical profession in battling the infection, the city Councils presented thirteen silver pitchers to the physicians who had been in charge of the hospitals, among whom were Nathaniel Chapman, John K. Mitchell, W. E. Horner, Charles D. Meigs, and Hugh L. Hodge.

Many literary journals made their appearance at this time, covering subjects of more cheerful note than that of the *Cholera Gazette*. In 1826 Samuel C. Atkinson started *The Casket*, a monthly magazine. Robert Walsh's serious *The American Quarterly Review* began its appearances the following year. Godey's *Lady's Book*, specializing in fashions, was brought out by Louis A. Godey in 1830. Among its contributors was Eliza Leslie, a prolific writer on subjects of interest to women. In 1836 she started her annual, *The Gift*, printing in its first issue Edgar Allan Poe's "MS Found in a Bottle." Subsequently she was editor of *Miss Leslie's Magazine*.

Poe came to Philadelphia, then the hub of the American publishing world, in 1837, and there he wrote many of his most famous stories and poems. In 1839 he became William E. Burton's assistant editor on *The Gentleman's Magazine*. This association was not entirely happy, and Poe hoped to edit a journal of his own, *The Penn Magazine*, but was unable to arouse sufficient interest.¹⁷⁰ Meanwhile George R. Graham had come on the scene, purchasing *The Casket* in 1839, and shortly after, *The Gentleman's Magazine*, merging the two in 1841 into the very successful *Graham's Magazine*.

Although Philadelphia failed to produce literary figures of lasting renown, she had in Henry Carey, Mathew's son, the leading political economist of the day. His three-volume *Principles of Political Economy* came out between 1837 and 1840. The want of literary genius did not discourage publishers, however. Under Henry Carey's leadership the publishing house of Carey and Lea dominated Philadelphia's and the nation's book trade. It was the publisher of James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving, active in the reprint trade of English authors, notably Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens, and dominant in the field of medical texts. When Henry Carey retired in 1838 the firm's great rival, Harper and Brothers, captured for New York preeminence in yet another field.¹⁷¹

Henry Carey had witnessed a revolution in the technique of printing. To begin with better presses were invented, and after 1825 the cylinder press

replaced the old flat-bed press. Within a few years steam power was adapted to its use. Other technological advances in typesetting and printing methods—most important, stereotype plates—and in papermaking made possible cheap, mass production of books and at the same time unleashed a flood of newsprint upon the community in the 1830s.¹⁷²

For news, Philadelphia continued to be served by more than a dozen papers, a fluid field with new papers being offered and mergers and sales removing old ones. In 1829 the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (first known as the *Pennsylvania Inquirer*) was launched as an organ dedicated to the principles of Andrew Jackson. It did not prosper and was soon acquired by Jesper Harding, a Bible publisher. Under Harding the *Inquirer* became a leading journal, broke with the Democrats, and assuming a tone of gentility, was deferential to commercial interests.¹⁷³

In 1839 the *North American* was established, a paper that was destined to become most influential. It promptly swallowed up Zachariah Poulson's *American Daily Advertiser*, the oldest daily in the country. Since 1800 Poulson's had been a favorite with Philadelphia conservatives, a safe-and-sound family paper. The famous old *United States Gazette*, a Philadelphia fixture since 1790, was also to be sold to the *North American* a few years later. Under the guidance of Joseph R. Chandler, the *Gazette* was considered an infallible authority by many readers throughout the 1830s, and evidenced a mild Whig character while paying studious attention to the interests of trade and commerce.

The sale of newspapers had been limited by their high prices, six cents for the better ones. But in the 1830s the new printing processes and cheaper paper made possible the penny paper. In 1833 Benjamin Day brought out the *New York Sun*, that city's first popular penny gazette. Two years later James Gordon Bennett, after an unsuccessful newspaper career in Philadelphia, created an even more successful penny paper in his *New York Herald*. Philadelphia's first penny journal was the *Public Ledger*, founded in 1836. It had a lurid appeal in its handling of police reports and other sensational matters, and it gained notoriety through libel suits. So well did it flourish that its proprietors established a similar paper in Maryland, the *Baltimore Sun*. William M. Swain, editor of the *Ledger*, shocked Philadelphia's staid newspaper world with his innovations. Rather than waiting for news to be delivered to his office, he sent reporters about town, a most undignified procedure. The few reporters employed by the city's papers used to meet once a day to pool information. The *Public Ledger* was the first to hire enough reporters to free itself of this exchange method and to insist on exclusive news coverage. It was the policy of this enterprising sheet, moreover, to route newsboys through the streets, soliciting sales; other papers either mailed their issues or decorously delivered them to subscribers' doorsteps. Before long the *Ledger* had the largest circulation in Pennsylvania.

In the stories carried by Philadelphia's newspapers it is possible to trace the public's growing awareness of the city's history, for in the early part of

the nineteenth century America began to identify its historical image. Historical societies were founded, sites were honored, documents preserved, historical writings published, and the historical theme found expression in orations, art, the theater, and literature.¹⁷⁴ The impulse that set this trend in action in Philadelphia had been Lafayette's visit in August 1824. Civic-minded citizens were pleased to recall the founding of the city. On October 24 they met in the Letitia House, a building then associated with William Penn, to commemorate the 142nd anniversary of his landing in 1682. Out of this dinner was born the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. "Our Penn Dinner has made a great stir, and is very popular," wrote the philanthropist Roberts Vaux to the antiquarian John Fanning Watson; "The Historical Soc'y will go on, and in short a new current of feeling seems to have set in."¹⁷⁵ The society was founded the next month with William Rawle, a leading member of the bar, as its first president. Rawle was succeeded in 1837 by the even more celebrated Peter S. Du Ponceau, another lawyer of note, a contributor to historical and linguistic literature, and president of the American Philosophical Society. Thus a good and enduring start was made and a worthy stream of publications soon attested to the society's program.

The attractions and importance of history in these years led Deborah Logan of Stenton to arrange and transcribe James Logan's correspondence. In 1827 a monument was erected near the site of the great elm at Kensington to commemorate Penn's treaty of 1682 with the Indians. Two years later, Thomas F. Gordon, a Philadelphia lawyer, published his history of Pennsylvania, and as already noted, in 1830 John Fanning Watson gave to the public the first history of Philadelphia.

Lafayette's visit also awakened interest in the State House (Independence Hall), which had hitherto been accorded little reverence. In 1828 the city Councils retained Strickland to restore its wooden steeple, taken down in 1781, and three years later John Haviland was commissioned to convert its Assembly room, where the Declaration had been signed, "to its ancient form."¹⁷⁶

The collector was early on the scene. In John McAllister, Jr., an antiquarian who retired from business in 1835 to devote the rest of his long life to gathering materials on the history of Philadelphia, the city rejoiced in the most perceptive of scavengers who preserved significant records which would otherwise have been lost. And in David J. Kennedy, a skilled amateur artist who came to Philadelphia in 1836, the city gained a historically interested person who would record the appearance of its old buildings in hundreds of sketches.¹⁷⁷

The contributions of these talented, historically interested people were overshadowed, however, by the city's most dynamic and dramatic issue, the future of the Bank of the United States.

XIII

When Nicholas Biddle became president of the bank it was his ambition to give the country better "notes" than it had ever seen before. Aside from

the bank's own paper money, that in use was issued by state-chartered banks. There was always the tendency for them to overissue, and from this and other causes their notes had circulated at a discount. In return for a bonus paid for its charter and the services it rendered to the government without charge—the transfer of public money from place to place, the payment of the public debt, of pensions, of salaries for the civil list, the army, and the navy—the bank was made the depository of the public funds. These funds arose principally from taxes paid by importers to customs collectors and were largely in the form of state-bank notes. With these notes in hand the Bank of the United States was a creditor of the state banks, and by presenting their notes for payment could regulate their activities and keep them from lending too much, thereby preventing the depreciation of their paper money.¹⁷⁸

Not only did the bank, the largest corporation in the nation, enforce a uniform standard of currency; it had eased financial crises and prevented others by the expansion or contraction of its credit facilities. By 1828 there was virtually no criticism heard of its operations. Relations with the bank's largest stockholder, the federal government, were excellent at the close of John Quincy Adams's administration. Secretary of the Treasury Richard Rush termed the institution "an indispensable and permanent adjunct to our political and fiscal system." That the new president, Andrew Jackson, did not harbor such friendly notions was no secret, but Biddle was sure that experience would convince him otherwise.¹⁷⁹ As far as party ideologies were concerned there was not as yet any question over the bank. Biddle himself had voted for Jackson in 1824 and again in 1828; many of his closest advisers, notably Gen. Thomas Cadwalader, were strong Jackson men.

Dissuaded from coming out against the bank in his inaugural address, Jackson raised the question of the bank's recharter in his first annual message to Congress. "Both the constitutionality and the expedience of the law creating the bank are well questioned," he averred, "by a large portion of our fellow-citizens, and it must be admitted that it has failed in the great end of establishing a sound and uniform currency." The currency Jackson wanted was one of hard money. Biddle, on the contrary, believed that a paper currency was the only practical medium of exchange; the country had never had such a currency as Jackson wanted, and it never would have. The parts of Jackson's message relating to the bank were referred to the appropriate committees of the Senate and the House, both of which reported in favor of the bank and its usefulness to the community. The statement from the House controverted the president's reasoning at every point, declaring, as had the Supreme Court, that the bank was constitutional. Moreover, it was highly expedient, and had "actually furnished a circulating medium more uniform than specie."¹⁸⁰

Jackson's views were not yet party policy. Like many other Democratic leaders, Charles J. Ingersoll disapproved the president's financial theories. In 1831 Ingersoll urged the recharter of the bank in the Democratically controlled Pennsylvania legislature. Resolutions to this effect passed its Senate by a

unanimous vote and its lower house by seventy-five to eleven. Despite the overwhelming proportions of these votes the *Globe*, spokesman for the administration in Washington, announced that the bank had purchased the passage of the resolutions by bribery. Ingersoll and his associates branded the accusation "an unfounded and atrocious libel."¹⁸¹

In December 1831 Secretary of the Treasury Louis McLane reported in favor of rechartering the bank. That same month the National Republican party, running Henry Clay for president and John Sergeant for vice-president, adopted the recharter of the bank as one of its goals. Cadwalader, after consultation with leaders of both parties, urged Biddle to apply immediately for recharter; there seemed little to be gained by postponing this increasingly agitated question. Accordingly, in January 1832 George Mifflin Dallas, Democratic senator from Pennsylvania, son of the man who had proposed the bank, long a counsel for it, and recently a director, presented Biddle's memorial for a renewal of the charter. Neither Biddle nor Cadwalader thought the application would have the slightest effect on the president's reelection, which they regarded as certain. Thus Biddle professed not to consider the application in an election year as politically motivated. To Ingersoll he wrote: "You know I care nothing about the election. I care only for the interests confided to my care."¹⁸²

The recharter bill passed Congress. But Jackson, having urged the people to take into consideration the recharter of the bank, now that they had done so through their constituted representatives vetoed their decision. His veto message's strength rested in its appeal to the poor against the rich, the West against the East, democracy against privilege.¹⁸³ Questioning the very solvency of the bank, Jackson directed the secretary of the treasury to find out whether the public deposits could be considered safe. The Treasury's investigation was undertaken by a Democratic politician who found that there was no question as to the security of the deposits or the solvency of the bank. A congressional investigating committee endorsed this opinion: "there can be no doubt of the entire soundness of the whole Bank capital."¹⁸⁴

The result of Jackson's veto was the worst possible for the bank, for it made the bank the central issue of the presidential election of 1832, a contest of extraordinary bitterness. Biddle was soon in the thick of it, getting up speeches and arguments for the bank and having them printed and distributed to defend the bank against the heavy attacks being made on it. The administration considered his activities as electioneering against Jackson. Perhaps it is impossible to separate the two, and there has been much criticism of Biddle's throwing the bank into politics. However, few leading men in Philadelphia opposed his activities, and while the defection of such Democrats as George Mifflin Dallas, Charles J. Ingersoll, and Richard Rush brought them political favor, it resulted in their social ostracism at home where an overwhelmingly anti-Jackson vote was registered.¹⁸⁵

Obsessed by the idea that the bank was a hydra-headed engine of corruption, Jackson viewed his reelection as a mandate to destroy the "monster,"

which, in his message to Congress in December 1832, he announced was insolvent.¹⁸⁶ Disappointed by the results of all the investigations of the bank, he convoked a meeting of New York bankers to obtain their opinion on the removal of the deposits. Again he was disappointed. They urged him not to do it and repeated advice that he had heard before—removal of the deposits would bring on a financial crisis.¹⁸⁷ Opposed by his secretary of the treasury, he promoted McLane to be secretary of state, replacing him with William J. Duane, a known opponent of recharter from Philadelphia. When Duane refused to obey Jackson's request that he remove the deposits, Jackson dismissed him. Believing that unless the bank was broken it would break his administration, and that the removal of the deposits was "necessary to preserve the morals of the people, the freedom of the press, and the purity of the elective franchise," Jackson appointed Roger B. Taney secretary of the treasury, and the removal of the deposits was ordered, effective October 1, 1833.¹⁸⁸

The government pledged that funds deposited in the bank would be withdrawn gradually as needed and that no funds would be transferred to state-bank depositories. Partially through the clumsiness of Taney, this pledge was immediately violated, and unannounced drafts totaling more than \$2 million began to be presented for instant payment.¹⁸⁹ Faced with the necessity of reducing loans because of the forthcoming loss of the deposits and the closing of the bank itself in 1836, Biddle now feared that Jackson was actually trying to make good his threat to break the bank. There were runs on branches of the bank, as at Savannah, where at the height of a run a government paymaster from Charleston appeared with a Treasury draft to be paid for in specie, refusing to explain why he did not cash it in his own city. Such incidents convinced Biddle that the runs were politically inspired, and indeed such actions had been openly discussed by leaders of the administration.¹⁹⁰ Accordingly, for the safety of the bank Biddle ordered more drastic reductions in credit than would normally have been necessary.

Jackson at first refused to recognize the financial crisis that ensued, and of which he had been warned. But the distress was real, and the petitions that poured in on him from all over to restore the deposits to the bank and thus right the country's economy did nothing to soothe his temper. At length, when it became undeniable that he had placed the safety of the bank beyond Jackson's ability to destroy it, Biddle ordered an easing of credit restrictions and the crisis passed. His action liberalizing loan policy aroused the stern displeasure of many of his friends, including Horace Binney, who declared that Biddle's action was "a complete reversal of the Bank's policy and an abandonment of its only practical weapon of defense against the administration."¹⁹¹

The excitement in Philadelphia over the War on the Bank, or as Jackson would put it, the Bank's War on the People, was intense, and throughout the remainder of Jackson's administration the great majority of the city's voters were solidly against Old Hickory. The withdrawal of the deposits was protested as "executive usurpation," and numerous rallies were held during the

financial crisis by every sort of trade and organization demanding the return of the deposits. In March 1834 the largest of these gatherings, 50,000 people, assembled at Independence Square. One of the memorials praying for the return of the deposits bore 10,259 signatures.¹⁹²

Biddle proceeded to wind up the bank's affairs and close its branches. At this time, he and the bank stood high in the esteem of the commercial world. "In all the proceedings of this institution," wrote a business commentator, "a calm dignity, a moderation of temper, and a regard to the interests of the country are observable, which contrasts admirably with the perturbed and ferocious spirit that seems to animate its persecutors."¹⁹³ At their final meeting the stockholders expressed their entire approbation for the way the bank was run during its last seven years, during which period "the institution has been exposed to both persecution and obloquy, which the public investigation of its transactions, and their undeniable benefit to the nation have enabled them to know were unmerited and unjust."¹⁹⁴

The failure of the bank five years later lent credence to Jackson's sagacity in having attacked the "monster," and made history's verdict appear that he was right and Biddle wrong. But it should be borne in mind that throughout the period of Jackson's presidency the bank was unquestionably solvent. Its subsequent troubles did not stem from its operations as the national bank.

When Jackson removed the deposits he made it impossible for Biddle to regulate the extension of credit by private banks, and this did much to make the Jacksonian inflation one of the worst in American history. During Jackson's presidency the number of banks in the country increased by 140 percent. Unfettered by control, they fostered a whirlwind of speculation that ended in panic, bankruptcy, and a long depression.¹⁹⁵

The most notable victim of these disasters was the Bank of the United States, operating after the loss of its federal charter under a charter granted by Pennsylvania. According to the most recent study of this bank, it was "strong, solvent, and liquid" when forced to suspend specie payments in 1837 because of the general paralysis of bank credit occasioned by Jackson's Specie Circular of 1836.¹⁹⁶ Seeking to encourage the hard-money economy so dear to his heart, Jackson had ordered payment for government land to be made only in gold or silver. As a result specie was drained from the great commercial centers of the East, where it was most needed, to the frontier, where it was least needed. Two months after Jackson left office, every bank in the nation suspended specie payments.

In 1838 the Philadelphia banks, following the example set by New York, resumed, and with affairs looking reasonably prosperous, Biddle felt free to resign from the Bank of the United States the following March. Six months later the bank suspended again, as did all the other banks in Pennsylvania, the South, and most of the West. Forced by the legislature to resume in January 1841, it encountered staggering runs on its specie and was soon obliged to close its doors for a final time. In the ensuing panic the city's next two largest banks failed, as did four lesser ones.

The reason for the bank's failure lay in policies that caused its assets to become illiquid and the safety of the bank itself to be tied to the debtor sections of the nation, the South and West. Ever anxious to promote improvement programs, Biddle had subscribed heavily to state bond issues. Anxious to help the southern banks resume in 1838, he had come to their aid. The bank's portfolio, the largest in the country, filled up with state obligations and stocks of all sorts. When the boom ran out, the states, including Pennsylvania, stopped paying interest on their bonds, prices fell, and the bank could not convert its rapidly depreciating assets into liquid funds.

Philadelphia was profoundly shocked by the failure of the Bank of the United States and the disclosures of corruption in other banks. The Schuylkill Bank was ruined by its cashier and the Western Bank was compromised by one of its officers; the president of a local railroad sold its stock by the simple process of filling in blank shares and pocketing the money. In an atmosphere of bitter recrimination, criminal charges were lodged by stockholders against Biddle, but they were later dismissed as without foundation. "It is due to truth to say that his private and personal character has never, to my knowledge, been successfully impeached," observed Martin Van Buren.¹⁹⁷

Industrial Development and Social Crisis 1841-1854

by Elizabeth M. Geffen

Day after day in their personal visits did they breathe the pestiferous atmosphere of some degraded or illy-ventilated purlieus, where extremes of filth and misery and loathsome disease met the eye. . . .

— Report of the Sanitary Committee of the Board of Health, 1848

This is the fatal evil of Philadelphia—that the riotous and disorderly are convinced of the lukewarmness and timidity of the respectable part of society, and so they take full swing upon every occasion that arises.

— WILLIAM H. FURNESS

How . . . am I able to communicate a just notion of the intelligence, the refinement, the enterprise of Philadelphians—their agreeable and hospitable society, their pleasant evening-parties, their love of literature, their happy blending of the industrial habits of the north with the social usages of the south?

— WILLIAM CHAMBERS¹

Between 1841 and 1854 Philadelphia came to terms with the industrial revolution. The cost was high and the rewards unevenly distributed. No one enjoyed the increasing noise and congestion of the city's streets, the degeneration of neighborhoods into slums. Workers—men, women, and children—newly regimented to the harsh discipline of factories, smarting under the demeaning impersonality of the emerging corporate order, experienced new anxieties. A new moneyed class, sometimes ill-mannered, challenged the old aristocracy for positions of power and won them with increasing frequency.

Contradictory and paradoxical readings of the significance of events destroyed consensus. Some Philadelphians deplored an apparent decline in public taste, while others rejoiced in the upward surge of the "common man." Some profited from novel opportunities for making great fortunes; others found themselves for the first time ground down into a poverty from which there was no escape. The period was marked by unprecedented civic violence, arising from many causes: an explosive increase in population; a complex and

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