



New York Public Library



W. H. Toms, *To his excellency James Glen Esq.. . . this prospect of Charles Town is most humbly inscrib'd*, etching, 1739

The Rules and By-laws of the Charlestown Library Society

*Together with the Act of the General Assembly of South-Carolina for Incorporating the Society,
confirmed by His Majesty: and a brief Historical Introduction.*

1762

The Charlestown Library Society was organized in 1748 by seventeen prominent young men of the town, including merchants, lawyers, and planters, who pooled funds to purchase new books and pamphlets from England for a lending library.¹ The society grew to about 150 members by 1750, and in 1762, it published its rules and bylaws as part of its successful request for a charter from the British Crown. The introduction to its request is presented here.

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—*Et artes trans mare currunt.*²

The advantages arising to mankind from learning are so evident that all civilized societies, both ancient and modern, have ever given the greatest encouragement to the promotion of it, and ever held it in the highest veneration and esteem. As this is not to be acquired but by a liberal education, together with the use of valuable books, the Charlestown Library Society, having both these points in view, must appear in a very favourable light to all who have the least degree of generous regard for the welfare and happiness of posterity.

Although any attempt to enumerate or recommend the benefits of education may appear superfluous, yet the following most obvious contrast cannot fail to make the strongest impressions in favour of our undertaking: Let any person of the Indian-inhabitants of this extensive continent, and it will be impossible for him to resist, without very mortifying sentiments, how little human nature uncultivated differs from

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¹The original seventeen members and their occupations: Alexander Baron, schoolmaster from Scotland; Morton Brailsford, merchant; Samuel Brailsford, merchant; Robert Brisbane, merchant; John Cooper, merchant and distiller; James Grindlay, lawyer; William Logan, merchant; Alexander McCauley, peruke (wig) maker; Dr. Patrick McKie, physician; Thomas Middleton, planter; John Neufville, merchant; Thomas Sacheverell, planter; John Sinclair, merchant; Charles Stevenson, merchant; Peter Timothy, printer; Joseph Wragg, merchant; Samuel Wragg, merchant.

[Anne King Gregorie, "The First Decade of the Charleston Library Society," *South Carolina Historical Association* 61 (1935), pp: 5-6] South Carolina Library History Project, University of South Carolina, at www.libsci.sc.edu/histories/private/cls09.html.

² "And the arts run across the sea." [Latin]

the brute. On the other hand, with what exalted pleasure will he contemplate the splendid figure which Great Britain, the admiration and envy of the world, at present makes when compared with its rude and savage state in the days of Julius Caesar? And who, without the most melancholy reflections, can cast his eye on the ancient state of Babylon, Egypt and Greece, those feats of empire, those fountains of learning and nurses of arts and sciences, and from thence turn to their present miserable condition, opprest with slavery, their learning extinct, their arts banished by a successive inundation of barbarians?

As the gross ignorance of the naked Indian must raise our pity, and his savage disposition our horror and detestation, it is our duty as men, our interest as members of a community, to take

“it is our duty as men, our interest as members of a community, to take every step, pursue every method in our power, to prevent our descendants from sinking into a similar situation.”

every step, pursue every method in our power, to prevent our descendants from sinking into a similar situation. To obviate this possible evil, and to obtain the desirable end of handing down the European arts and manners to the latest times, is the great aim of the members of this Society, who are ambitious of approving themselves worthy of their mother country, by imitating her humanity, as well as her industry, and by transporting from her the improvements in the finer as well as in the inferiour arts. Desirous therefore that this laudable ambition may be as extensive as the province, they invite every lover of his country, every well-wisher to posterity, to join with them in promoting the good purposes intended by this Society, of which the following is a brief account.

In the year 1748, some young gentlemen, by contribution among themselves, imported a few books and pamphlets, chiefly for amusement. From this small beginning they soon perceived the great advantages their scheme might be of, if prosecuted with spirit and enlarged in its plan, to which finding themselves unequal, they proposed to supply the defect by inviting others to associate with them. They were soon joined by many lovers and encouragers of science, a publick library was projected, which met with great applause, and was countenanced by the first people of the place, who became members of the infant Society, extended its plan to the endowing an academy to encourage men of literature to reside among us and institute youth in the several branches of liberal education.

In the year 1754, application was made to the legislature for a charter of incorporation, and an act was passed for that purpose, which was not to have effect until it received his Majesty’s approbation.

This act being sent to England for the Royal Assent, was, by the care and diligence of James Crockatt, Esq., merchant in London and then Agent for this province, ratified and confirmed by the Lords Justices in Council, the 24th of June, 1755, his Majesty being at that time out of the kingdom; and here let it be gratefully remembered, that Mr. Crockatt very generously declined receiving any consideration from the Society for all the trouble and expence he was at in getting this matter transacted. The instrument of royal confirmation, however, unfortunately did not arrive here till upwards of eighteen months afterwards, having been lost by the Blandford man from England. This disappointment was attended with consequences almost fatal to the Society; the rules having as yet no legal sanction were but indifferently complied with; the weekly contributions were not always regularly paid up; books were often kept from the library beyond the time limited; the spirit of the Society flagged and was on the very brink of dissolution, when it received new life from the arrival of an exemplification of that instrument, which his Excellency Governour Lyttleton ordered immediately to be published. This gentleman soon after did honour to the Society by becoming a member thereof, and on the next anniversary meeting was unanimously elected President. Under his protection and patronage the rules were revised, ratified and duly observed; and the Society became established on a firm and respectable footing.

On Mr. Lyttleton’s departure from this province, the Hon[orable]. Lieutenant-Governour Bull was chosen and still continues President, who happily maintains the spirit raised in the Society by his worthy predecessor.
