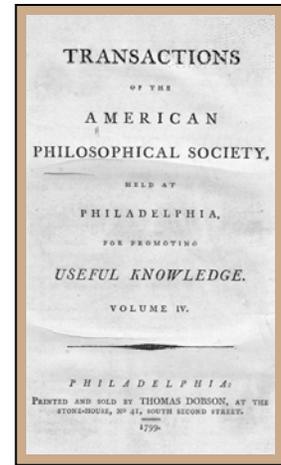




_____ Benjamin Franklin _____

A PROPOSAL
 for Promoting
USEFUL KNOWLEDGE
 among the British Plantations in America

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 1743



In 1743, sixteen years after he had formed the Junto in Philadelphia for weekly meetings of learned conversation, and twelve years after instituting the first lending library in the colonies. Benjamin Franklin envisioned a colonies-wide society for the discussion and promotion of science, modelled after the Royal Society of London. To announce his plan, he published a broadside in 1743 titled *A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge among the British Plantations in America*. With the colonies well established and over a century old, Franklin began, there was greater opportunity for scientific pursuit and technological innovation. But without a mechanism for communicating new ideas and discoveries, they “die with the Discoverers and are lost to Mankind.” From Franklin’s impetus came the American Philosophical Society, which exists to this day. (Five years after *Proposal*, Franklin spurred another society of learning — the College of Philadelphia, later the University of Pennsylvania. It is evident that no colonial American did more to “promote useful knowledge” than Benjamin Franklin.)

The *English* are possess’d of a long Tract of Continent, from Nova Scotia to *Georgia*, extending North and South thro’ different Climates, having different Soils, producing different Plants, Mines and Minerals, and capable of different Improvements, Manufactures, &c.

The first Drudgery of Settling new Colonies, which confines the Attention of People to mere Necessaries, is now pretty well over; and there are many in every Province [colony] in Circumstances that set them at Ease, and afford Leisure to cultivate the finer Arts and improve the common Stock of Knowledge. To such of these who are Men of Speculation, many Hints must from time to time arise, many Observations occur, which if well-examined, pursued and improved, might produce Discoveries to the Advantage of some or all of the British Plantations, or to the Benefit of Mankind in general.

But as from the Extent of the Country, such Persons are widely separated, and seldom can see and converse or be acquainted with each other, so that many useful Particulars remain uncommunicated, die with the Discoverers, and are lost to Mankind. It is, to remedy this Inconvenience for the future, proposed,

THAT One Society be formed of Virtuosi or ingenious Men residing in the several Colonies, to be called *The American Philosophical Society*, who are to maintain a constant Correspondence.

THAT *Philadelphia* being the City nearest the Centre of the Continent-Colonies, communicating with all of them northward and southward by Post, and with all the Islands by Sea, and having the Advantage of a good growing Library, be the Centre of the Society.

THAT at *Philadelphia* there be always at least seven Members, viz. [namely] a Physician, a Botanist, a Mathematician, a Chemist, a Mechanician, a Geographer, and a general Natural Philosopher [scientist], besides a President, Treasurer and Secretary.

National Humanities Center, 2009: nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/. Oil portrait of Franklin in his late thirties by Robert Feke, ca. 1748-1746 (detail); reproduced by permission of the Harvard University Art Gallery. Title page of *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 4 (1799), courtesy of the University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Research Center; accessed through the Library of Congress, The Thomas Jefferson Papers Online. Some spelling and punctuation modernized by NHC for clarity. Formatting in this document does not represent that of the original broadside. Complete image credits at nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/imagecredits.htm.

THAT these Members meet once a Month, or oftener, at their own Expence, to communicate to each other their Observations, Experiments, &c. [etc.], to receive, read and consider such Letters, Communications, or Queries as shall be sent from distant Members; to direct the Dispersing of Copies of such Communications as are valuable to other distant Members in order to procure their Sentiments thereupon, &c.

THAT the Subjects of the Correspondence be:

- All new-discovered Plants, Herbs, Trees, Roots, &c. their Virtues, Uses, &c.
- Methods of Propagating them, and making such as are useful but particular to some Plantations [colonies] more general.
- Improvements of vegetable Juices, as Ciders, Wines, &c.
- New Methods of Curing or Preventing Diseases.
- All new-discovered Fossils in different Countries, as Mines, Minerals, Quarries, &c.
- New and useful Improvements in any Branch of Mathematicks.
- New Discoveries in Chemistry, such as Improvements in Distillation, Brewing, Assaying of Ores, &c.
- New Mechanical Inventions for saving Labour; as Mills, Carriages, &c. and for Raising and Conveying of Water, Draining of Meadows, &c.
- All new Arts, Trades, Manufactures, &c. that may be proposed or thought of.
- Surveys, Maps and Charts of particular Parts of the Sea-coasts, or Inland Countries; Course and Junction of Rivers and great Roads, Situation of Lakes and Mountains, Nature of the Soil and Productions, &c.
- New Methods of Improving the Breed of useful Animals; Introducing other Sorts from foreign Countries.
- New Improvements in Planting, Gardening, Clearing Land, &c.
- And all philosophical Experiments that let Light into the Nature of Things, tend to increase the Power of Man over Matter, and multiply the Conveniencies or Pleasures of Life.

THAT a Correspondence already begun by some intended Members, shall be kept up by this Society with the ROYAL SOCIETY of *London*, and with the DUBLIN SOCIETY.

THAT every Member shall have Abstracts sent him Quarterly of every Thing valuable communicated to the Society's Secretary at *Philadelphia*; free of all Charge except the Yearly Payment hereafter mentioned.

THAT by Permission of the Postmaster-General, such Communications pass between the Secretary of the Society and the Members, Postage-free.

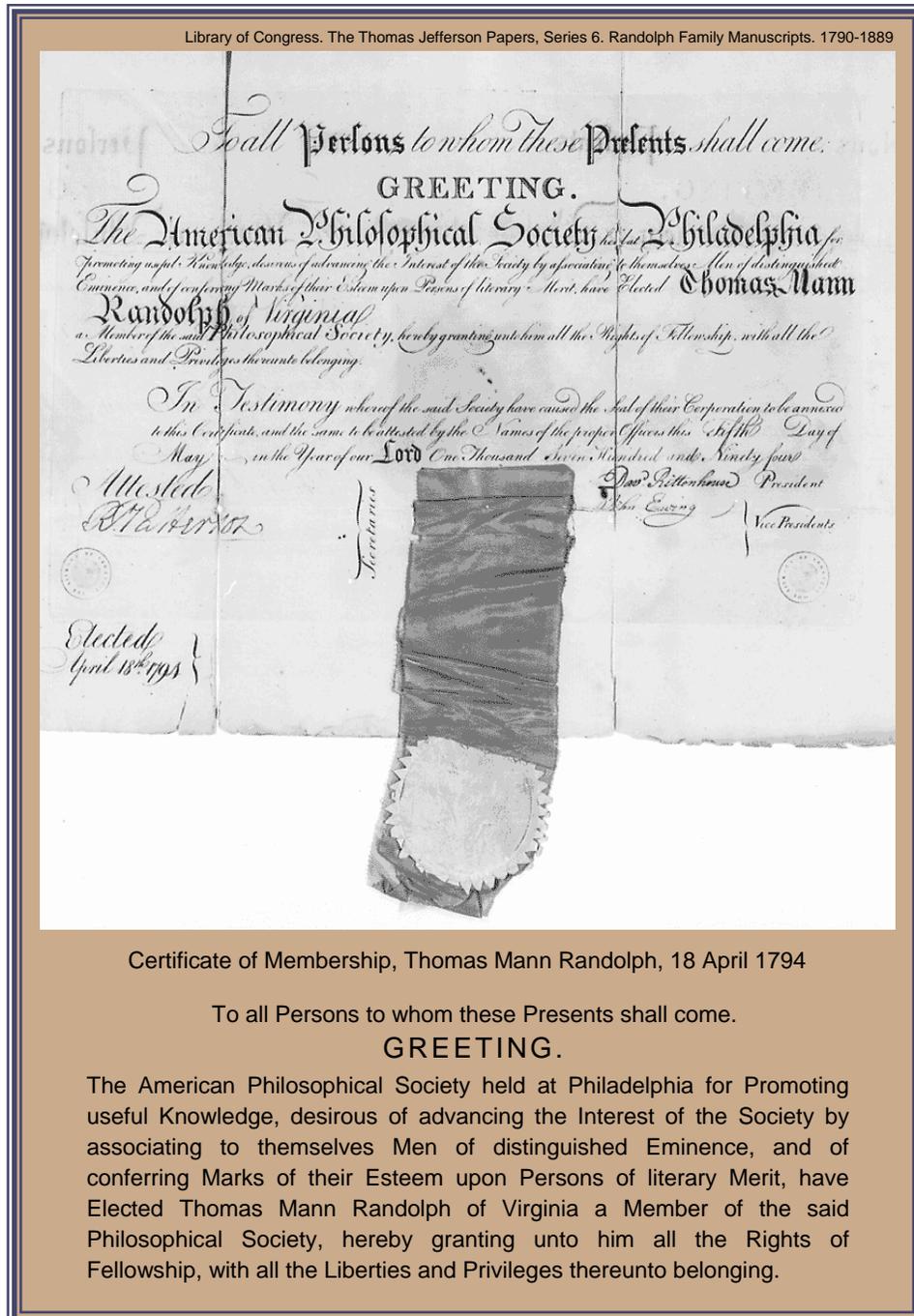
THAT for defraying the Expence of such Experiments as the Society shall judge proper to cause to be made, and other contingent Charges for the common Good, every Member send a Piece of Eight *per Annum* to the Treasurer, at *Philadelphia*, to form a Common Stock, to be disburs'd by Order of the President with the Consent of the Majority of the Members that can conveniently be consulted thereupon, to such Persons and Places where and by whom the Experiments are to be made, and otherwise as there shall be Occasion; of which Disbursements an exact Account shall be kept, and communicated yearly to every Member.

THAT at the first Meetings of the Members at *Philadelphia*, such Rules be formed for Regulating their Meetings and Transactions for the General Benefit, as shall be convenient and necessary; to be afterwards changed and improv'd as there shall be Occasion, wherein due Regard is to be had to the Advice of distant Members.

THAT at the End of every Year, Collections be made and printed of such Experiments, Discoveries, Improvements, &c. as may be thought of publick Advantage: And that every Member have a Copy sent him.

THAT the Business and Duty of the Secretary be, To receive all Letters intended for the Society and lay them before the President and Members at their Meetings; to abstract, correct and methodize such Papers, &c. as require it, and as he shall be directed to do by the President, after they have been considered, debated and digested in the Society; to enter Copies thereof in the Society's Books, and make out Copies for distant Members; to answer their Letters by Direction of the President, and keep Records of all material Transactions of the Society, &c.

Benjamin Franklin, the Writer of this Proposal, offers himself to serve the Society as their Secretary, 'till they shall be provided with one more capable.



Certificate of Membership, Thomas Mann Randolph, 18 April 1794

To all Persons to whom these Presents shall come.

GREETING.

The American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia for Promoting useful Knowledge, desirous of advancing the Interest of the Society by associating to themselves Men of distinguished Eminence, and of conferring Marks of their Esteem upon Persons of literary Merit, have Elected Thomas Mann Randolph of Virginia a Member of the said Philosophical Society, hereby granting unto him all the Rights of Fellowship, with all the Liberties and Privileges thereunto belonging.