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ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY/ BUILDING AN ECONOMY

Beginnings to 1800

F ROM ITS FIRST SETTLEMENT IN 1682 to the end of the eighteenth cen-
tury, Philadelphia, and the world around it, changed in profound ways.
In the first decade the town was a ramshackle settlement resting precari-
ously on the edge of a vast continent, offering a haven for persecuted English
Quakers. By 1750 it was among the largest towns in the British Empire with
a port that handled goods from all over the Atlantic basin and attracted
thousands of European immigrants. By 1790, with more than forty thousand
residents, Philadelphia was the capital city, banking hub, and manufacturing
center of a new nation. The settlement patterns, economic functions, civic
institutions, and social relationships established in the city's first decades
shaped Philadelphia for the next three hundred years.

Economic and Civic Foundations

King Charles II despised Quakers. Their religion challenged the Church of
England and their rejection of hierarchy threatened civil order. Persecution in
the 1670s had failed to quiet them. But one of their leading spokesmen, Wil-
liam Penn, was well-connected at Court, and the king owed a large debt to
Penn's father, who had helped restore Charles to the throne. In the New World
the king saw an opportunity to solve two problems at once. In March 1681,
to discharge his debt to the family and get rid of the pesky Quakers, he granted
Penn a charter to establish a new colony, Pennsylvania (Penn's Woods). Penn-
sylvania was thus established as a proprietorship that gave Penn and his de-

scendants wide powers to govern the colony. Penn sought to create a model community and a profit-making enterprise, dual purposes that sometimes clashed in the new town established as the hub for his experiment.[1]

At the time, the Delaware Valley was a dense forest with rich soil, great mineral wealth, and favorable growing conditions, but it was not a wilderness. Native people, who called themselves Lenape, had occupied the lower Delaware Valley for untold centuries. In 1600, they lived in small settlements scattered throughout the region where they farmed corn, squash, and beans, hunted game in the forests, and fished in the streams and rivers. They lacked a centralized organization, but village leaders, known as sachems, cooperated with one another. About nine thousand Lenape lived across the region before the arrival of Europeans. By 1681, much diminished by disease, they resided mostly in southern New Jersey. We find their most visible reminder in such place names as Manayunk, Moyamensing, Passyunk, and Shackamaxon.

The distinct attributes of Lenape society and the interactions of the Lenape with the European settlers who drifted into the region between 1615 and 1681 helped to shape Pennsylvania. The native people and the Europeans, mostly from Sweden, Finland, England, and the Netherlands, developed a society of mutual respect, shared use of the land, and peaceful settlement of differences. Their relationship was primarily pragmatic: both sides gained from mutual trade. In 1681, about fifty European families lived within the boundaries of the future Philadelphia, with small clusters at Cobbs Creek, at the mouth of the Schuylkill River, and at Kingsessing, and some Europeans intermarried with the Lenape. The Lenape's peaceful outlook and willingness to sell land to settlers meant that Pennsylvania was the only major colony founded with no threat by Native Americans. It also meant the Quakers could maintain their pacifist ideals and devote resources to private pursuits rather than military defense.[2]

Following Penn's detailed instructions, which laid bare his concern for the commercial aspects of the venture, his agents sited the town at the confluence of two major rivers, the Delaware and the Schuylkill, which would become highways to the interior. An embankment near the Delaware led down to a sandy beach suitable for building wharves out into the water. Numerous creeks ran toward each river, one of which, Dock Creek, fed a small cove off the Delaware that would provide a protected harbor for small craft.

Penn knew that capital and settlers were essential for a successful venture. To attract both, he guaranteed religious toleration—at least for Protestants—and promised limited representative government. Quakers had suffered considerable persecution in Restoration England and had learned from bitter experience that religious freedom and property rights were inextricably

linked. If people were not free in their possessions because of their beliefs, then they had no freedom of conscience. Penn therefore wrote basic protections of property and trial by jury into his Frame of Government. He named the principal town Philadelphia, meaning "one who loves his brother." He took the name from an important Greek trading center of the late Hellenic period that was also the location of an early Christian church to which Saint John the Divine addressed a message in the Book of Revelations. Thus the name evoked three potent images: brotherhood, a prosperous port, and Christianity.

Philadelphia began with a town plan. Penn laid out a grid of streets running a mile along the Delaware River waterfront from Vine to South Street and two miles west to the Schuylkill River, for a total of twelve hundred acres. Two wide streets, Market and Broad, divided the town into four sections.* Where those streets crossed, Penn set aside a ten-acre public square (now the site of City Hall). In the middle of each quadrant, Penn reserved eight acres as a public commons (later Franklin, Washington, and Rittenhouse Squares and Logan Circle). The plan conveyed a sense of order and rationality, with open space reserved for public use. In the eighteenth century the squares were, alas, used to dump garbage, hang criminals, and bury the poor. The plan was not entirely original; Penn drew on several English examples, but Philadelphia was the first major American town to be planned. Penn's plan had a determinative effect in shaping the city's growth. Furthermore, as Americans founded new towns across the continent, they repeatedly copied his plan.

Penn wanted Philadelphia to avoid the congestion of London, which suffered an outbreak of bubonic plague in 1665 and a disastrous fire in 1666. He therefore provided for large square blocks with generous house lots. Penn expected that houses would be located in the middle of the plots, keeping the density low. In a rapidly growing commercial port, however, everyone sought to be as close to the waterfront as possible, so as early as the 1690s owners subdivided lots and cut through narrow alleys. Despite Penn's hopes for a "greene Country towne," Philadelphia quickly became a dense urban place with substantial houses facing the main streets but with cramped houses squeezed into narrow alleys and courts where artisans plied their craft in their front room and lived above. In the trade-off between community and commerce, commerce was winning out.[3]

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*The names of many Center City streets have changed. For example, the original name of Market Street was High, Race Street was Sassafras, Arch Street was Mulberry, and South Street was Cedar. To avoid confusion, I use current names throughout.

Word of Penn's experiment generated enormous excitement, especially among Quakers, who, like the New England Puritans, placed a strong emphasis on self-discipline and self-control: hard work was a virtue and a duty, idleness a waste of God's resources. Developing God's bounty was one's duty, and if doing so led to improvement in one's material position, it was a positive sign that one was doing God's work. Because of this mix of Puritan self-discipline with religious democracy, Quakerism appealed particularly to market-oriented people with entrepreneurial skills. Quakers flocked to the colony along with Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Baptists from England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and Germany. Most people took up farms in the countryside, but within a decade the town's population surpassed two thousand. Africans were also among the town's earliest residents, but they were involuntary immigrants: the first slave ship arrived to sell its human cargo in 1684. Penn also granted land to a group of German pietists; their village along the Wissahickon Creek, six miles from Philadelphia, became known as "Germantown."

By 1700, Philadelphia was taking the shape and appearance that would characterize it throughout the eighteenth century. Settlement spread in a thin ribbon along the Delaware waterfront, extending west only a few blocks. More than a hundred shops and warehouses crowded between Front Street and the riverbank. One could walk from one end of town to the other in half an hour. Although most houses were timber frame, abundant nearby clay and limestone made bricks inexpensive and brick town houses would eventually dominate, providing a decidedly urbane appearance. The Swedes erected a substantial church, Gloria Dei (Old Swedes Church), which has stood for three hundred years, and the Quakers built a fifty-foot-square meeting house at Second and Market Streets.

To maintain their living standards, Pennsylvanians needed English manufactured goods, such as pots, kettles, tools, axes, rifles, gunpowder and shot, cloth, glass, paper, books, and furnishings. But, except for deerskins and other furs, England had little need for Pennsylvania's products. To prosper, Philadelphia merchants had to find markets for the region's abundant agricultural surplus to pay for their imports. Thus, the success of the town and the region were intertwined. As the colony grew, so did the town, which reached ten thousand by 1740; twenty years later, with more than eighteen thousand residents, Philadelphia had displaced Boston as the largest town in the colonies. At the outbreak of the Revolution it was the fourth largest town in the British Empire.

Philadelphia attracted many Quaker merchants, who arrived with established contacts in other Atlantic ports, accumulated capital, good reputations, and entrepreneurial skill, positioning the town to compete with older and larger rivals. Philadelphia was closer to the Caribbean than Boston or New

York, and its merchants sent south the produce that fed African slaves on sugar plantations. Returning ships carried rum, coffee, molasses, enslaved humans, and, most important, currency to pay for goods Philadelphia imported from Britain. In the eighteenth century, merchants also opened lucrative markets with Spain, Portugal, Madeira, and the Canary Islands. In addition, a thriving commerce developed with the other colonial ports, and by the time the American Revolution began, Philadelphia had become a major supplier of food-stuffs to New England.

Colonial Philadelphia had a remarkably complex economy, with as many trades as could be found in a much larger town. The port stood at the core, directly or indirectly employing most of the people. Longshoremen (often African slaves) loaded and unloaded vessels and moved goods through the streets. Along the waterfront more than a dozen shipyards kept busy hundreds of skilled craftsmen—together with apprentices, laborers, and slaves—building ships and making sails, barrels, rope, and tackle. Distilleries, breweries, tanneries, and slaughterhouses clustered along Dock Creek. Carpenters and bricklayers built houses for a rapidly growing population. Printers supplied legal and business documents and published two weekly newspapers that announced auctions and published commodity prices and shipping information in addition to local and international news. Beyond the town, water-powered mills along the Wissahickon Creek made the village of Germantown an important processing center for agricultural produce. Colonial merchants also invested their profits in the region's development, especially in Delaware Valley iron forges, making the region a major center of North American iron production. By the eve of the Revolution, iron was a valuable export sent directly to England. In those ways the accumulated profits of the port of Philadelphia contributed to the development and diversification of the entire region.[4]

In contrast to the town's successful economic growth, the municipal government, the Corporation of Philadelphia, was a conspicuous failure. From the beginning a narrow elite of wealthy landowners and merchants controlled the Corporation. When it came to encouraging commerce, the aldermen showed considerable initiative, building and maintaining public docks and the finest public markets in the colonies, but on matters dealing with health and communal well-being, the Corporation was remarkably sluggish and unresponsive. The initiative to address problems came from civic-minded men who organized as volunteers or petitioned the Pennsylvania Assembly to widen the scope of public responsibility. Their achievements made Philadelphia a model for other colonial towns to follow.[5]

Like other colonial ports, Philadelphia in the eighteenth century was a dangerous place to live, although much less so than any English town. The
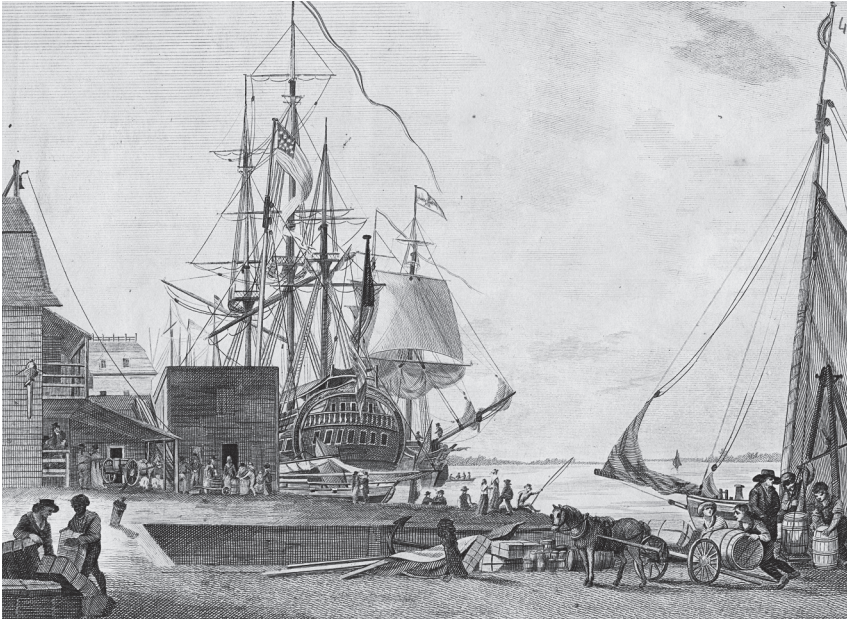
Arch Street Ferry, Delaware River Waterfront, 1799, an engraving by William Birch, provides a sanitized view of the activity along the busy waterfront (without the garbage, trash, and horse and pig manure that coated the streets). To the left and in the lower left and right corners, boys and men load heavy barrels and crates onto carts. (William Russell Birch and the Library Company of Philadelphia.)

death rate was appalling. A fifth to a quarter of all babies died before age five, and childbirth took the lives of many women. People who survived to twenty-one rarely reached age sixty. Chronic maladies, such as tuberculosis, diphtheria, measles, whooping cough, and venereal disease took a heavy toll every year, although the periodic epidemics, such as smallpox, were more frightening in their virulence. Smallpox inoculation, which became widespread late in the century, helped reduce the mortality rate. As with so many other aspects of life, inoculation was problematic for the poor. It was not free, and the patient had to rest for days, a burden for those who lived from day to day.[6]

Since no one knew the causes of disease, people drank from communal cups, and they did not much bother to wash their hands, bodies, or clothes. Residents dumped their kitchen waste in the streets, where it mixed with the abundant manure of horses, dogs, and pigs. Outdoor privies were dangerously close to backyard pumps. By the late 1730s, Dock Creek was an open sewer. The eight tanneries and various distilleries, breweries, and slaughterhouses that lined its banks and tributaries all dumped their refuse into the waterway. It

was also a cheap and convenient place in which to dispose of dead animals, which floated slowly down to the Delaware, mixing with raw sewage en route and emitting a dreadful odor. Although no one could demonstrate a direct connection between polluted water and disease, people intuitively understood what they could not prove and complained frequently of the putrid stench. A rash of epidemics led to a concerted effort to clean up the creek, and in 1739 a petition to the colonial assembly called for relocation of the noxious uses to a more remote site. But nothing changed. Beginning in the 1760s, the Corporation covered over Dock Creek in several stages. This action was a sensible response to the open sewer, but it ignored the alternative of careful protection of the water supply and segregation of necessary but adverse land uses in the name of unrestricted property rights. Philadelphia continued to pollute its waterways shamelessly and recklessly for another two hundred years.[7]

Fire, like disease, was a constant danger, and fire-fighting techniques were primitive and consisted mostly of calling out nearby residents to toss buckets of water on the burning structure. Occasionally, in the chaos of the moment, some residents would help themselves to unguarded household goods and

Southeast Corner of Third and Market Streets, 1799, an engraving by William Birch, shows the range of activities conducted in these streets lined by substantial brick buildings. At left are meat stalls, and at the intersection a butcher carves a side of beef. Native Americans and African Americans form part of the street scene. No unkempt individuals are in view. (William Birch & Son and the Library Company of Philadelphia.)

merchandise. After a serious conflagration in 1730 destroyed a wharf and several warehouses, the Corporation acquired new buckets and a pumping engine, but it rejected efforts to regulate chimney cleaning and made no effort to improve firefighting or prevent looting. Thus, in 1736, a group of artisans organized the volunteer Union Fire Company. The idea, borrowed from Boston, caught on more rapidly in Philadelphia, perhaps because of the laxity of the local government, and other volunteer companies followed. Protection of property was always important to the middling sort, and the civic-mindedness of the men who volunteered to protect property (mostly each other's) reflected a growing public awareness of the interdependence of the urban community.

In other areas, the community did much better. For decades, citizens complained about the wretched conditions of the streets. A 1739 report labeled Arch and Vine open sewers. The drawbridge over Dock Creek was often in disrepair, causing considerable inconvenience. A night watch was organized to patrol the dark streets, keeping a lookout for fires and thieves, but citizens so often shirked this unpaid obligation that the watch had little effect. At midcentury the colonial assembly, sidestepping the Corporation, established separate special-purpose elected boards with taxing powers and responsibility for paving, drainage, street lighting, and a paid night watch. Those acts recognized that the urban habitat was a communal responsibility and that personal safety and protection of property required public revenue. Philadelphia soon acquired a reputation for clean, well-paved, and well-lighted streets. The main streets, however, benefited the most; the numerous alleys, lanes, and courts of the laboring people and poor often remained dark, dirty, and unpaved.

It is not surprising that, as the colonies' largest town, Philadelphia pioneered such projects, but it is extraordinary that one man, Benjamin Franklin, was involved in virtually every civic initiative from the 1730s through the 1750s. Franklin possessed tremendous natural talent—intelligence, imagination, practicality, and personal charm. He learned the printing trade from his older brother but left his native Boston at age sixteen to strike out on his own. Shortly after his arrival in Philadelphia, he went to London, where he spent eighteen months as a journeyman printer, a unique experience for a young colonist in the 1720s. Back in Philadelphia Franklin started a weekly newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette,* which he quickly made the most influential newspaper in town and later in the colonies. His *Poor Richard's Almanac* was second only to the Bible in popularity among colonial readers.

In a stunning range of endeavors, Franklin led the citizenry to understand the obligations of civic life and the importance of creating a livable environment. Further, he consistently advanced an ethos of democratic self-improvement. He espoused the Protestant work ethic of his Boston background but

without the religious doctrine. In 1727, only twenty-one years old, he formed a discussion group with other like-minded and ambitious young artisans, the Club of the Leather Apron Men, known as the Junto. From Franklin and his Junto soon tumbled a host of proposals for improving the town. In 1731 they organized the Library Company, a private circulating collection. Subscribed to by fifty young tradesmen, it provided an opportunity for ambitious "middling people" to learn of the ideas and intellectual currents of contemporary Europe. It was a remarkably democratic institution for self-advancement. In 1747, when the city feared attack from the French, Franklin hastily organized voluntary militia companies in which the men elected their own officers, reflecting his strongly egalitarian outlook.

Franklin played the leading role in founding the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Sick Poor, the College of Philadelphia (later the University of Pennsylvania), and the American Philosophical Society, the nation's oldest learned society. Pennsylvania Hospital, which pioneered in humane treatment of the mentally ill, was the first hospital in the British colonies. The college was the first in the colonies not founded primarily to train clergymen, and, in 1765, it established the colonies' first medical school, laying the basis for the city's preeminence in medical education in the following century. Most of Franklin's initiatives did not involve the government; they were private, volunteer, and democratic.[8]

Class, Race, and Daily Life in a Colonial Town

People knew their social place in the eighteenth century, when distinctions were marked not just by wealth and occupation but also by clothes, manners, forms of address, and habits of deference, as well as by gender and race. Quakers believe all are equal in God's eyes, but the Quakers in Philadelphia certainly embraced differences in rank and status, weakening any true sense of community that Penn might have hoped for. Colonial Philadelphians can be divided roughly into three main groups, known in contemporary terms as the "better sort," the "middling sort," and the "lower sort." As the city became more diverse and cosmopolitan, race, gender, and condition of servitude also shaped the rhythms of urban life.

The better sort, a small elite of wealthy merchants and substantial landowners, provincial officials, and successful professionals—doctors, lawyers, clergy—dominated the town and the colony. Quakers were overrepresented among this upper group that at most accounted for 10 percent of the people but, by 1760, owned about two-thirds of the personal wealth. Members of the upper group were part of an international network of ideas and culture nourished by contacts in ports throughout the Atlantic World. They lived in sub-

Second Street North from Market Street, 1799, an engraving by William Birch, shows the center of Market Street, with the old City Hall at the left. Women sit in front displaying their wares, and an African American woman carries a basket of laundry on her head. In the lower left corner, a man standing in a cart sells chickens. An African American boy holding a basket crosses the street. Above the houses rises the steeple of Christ Church (Anglican). (William Russell Birch and the Library Company of Philadelphia.)

stantial houses in the center of town, away from the odors of the waterfront and markets, notably along Chestnut, Walnut, Pine, and Locust between Second and Third Streets. They imported fine-quality English furniture, ate on bone china with sterling silver, drank the best wines, covered their tables, chairs, and beds in the finest fabrics, and rode about in carriages. The elegance of the colonial gentry can still be glimpsed at the Powel House on Third Street and in a cluster of surviving country houses along the banks of the Schuylkill River in Fairmount Park.[9]

Among all social groups, women derived their status from that of their fathers or husbands. Wealthy women were literate and often kept up with political affairs. They managed complex households that included servant girls and house slaves. Typical of such women was Elizabeth Drinker, whose father and husband were wealthy Quaker merchants. Drinker received an education unusual for her time and left a remarkable diary. Her concerns were mostly those of private family life, and her tribulations were similar to those of parents

at all times. Well versed in medical knowledge of the day, she was a nurse and caregiver to family and friends, and she managed to hold her family together when her husband, Henry, was arrested for his pacifism during the Revolution. Later in the century their home became a refuge for runaway slaves, although Elizabeth never overcame her condescension toward blacks.[10]

The middling sort—shopkeepers, master artisans, small-scale merchants, and professionals of modest means—enjoyed a measure of respectability and social standing, particularly the shopkeepers and lesser merchants who advanced credit to their customers. The master craftsmen ran their own workshops with the help, at most, of a few journeymen and apprentices and perhaps a slave. Journeymen, younger artisans who lacked the capital to set up on their own, filled the ranks of the lower end of the group. Unmarried journeymen usually lived in the master artisan's house. Men of the middling sort could vote, and they took politics seriously; they held the minor offices that might advance their standing. Their small houses usually had a store or workshop in the front room. They could afford simple but adequate furniture: beds, a dining table and chairs, a few chests. Around midcentury, as the town became more prosperous, these families acquired more material possessions. When Benjamin Franklin's wife wanted china and silver to replace their earthenware and pewter, she wanted it "to be as good as [the] neighbors."[11]

Like those above them, middling women managed complex households. While they often had servants or slaves, wives and daughters did much of the housework themselves and they might also help their husbands run a shop or business. Some widows who inherited a retail store or a tavern could be counted among the middling sort. Others ran boarding houses or worked as nurses or midwives, although the pay was low. A few educated women taught or gave music or language lessons, but most women had few opportunities for respectable employment. The house and furnishings of John and Betsy Ross on Arch Street provide a surviving example of a home of the middling people.[12]

Two distinct groups formed the lower sort: workers with little or no skill and dependents whose freedom was restricted. The free people of the lower sort filled the ranks of lesser skilled occupations. Some worked as tailors, shoemakers, and coopers, but most toiled as porters, longshoremen, woodcutters, ditch diggers, common seamen, or day laborers. Accounting for almost half of the workforce, they owned few possessions and lived in cramped, rented quarters usually near the docks and toward the edges of town. A cluster could be found in the neighborhood aptly labeled "Helltown," just north of Arch Street, east of Third Street. Observers sometimes described the accommodations of the poorest as "huts," "sheds," and "mean, low boxes of wood." In such foul and congested alleys and courts, where residents survived on inadequate diets and

lacked warm clothing, disease found a congenial environment and took a heavy toll. The town's outward prosperity did not trickle down to them.

The women and children of the lower sort also worked. Wives and daughters might supplement income by taking in boarders or laundry, or doing domestic work for the better sort. They did the town's heavy and unpleasant housework: scrubbing floors, emptying chamber pots, and cooking over fireplaces. Widows and adult single women on their own struggled to survive. A few operated retail shops or taverns and had a toehold among the middling sort, but most ranked among the poor. Some took in sewing or peddled goods in the streets. Desperate young women without skills or family might turn to prostitution, which was widespread in a port with numerous transients and sailors. Children could scavenge for wood, peddle goods, or sweep chimneys.[13]

Dependents with restricted freedom included apprentices, indentured servants, and slaves. Apprentices, mostly teenage boys, lived in their master's house, subject to his rules and discipline while learning a trade or skill. Philadelphia also had a substantial number of indentured servants, most of whom were Irish, Scotch-Irish, or German immigrants in their teens and early twenties. They had sold their labor, usually for four to seven years, to pay off their passage: women as domestics, men as laborers. According to the indenture agreement, they were to be taught reading and writing but not any particular skill. Poor families sometimes indentured their own children if they could not support them. Also, the overseers of the poor frequently indentured orphans and children of parents seeking public relief, sometimes at a young age, and sometimes against their parents' will. Indentured servants had fewer rights or protections than apprentices. Frequent reports of runaways suggest that exploitation and abuse were common.[14]

Those in need of charity or public relief constituted the indigent poor. Most were women, especially single women, impoverished because of pregnancy, childcare responsibilities, low wages, widowhood, and old age. With a jump in population around midcentury, the poor increasingly appeared threatening. Wandering the streets begging, they were viewed as potential thieves and prostitutes. The authorities described them as "worthless," "undeserving," or "vicious" people who might need aid but also supervision. Thus, aid was kept stingy and degrading in an effort to encourage work and keep the tax burden low. In 1767, Philadelphia opened the Bettering House, a combination almshouse and workhouse. The largest building in British North America, it suggested a strong civic commitment to aid the distressed, but the reality was more complex. The initiative came from wealthy merchants who wanted the

able-bodied poor to be taught discipline and some skill, and then put to work. Because those merchants saw the principal cause of poverty to be a defect of character, the intent was more reform than charity. The scheme represented an extraordinary mix of public and private authority: a board of managers elected by only wealthy contributors ran it. The managers expected that relief given to the needy in their homes would cease, although the overseers of the poor resisted. They were elected officials, usually of the middling sort, who were just a little closer to those in need than the Bettering House managers. The overseers saw the Bettering House for what it was: incarceration for the crime of being poor.[15]

From the outset there were African slaves in Philadelphia, as there were in every other northern colony. During the eighteenth century, slavery in Philadelphia fluctuated in accordance with the availability of indentured servants. Slaves peaked as a share of the town's population at about 17 percent around 1710, but in absolute numbers the peak came in the 1760s, when fourteen hundred slaves comprised 8 percent of the total population. In the 1760s about 20 percent of households owned a slave. In 1773, Pennsylvania largely ended the slave trade by taxing slave importation, and by 1775 the number and percentage of slaves had fallen sharply.

Constituting, in the 1760s, about 20 percent of the laborers along the docks, the men performed a considerable fraction of the city's backbreaking work; most female slaves were domestics. Although the work and living conditions of slaves in Philadelphia were less harsh than in the plantation South, the frequency of runaway notices, as well as the occasional suicide and homicide, revealed their cruelty. In Philadelphia, whites who owned only one or two slaves lived in intimate contact with their slaves and worked alongside them.

Economic necessity and the density of the town enabled African Americans far greater freedom of movement than those in rural areas. Gradually they were able to define spaces for social gatherings. Early in the century, the town had set aside a separate black burial ground that became a regular meeting place, as did the space in front of the courthouse on Sundays. With some semblance of family life and a regular place to meet, black people were able to perpetuate elements of their African culture. A small free black community began to emerge in the middle decades and grew rapidly just before the Revolution, when they numbered between four hundred and six hundred, about 20 percent of the total black population.[16]

For all races and classes, the patterns of daily life in the pre-industrial age varied greatly from that of modern times. People lived, worked, shopped, and worshipped within small areas, and although there was always a transient

population, each neighborhood contained dense networks of family and friends. People bought their food from street venders, who were usually women and children, or at the thrice-weekly farmers' stalls that lined the center of Market Street and later in Southwark and Northern Liberties. Recreational and leisure outlets were limited and often revolved around alcohol. Workers expected to drink on the job and might consume two to three quarts of beer a day. This practice may have contributed to the numerous accidents at job sites. Much of the town's social life occurred in the ubiquitous taverns, and virtually all free men, and many women, frequented them. At first, gentlemen and journeymen often sat around one large table, fostering a rough egalitarianism in the customs of treating one another to a round, toasting friends, singing together, and debating political developments.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the town became more cosmopolitan and the classes began to go their separate ways. Several coffeehouses catered to merchants and served as informal exchanges for commercial news and business dealings. Theaters, notably the Walnut Street Theater, offered plays for the better off, while elsewhere wagering on cockfights and horse races provided amusement. All the entertainments involved drinking and usually sexual license, as the rapidly growing and heterogeneous town encouraged a degree of toleration not found elsewhere.[17]

The colony's reputation for toleration also encouraged religious dissenters. By midcentury, German Reformed, Lutheran, Moravian, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches abounded. Anglicans erected the imposing Georgian-style Christ Church at Second and Arch Streets where many of the Founding Fathers prayed. The modest St. Joseph's Chapel for Roman Catholics arose in Willing's Alley near Fourth Street, where the fourth structure still stands on the site. Sephardic Jews established a congregation in the 1740s and erected Mikveh Israel on Cherry Street in 1782. An evangelical movement known as the Great Awakening swept through the colonies in the 1740s, offering the democratic promise of salvation to those who embraced Christ. Its leading advocate, the charismatic George Whitefield, preached to a reported fifteen thousand people at an open-air meeting in 1740. He was so persuasive that even the skeptical Benjamin Franklin emptied his purse into the collection plate and later reported that Whitefield, temporarily at least, increased piety in Philadelphia.

Slowly white Philadelphia awoke to the horrors of slavery. In 1754, the Quaker Meeting condemned the practice as a sin. In 1774, Quakers took a stronger stand and pressured its members to free their slaves, and two years later, decided to disown any Friend who engaged in the slave trade or continued to own slaves. Although Quakers made a strong commitment to antislav-

ery after the Revolution, they were never too eager to welcome blacks into their ranks. Anglicans were more receptive: Christ Church baptized and married several black couples. Anglicans and Quakers sponsored free schools for black children before the Revolution. Only the Quakers, however, showed much interest in the actual conditions of free blacks.[18]

In 1780, Pennsylvania passed a law that provided for the gradual abolition of slavery. Although it was the first abolition law in any Western nation, it did not immediately free any slaves. Children of slaves born after 1780 would gain freedom at age twenty-eight. Despite the gradual aspect of the law, Philadelphia quickly became a magnet for newly freed slaves and runaways, and many owners conformed to the spirit of the law by releasing slaves born before 1780 when they reached about age twenty-eight. In 1783, the town housed about four hundred slaves and a thousand free blacks; in 1800, fifty-five remained enslaved alongside six thousand free blacks. Thirty years later, thirteen slaves lived in the city proper. Free blacks filled the ranks of the least desirable and lowest-paying jobs and were over-represented in the almshouse. A very few became artisans and petty proprietors.[19]

By the dawn of the new century Philadelphia would emerge as the center of free black culture in America. In 1787, two African American preachers, Richard Allen, a former slave, and Absalom Jones, founded the Free African Society, the country's first independent black institution, which aided free blacks and held religious services. In the 1790s, the African American community established two autonomous churches where, free of patronizing and hostile whites, they could find solidarity for their woes and an emotional outlet for their feelings. Jones founded the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas on Fifth Street near Spruce, the nation's first free black congregation, while Allen organized the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (later known as Mother Bethel) on Sixth Street between Pine and Lombard. The churches quickly became cultural and social centers and sponsored schools for the children.