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Author(s): Robert C. Smith

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Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences

A Philadelphia Allegory by Samuel Jennings

ROBERT C. SMITH

“**H**aving lately received Information that an Elegant Building is now erecting for the Philadelphia Library, an Idea immediately struck me, that if it would not be thought presumptuous, I should esteem myself very happy to have the honor of presenting a Painting to the Company that would be applicable to so noble, and useful an Institution”¹ With these respectful words Samuel Jennings, a Philadelphia painter residing in London at the close of the eighteenth century, began a correspondence which eventually brought to the Library Company in his native city an allegory he had painted in its honor. Some years ago I published a brief account of this picture (Fig. 1), which seems to have been the first antislavery painting by an American artist.² Subsequently, the late Arthur J. Sussel of Philadelphia acquired a smaller version of the allegory, and this in turn was purchased for Winterthur at an auction sale held after Mr. Sussel’s death in 1958³ (Fig. 2).

The two versions of the subject, which is entitled *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences*, are almost identical, the only difference being the introduction in the small one of a British shield among the symbolic objects surrounding the figure of Liberty. For this reason, I often wondered why

¹ Letter of January 12, 1790, from Samuel Jennings in London to his father John Jennings in Philadelphia copied in the “Minutes of the Proceedings of the Library Company of Philadelphia” (hereafter “Minutes of the Library Company”) III, 195. The original letter is in the collections of the Library Company (MS. 7440. F.4) and was copied verbatim.

² “A Philadelphia Allegory,” *The Art Bulletin*, XXXI (1949), 323-326. In the same year the painting was shown outside of Philadelphia for the first time since its arrival there in 1792. It was included in an exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago held from April 21 through June 19, 1949 (*From Colony to Nation: An Exhibition of American Painting, Silver and Architecture, from 1650 to the War of 1812* [Art Institute of Chicago, 1949], No. 71 [text p. 51, illus. p. 58]). The allegory is painted in oils on canvas (H. 60¼”, W. 73⅜”) and is signed “S. Jennings Pinxt. 1792” on a scroll in the lower right corner.

³ Parke-Bernet Galleries, *Arts and Crafts of Pennsylvania, and Other Notable Americana: Part One of the Collection of the Late Arthur J. Sussel, Philadelphia*, Sale No. 1847, Oct. 23, 24, 25, 1958 (New York: Parke-Bernet Galleries, 1958), Item 526 (pp. 110-111). The painting is in oils on canvas (H. 15½”, W. 18½”), and is signed in the same fashion as the larger version (see note 2 above). Mr. Sussel purchased the painting from the late David David, a Philadelphia art dealer, about 1955. It has not been possible to trace the painting further.



Fig. 1
 Samuel Jennings,
*Liberty Displaying
 the Arts and Sciences*.
 London, 1792.
 Oil on canvas;
 H. 60¼", W. 73"
 (The Library Company
 of Philadelphia,
 Photo: The Art
 Institute of Chicago).

Fig. 2
 Jennings,
*Liberty Displaying
 the Arts and Sciences*,
 London, 1792.
 Oil on linen;
 H. 15½", W. 18½"
 (Winterthur 58.120.2,
 Details Figs. 5, 7, 8, 10).



the smaller picture now at Winterthur was painted. I was therefore delighted when it was suggested that I re-study the Jennings allegory to try to discover the reason for the Winterthur version.

An explanation soon appeared through the fortunate discovery among the manuscripts at the Library Company of Philadelphia of a hitherto unknown letter from the painter explaining the matter. With the kind assistance of a number of friends and colleagues in Philadelphia, London, and elsewhere,⁴ it was possible to bring together a considerable amount of new information about the two paintings and their author. A much more detailed account can now be given of the undertaking, remarkable in a number of ways, of a minor late-eighteenth-century Philadelphia painter dealing with one of the most important of present-day issues—the rights of the Negro in this country.

Very little is known about the life and work of the painter, Samuel Jennings. He was the son of a John Jennings,⁵ who appears to have been the colonial sheriff, Revolutionary soldier, and Federal official of that name. This John Jennings (ca. 1738-1802) is thought to have been a native of Pennsylvania and the son of a Solomon Jennings.⁶ In 1761 he was elected sheriff of Northampton County and was subsequently returned to this office on several occasions, the last time in 1778. During this period, he was called upon to arrest and expel Connecticut settlers from the Wyoming Valley, and in 1766 he journeyed from Fort Pitt to New Orleans, keeping a diary of his experiences.⁷

On January 1, 1783, John Jennings was serving as a private in the 3rd Regiment of the Continental Line; in the following February, he was elected quartermaster of the 1st Company, 2nd Battalion of the Northampton County Militia. He then moved to Philadelphia, where he became secretary of the Mutual Assurance Company for Insuring from Loss by Fire (Green Tree), a company founded in 1784. In 1791 he was clerk of the commissioners of bankruptcy and register of sweeps, and in 1794 became a deputy United States marshal for the district of Pennsylvania. In 1796 Jennings was elected an alderman of Philadelphia and appointed associate justice of the mayor's court. He held these offices until his death on January 14, 1802.

⁴ I wish to take this opportunity of thanking the following persons for their gracious assistance in preparing this study: C. Kingsley Adams, Director, National Portrait Gallery, London; John E. Bartlett, Director, City and County of Kingston-upon-Hull Museums; Sir Anthony Blunt, Director, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London; Marion V. Brewington, Curator of Maritime History, Peabody Museum, Salem, Mass.; Harry M. Buten, Director, Buten Museum of Wedgwood, Merion, Pa.; Mrs. Joseph Carson, Philadelphia; Timothy Jayne, Conservator, Winterthur; John Maxon, Director, Art Institute of Chicago; Mrs. Charles F. Montgomery, Assistant Curator (Textiles), Winterthur; Mrs. Barbara J. Morris, Assistant Keeper of Circulation, Victoria & Albert Museum; Michael Pouncey, Assistant Keeper of Prints, British Museum; Roy Strong, Assistant Keeper, National Portrait Gallery; Edwin Wolf 2nd, Librarian, Library Company of Philadelphia.

⁵ "Minutes of the Library Company," III, 195.

⁶ JOSEPH JACKSON in *Dictionary of American Biography* (hereafter DAB) s. v. "Jennings, John." The first reference in the Philadelphia directories to John Jennings, "clerk to the commissioners of bankruptcy and register of sweeps" at 127 Sassafras St., occurs in 1791. The tax records for 1791 record his address as the "Widow Wescott's dwelling" and the assessment of an occupational tax of £50 against him (Philadelphia County Tax Assessment Ledgers, North Mulberry Ward, XXXV [1791], 31 [Winterthur, Joseph Downs Manuscript and Microfilm Collection, Microfilm M-701, original in Municipal Archives City and County of Philadelphia, Department of Records]).

⁷ "Journal from Fort Pitt, to Fort Chartres in the Illinois Country" (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Am. 6083).

John Jennings' obituary, which appeared two days later,⁸ provides no information about his family. On February 3, 1802, his widow, Mary Jennings, with William Nicholas, a merchant, and Michael Hillegas, the first Treasurer of the United States, took out letters of administration for his estate.⁹ The existence of no less than nine "painted pictures," one of them a "Death of Gen. Wolfe," in his meager estate is strong reason to believe that this John Jennings was the father of our painter.

On April 3, 1770, a Samuel Jennings, son of John Jennings, was accepted as a student of the University of Pennsylvania.¹⁰ If this Samuel Jennings was the painter, as seems likely, he must have been born about 1755, because it was the rule in the eighteenth century for boys to enter college at the age of fifteen or earlier. There is no record of his graduation.

In 1787 Samuel Jennings is said to have been conducting a school of drawing in Philadelphia and painting portraits and miniatures.¹¹ Then, like Charles Willson Peale and Matthew Pratt, he followed the example of Benjamin West by going to London to study and practice painting. In 1789 he was already exhibiting at the Royal Academy in London,¹² perhaps as a result of West's personal interest in a fellow townsman. From that time until 1834, Jennings constantly showed pictures at the Academy, the British Institution, and the Associated Artists, offering occasional portraits and classical subjects but principally religious paintings of which no less than seven represented the repentant Magdalen.¹³

William Dunlap formed a low opinion of the artist. He quoted Jennings' own declaration of his success "in *manufacturing old pictures* for the *knowing ones*," which probably means making forgeries for dealers, and added: "Of course he was an imposter, leading a life of falsehood and deception; and probably ended it at Botany Bay, unless his meritorious knavery exalted him to a higher situation in the country of his adoption."¹⁴ Jennings was still exhibiting at the Royal Academy in the year these words

⁸ *The Philadelphia Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, Jan. 16, 1802, 3rd p.

⁹ Municipal Archives of the City and County of Philadelphia, Office of the Register of Wills, Letters of Administration, 1802, No. 29. A "William Nichols, merchant" is listed in Stafford's Philadelphia directory for 1801 at 117 Race St. (p. 82). Michael Hillegas (1729-1804), a merchant of German descent, was made sole Continental Treasurer on Aug. 6, 1776, and on Sept. 6, 1777, became Treasurer of the United States of America. He served in that post until establishment of the Treasury Department on Sept. 11, 1789. Hillegas married Henrietta Boude; one of their ten children, it appears, married the Philadelphia silversmith, Joseph Anthony (JOHN H. FREDERICK in *DAB* s. v. "Hillegas, Michael").

¹⁰ "Additions and Corrections," *University of Pennsylvania: Biographical Catalogue of the Matriculates of the College . . . , 1749-1893*, Prepared by a Committee of the Society of the Alumni (Philadelphia: Printed for the Society, 1894), p. xxxiii.

¹¹ Art Institute of Chicago, *From Colony to Nation*, p. 51.

¹² ALGERNON GRAVES, *The Royal Academy of Arts: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and their work from its foundation in 1759 to 1904* (London: H. Graves & Co. & George Bell & Sons, 1906) s. v. "Jennings, S." In 1789 Jennings exhibited portraits of Mr. Cox and the Reverend F. Gower. He was then living at No. 2, New Street, Covent Garden. The next year he moved to 1 Coventry St., Haymarket. When he exhibited the allegory listed as "Liberty displaying the Arts & Sciences" in 1792 (No. 215), he lived at 19 Clipstone St. In 1810 Jennings resided at 17 Warren St., Fitzroy Square; in 1812 at 46 Rathbone Place; and in 1822 at 1 Poland St. *Pigot's London Directory* for 1824 lists his address as 125 Rotherhide St.

¹³ ALGERNON GRAVES, *The British Institution, 1806-1867: A Complete Dictionary of Contributors and Their Works from the Foundation of the Institution* (London: G. Bell & Sons and A. Graves, 1908) s. v. "Jennings, S."; GRAVES, *The Royal Academy of Arts* s. v. "Jennings, S."

¹⁴ *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (New York: G. P. Scott & Co., 1834), I, 435. The entry for Jennings occurs without change in the 2nd ed., eds. FRANK W. BAYLEY and CHARLES E. GOODSPEED (Boston: C. E. Goodspeed & Co., 1918), II, 124-125.

were published and appears to have escaped the former and enjoyed the latter fate. There is no evidence that he ever returned to Philadelphia. He is last mentioned in 1834.¹⁵

It was early in 1790 that Samuel Jennings conceived the idea of painting the allegory for which he is best remembered. He had learned that the Library Company of Philadelphia, founded in 1731 by Benjamin Franklin and housed for decades in the State House of Pennsylvania before moving to Carpenters' Hall in 1772,¹⁶ had begun a new building on August 1, 1789. The plans were those of Dr. William Thornton, later the architect of the Capitol in Washington.¹⁷ On January 12, 1790, Jennings informed his father in Philadelphia:

Having lately received Information that an Elegant Building is now erecting for the Philadelphia Library, an Idea immediately struck me, that if it would not be thought presumptuous, I should esteem myself very happy to have the honor of presenting a Painting to the Company that would be applicable to so noble, and useful an Institution, and which if agreeable to the Gentlemen who have the Direction of it, shall use my utmost exertions & abilities to make it acceptable; the great affection I retain for my native Country, will always be an inducement to me to contribute my mite towards the Encouragement of Arts and Sciences, hoping in due time, they will arrive to as great perfection as they are at present in the place I now reside. As I do not know who the Gentlemen are that have the direction of the Library, I request you will be so obliging as to communicate to them the Information I have given you, and if they should be pleased to approve of it, as I hope they will, it will be necessary for me to be acquainted with the length, breadth and height of the Room, together with the Situation they would wish to place it in, and if over the Fireplace, the distance from the Mantle-piece to the Ceiling. You will perhaps think me too particular, but these are things essentially necessary. As soon as I receive an answer from you with their approbation, which I hope will be by the first Packet from New York, or any other immediate opportunity, I shall put the piece into Execution. In regard to the Subject, there are three, which I think would be applicable to the Institution vizt. Clio—Goddess of History, and Heroic Poetry. Calliope—Goddess of Harmony, Rhetoric & Heroic Poetry. Minerva—Goddess of Wisdom, & all the Arts. The Presidentess of Learning, which seems to comprehend every thing that can be desired. The Dress of Minerva is

¹⁵ GRAVES, *The Royal Academy* s. v. "Jennings, S."

¹⁶ CHARLES E. PETERSON, "Carpenters' Hall," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, N. S., 43, (1953), 100.

¹⁷ For an account of this building, which served the Library Company until 1880 and was razed in 1887, see: FISKE KIMBALL and WELLS BENNETT, "William Thornton and the Design of the United States Capitol," *Art Studies* (1923: An Extra Number of the *American Journal of Archaeology*), I, 76-92; CHARLES E. PETERSON, "Library Hall: Home of the Library Company of Philadelphia, 1790-1880," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 95 (1951), 266-285. Dr. William Thornton (1759-1828), a native of the Virgin Islands, was trained as a physician in Edinburgh but never practiced medicine. Instead, he became an inventor and amateur architect. He won competitions for the new buildings of the Library Company in 1789 and for the United States Capitol in 1791. In 1794 Thornton was appointed one of the commissioners for the new Federal City of Washington and spent the rest of his life there. Among other buildings, he designed the Octagon House for John Tayloe of Virginia (erected 1798-1800).

*grand, and would make a better picture than either of the others. But if any other Subject should be their choice, I shall with pleasure comply with it.*¹⁸

John Jennings, who was not a shareholder of the Library Company, must have fulfilled his son's request with alacrity. A committee of the directors especially appointed to consider the matter,¹⁹ replied on April 3, 1790, that of the three subjects Jennings offered they preferred Minerva. "But," they continued,

*as a more general latitude has been so politely granted, they take the liberty of suggesting an Idea of Substituting the figure of Liberty (with her Cap and proper Insignia) displaying the arts by some of the most striking Symbols of Painting, Architecture, Mechanics, Astronomy &c. whilst She appears in the attitude of placing on the top of a Pedestal, a pile of Books, lettered with, Agriculture, Commerce, Philosophy & Catalogue of Philadelphia Library. A Broken Chain under her feet, and in the distant back Ground a Groupe of Negroes sitting on the Earth, or in some attitude expressive of Ease & Joy.*²⁰

In making this decision, the directors of the Library Company may have been influenced in the choice of Liberty by the presence in Philadelphia of an allegory of the "liberty and prosperity of America," which the English painter Robert Edge Pine had brought with him from London in 1784. It had been exhibited in Pine's house on Eighth Street until his death in 1788²¹ and was, at the moment when the directors were writing to

¹⁸ "Minutes of the Library Company," III, 195-197. The entry begins with the statement: "The following Extract of a Letter from Samuel Jennings to his Father, John Jennings, in this City, was presented to the Board." It concludes with the comment: "This handsome Compliment from one of our Fellow Citizens now in London, is gratefully received, and Mordecai Lewis, John Kaighn, Doctor Parke, Thomas Morris and Richard Wells, are appointed a Committee to prepare a Letter to go by the next Packet expressive of the high Sense which the Board entertain of the genteel proposal, and that the Committee take the Subject of the picture into consideration, and transmit their opinion thereon." See "Minutes of the Library Company," III, 195-197.

¹⁹ "Minutes of the Library Company," III, 196. See above n. 18.

²⁰ "Minutes of the Library Company," III, 206. The complete entry (pp. 206-207) is as follows: "The Committee appointed by the last board reported that they had transmitted a letter to Samuel Jennings in answer to his polite and liberal offer of a painting for this Institution which was read and ordered to be entered on the Minutes.

Phila. April 3d 1790

Esteemed Friend —

The Directors of the Library Company of Philadelphia having been furnished with an extract of thy letter respecting a Piece of Painting intended for the Library, they have instructed us to transmit their grateful acknowledgements for so genteel a notice of their Institution. To receive such a proof of Attachment from one of their Fellow-Citizens, at so great a distance, must be truly pleasing to every Member of the Company, to whom the Directors will have an opportunity of communicating it at their annual Election next month.

The Board have considered the three Subjects submitted to their Choice, and readily agree in giving a preference to that of Minerva.

This is handed merely as a Sketch of what struck the Directors, but they have so much diffidence on Subjects of this nature, that they wish to submit the whole to thy own Judgment.

We are on behalf of the Directors very respectfully

Thy Friends
[Signed] Richard Wells
Thomas Morris
Thomas Parke
John Kaighn"

²¹ *The Pennsylvania Packet and Daily Advertiser*, Jan. 11, 1790, 4th p.

Jennings, being offered as a principal prize in a lottery advertised by Pine's widow.²²

By suggesting that Negroes be included in their allegory, the directors of the Library Company—many of whom were members of the Society of Friends—revealed how keenly they sympathized with the movement to abolish slavery, which had begun in Quaker Philadelphia. It was there that Ralph Sandiford in 1729, Benjamin Lay in 1737, and Anthony Benezet in 1766²³ had published their attacks on slavery, and Thomas Paine in 1775 had demanded its abolition.²⁴ In that same year, a Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage had been formed with sixteen Friends among its original twenty-four members.²⁵ This was reorganized in 1787 as the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, and for Improving the Condition of the African Race. Benjamin Franklin, founder of the Library Company, was its president. In 1787, and again in 1788, Franklin received from Josiah Wedgwood, the English pottery manufacturer and another devoted abolitionist, shipments of a slave medallion (Fig. 3).²⁶ It was the official symbol of the English Committee for the Society for the Abolition of Slavery that was founded in 1787 with a number of Quakers as chief advisors.²⁷ Franklin distributed the medallions to his friends in

²² "A fine original Allegorical Picture, representing the liberty and prosperity of America, 9 feet 6 inches by 6 feet 10 inches (framed) value 220 pounds." See *The Pennsylvania Packet and Daily Advertiser*, Jan 11, 1790, 4th p. Charles H. Hart describes an "Allegory of America suffering the Evils of War" by Pine that was sold to Savage and Bowen's Museum in New York and in 1795 was taken to Boston for the Columbian Museum, where it is thought to have burned in a fire of Jan., 1803. Composed about 1781, it was stipple engraved by Joseph Strutt in England. See "'The Congress Voting Independence,' A Painting by Robert Edge Pine and Edward Savage," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, XXIX (1905), 9-10. David McNeely Stauffer lists an American version of this subject produced by Amos Doolittle in 1807 and comments that it was copied after an engraving by Joseph Strutt published in 1781 (*American Engravers on Copper and Steel* [New York: The Grolier Club, 1907], II, 90, no. 522). The circumstances suggest that this engraving by Doolittle may be of the allegory by Pine.

²³ *A Brief Examination of the Practice of the Times* (Philadelphia: Franklin & Meredith, 1729) by Ralph Sandiford (1693-1733) is considered the earliest published protest against slavery. Benjamin Lay (1681-1765), an eccentric, humpback dwarf, came to Philadelphia in 1731 from Barbados, where he had tried unsuccessfully to minister to the slaves. His book *All Slave-Keepers That keep the Innocent in Bondage . . .* was published by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia in 1737. Anthony Benezet (1713-1784), a French-born Quaker schoolteacher and associate of the abolitionist John Woolman of New Jersey, published, in addition to *A Caution and Warning to Great-Britain and Her Colonies, in a Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions* (Philadelphia: H. Miller, 1766), another book entitled *Some Historical Account of Guinea . . .* (Philadelphia: J. Crukshank, 1771). The latter was an attack on the slave trade which led the Englishman Thomas Clarkson to give his life to the cause of antislavery. For further information on this matter, see EDWIN WOLF 2nd, "The Beginnings of the Anti-Slavery Movement," in *The Annual Report of the Library Company of Philadelphia for 1963* (Philadelphia: The Library Company of Philadelphia, 1964), pp. 22-29.

²⁴ THOMAS PAINE (1737-1809), having arrived from England in Nov., 1774, published on March 8, 1775, in the *Postscript to the Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, an essay entitled "African Slavery in America." This essay has been called "the first article published in this country urging the emancipation of slaves and the abolishment of the system of negro bondage" (WILLIAM M. VAN DER WEYDE, *The Life and Works of Thomas Paine* [New Rochelle, N. Y.: Thomas Paine National Historical Association, 1925], I, 20).

²⁵ THOMAS EDWARD DRAKE, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, Yale Historical Publications Miscellany, LI (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 90.

²⁶ HARRY M. BUTEN, "Josiah Wedgwood and Benjamin Franklin," *Bulletin of the National Philatelic Museum*, III (1951), 157-165; BUTEN, *Wedgwood Counterpoint* (Merion, Pa.: The Buten Museum of Wedgwood, 1962), p. 127.

²⁷ FRANK JOSEPH KLINGBERG, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England: A Study in English Humanitarianism*, Yale Historical Publications Miscellany, XVII (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), p. 73.



Fig. 3
Josiah Wedgwood,
Slave Medallion, Etruria,
Staffordshire, England, 1787.
Black basalt on white jasper;
H. $1\frac{3}{16}$ "', W. $1\frac{1}{8}$ "'
(The Buten Wedgwood Museum).

Philadelphia, urging them to wear them as brooches, hatpins, buttons, or rings like the abolitionists in London. "I have seen in their countenances," Franklin wrote Wedgwood in 1788, "such Mark of being affected by contemplating the Figure of the Suppliant (which is admirably executed) that I am persuaded it may have an Effect equal to that of the best written Pamphlet in procuring favour to those oppressed People."²⁸ Furthermore, Richard Wells,²⁹ who headed the group of directors signing the letter to Jennings, had in 1789 led the special committee of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery³⁰ which in the following year was to put pressure on the Congress in New York City to apply a "remedy against the gross national iniquity of trafficking in the persons of fellow men."³¹ Finally, Dr. William Thornton, the Quaker architect for the new building of the Library Company, was in Philadelphia at the time the directors' letter was written and was himself an Abolitionist. Through his friendship with Dr. John Coakley Lettson in England, he had early conceived a desire to free slaves and send them back to Africa.³² Clearly, therefore, the suggestion that Jennings should paint both Liberty and the Negroes stemmed from the most cherished aims and ideals of the directors of the Library Company.

Their letter was skillfully worded to produce a result satisfactory in three distinct ways. First, the Library would have an allegory that would be eminently patriotic. Secondly, it would strike a strong Abolitionist note.

²⁸ See BUTEN, "Josiah Wedgwood and Benjamin Franklin," 157-165.

²⁹ Probably the Richard Wells who is listed in the Philadelphia directory for 1793 as a cashier of the Bank of North America residing at 28 North Third St.

³⁰ *The Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, Jan. 21, 1789, 4th p.

³¹ DRAKE, pp. 102-103.

³² See JAMES JOHNSTON ABRAHAM, *Lettson, His Life, Times, Friends and Descendants* (London: W. Heinemann Medical Books, Ltd., 1933), and the Lettson-Thornton correspondence in the Thornton Papers, Library of Congress, Division of Manuscripts.

Thirdly, it would be self-congratulatory through the presence of the catalogue of the books owned by the Library Company. This catalogue was to be the most important of all the allegorical elements in the painting, the only one held by Liberty herself, who, as Jennings later declared, was to be represented “in the Act of Placing the Catalogue of the Phila.^a Library on a pedestal.”

On July 24, 1790, the painter thanked Richard Wells and his committee for their suggestions of a subject and for the information that he had requested about the new building through his father. In a letter to the directors that reveals him delighted both with himself and the new project in which he had involved the Library Company, he stated:

The genteel reception my proposals met with, affords me the most secret satisfaction, & I am happy to inform You, that I most readily coincide with You in Opinion, relative to the new Subject proposed, & be assured Gentlemen, that every exertion shall be called forth, so as to render the Piece, as acceptable as possible. Being truly anxious for the promotion of the Arts & Sciences, in my Native Country, to which I feel myself most strongly attached, & at the same time flattering myself, that a Piece of painting, for the New Library, might be acceptable, urged me to prosecute my design.

The plan of the Room is laid down with great attention, which enables me to judge of the stile of Painting necessary for its size. & [sic] confirms me in opinion, that the Space, above the Mantle Piece, is the best situation, in which the Picture could be placed, as it will there have the benefit of a North Light.

I think I shall be able to finish the Picture, so as to send it, by the return of the Pigou,³³ next Spring.³⁴

It was not, however, until the following spring, on March 13, 1792, that Jennings was able to tell the gentlemen of the Library Company that his picture was finished and dispatched after having been exhibited at the Royal Academy.³⁵ “I have the great pleasure,” he wrote, “of forwarding by the Pigou, Captn. Loxley—the Picture painted for the Museum, & sincerely hope it may meet your approbation, & that you will receive it as a Token, of the great Respect I bear you, & the regard I have for your noble, & useful Institution. I have,” he continued,

(in addition to the description forwarded to me, by the Committee appointed for that purpose) introduced, another Groupe of Negroes, who are paying Homage to Liberty, for the boundless Blessings they receive through her. I have also represented Commerce by Shipping, which I think adds to the Beauty of the Picture, by leading the Eye to a greater distance, & acting as an intermediate object, between the distant Groups of Negroes, & the Sky, for I have endeavoured to conduct the Eye through the Pic-

³³ The ship *Pigou*, a vessel of 359 tons, was built in Philadelphia in 1783 (WILLIAM ARMSTRONG FAIRBURN, *Merchant Sail*, ed. ETHEL M. RITCHIE (Center Lovell, Me.: Fairburn Marine Educational Foundation, Inc., 1945-1955), V, 2767.

³⁴ Dr. Parke presented the letter to the Board of the Library Company at the Meeting of October 7, 1790, “at the New Building in Fifth Street.” For the presentation and letter, see “Minutes of the Library Company,” III, 225.

³⁵ GRAVES, *The Royal Academy of Arts* s. v. “Jennings, S.”

ture, in the most pleasing manner possible, beginning with the Figure of Liberty, which is the principle object in the Picture, that, together with the Emblems which immediately surround her, form the Grand Groups.

Jennings then gave a complete description of the picture to which we shall shortly return.

He also added the following significant information in reference to the painting now at Winterthur (Fig. 2) :

I have taken a small Copy from the Picture I have sent you, 15 by 18 Inches, from which I intend having a Print of the same size, & for which Subscription will be recd: at Philada.

The assurances I feel, of your Patronage, & Support, on this occasion, has induced me to proceed with additional Spirit, & sincerely hope, You will forward the Subscription, as much as possible.

I believe this is the first Instance, of a Print being taken from a History painting, invented & executed, by a Philadelphian, for any one of the Institutions there, indeed, I am almost induced to suppose, it is the first Painting of the kind.³⁶

With these carefully worded phrases, Jennings asked for assistance in the sale of copies of an engraving of the allegory. These would have reimbursed him for expenses incurred in the gift of the larger painting. The scheme was a shrewd one, comparable in its way to the formula of the Library Company for the subject of the picture. Jennings, by giving the larger painting to the famous institution in his native city, would acquire valuable publicity and good will. The Library Company, in turn, through advertising for subscriptions to a print would assist him in raising funds, principally, it would appear, from abolitionist sympathizers. Then, since a much larger market was available in England, the print would be made not from the original painting but from a smaller version (the picture now at Winterthur) in which the figure of Liberty is firmly linked with Britain through the appearance at her feet of the English national colors on an oval shield. This detail could not, of course, have been used in a painting destined for a building in Philadelphia in 1792, only sixteen years after the Revolution.

The directors of the Library Company acceded to Jennings' request, for a full notice of the proposal to issue a print appeared in the *General Advertiser* of Philadelphia for Thursday, May 31, 1792, and subsequently at intervals until the middle of August.³⁷ According to the announcement, the print was to be a stipple engraving, fifteen by eighteen inches, and was to cost twenty-five Pennsylvania shillings, "one-half to be paid at the time of subscribing, and the other on the delivery of the Print, which will be by the Spring vessels, 1793."³⁸ The subscriptions were to be taken by Joseph

³⁶ Library Company of Philadelphia, MS. 7440.F.42.

³⁷ On May 31, 1792, it appeared on the 3rd p., col. 3; the advertisement then reappeared three times a week for a month. It was published again in August, when it ran for three days in succession, from Tuesday, Aug. 14 through Thursday, the 16th.

³⁸ The engraving was to be "executed in the dotting or chalk method [i.e. stippled], in the stile of Mr. West's Family Piece, so well known in Philadelphia." This comparison is to the stipple engraving entitled *Mr. West and Family* engraved by G. S. and J. G. Facius after the painting by West and published by John Boydell, London, 1779 (H. 23 $\frac{3}{8}$ ", W. 28 $\frac{1}{8}$ "). Two impressions are in the Winterthur collections (Nos. 61.85 and CH 60.502).

Anthony Jr., a Philadelphia silversmith,³⁹ and Zachariah Poulson Jr., the Librarian of the Library Company.⁴⁰ The choice of the latter is obvious because of his association with the library. The former may have been selected because his wife was Henrietta Hillegas, who seems to have been a daughter of that Michael Hillegas who, a decade later, was to be one of the administrators for the estate of the painter's father. Michael and Henrietta Hillegas were evidently close friends of the Jennings family. In spite of the efforts of Samuel Jennings and the Library Company, the print seems never to have been issued, for no copies have been located in this country or in Great Britain.

Meanwhile, the gift of the larger painting was acknowledged by the board of the Library Company in a letter to Jennings on June 13, 1792. It stated that the picture had "arrived in perfect order, is now framed and placed agreeably to your request."⁴¹ A plain gilt frame was procured for seventeen shilling and six pence per foot from the well-known carvers and gilders James and Henry Reynolds at their looking glass store, number fifty-six Market Street.⁴² The picture was hung in the new building at Fifth and Chestnut Streets over the mantel, as Jennings had suggested in his letter of July 24, 1790.⁴³

The artist returned to the matter on March 13, 1792, with the words, "There cannot, I think, be a better light for a picture than that which the

³⁹ Joseph Anthony, Jr., son of another Philadelphia silversmith, was born in Newport, R. I., Jan. 15, 1762, and was active in Philadelphia from 1783 until his death in 1814 (STEPHEN G. C. ENSKO, *American Silversmiths and Their Marks* [Portland, Me.: Southworth Press, 1927], p. 119). He is identified in the Philadelphia directory of 1791 as a "goldsmith" at No. 76 High St.; in that of 1793, when his address was No. 94 High St., he is listed as a "goldsmith and jeweler." The same page of this directory (p. 3) includes the names of Joseph Anthony, "merchant" at No. 225 High St. (an entry also appearing in 1791), and Joseph Anthony and Son, "merchants" at No. 5 Chestnut St. The latter seem to be the agents through whom Elias Hasket Derby of Salem, Mass., ordered a set of oval back, painted chairs in 1796 (EDWIN J. HIPKISS, *Eighteenth-century American Arts: The M. and M. Karolik Collection* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press for the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1941), p. 166, No. 104.

⁴⁰ Poulson (1761-1844), was a printer of Danish descent, librarian of the Library Company from 1785 to 1806, and from 1800 to 1839 publisher of *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Anne Lane Lingelbach in *DAB* s. v. "Poulson, Zacharia"). He is listed in the Philadelphia directory for 1793 as "printer and librarian, 80, Chestnut St. and 31, Carter's Alley."

⁴¹ "Minutes of the Library Company," III, 313-314. At this meeting of the Directors on July 5, 1792, "the Secretary reported, that he had answered the letter received from Samuel Jennings, agreeably to the directions of the Board." His letter then appears in the minutes:

Phila. 13th. June, 1792

Sir.

Your Letter of the 13th. of March last to the Directors of the Library Company of Philadelphia, and the Picture painted by you for their Museum have been received by them; the latter, which arrived in perfect order, is now framed and placed agreeably to your request. The Sense entertained by the Directors, as well of the merit of the Painting as of the attention and regard manifested by you to the Institution under their care, in thus devoting your time and Talents to its ornament and advantage, calls for their earliest acknowledgments. These they have directed me to communicate; and permit me to add a sincere wish of my own for your Success in a pursuit of the elegant Art you have hitherto so happily cultivated.

I am, Sir, your obed. hum. Servt.

[Signed] *Benjamin R. Morgan Sec
to the Library Company of Philadelphia*

Benjamin Rawle Morgan (1764-1840) was secretary of the Library Company from 1792 until 1825, when he was elected a director and served in that post until his death. Morgan was admitted to the bar in 1785 and in 1821 became an associate judge of the district court. In the period between 1810 and 1820, he ran unsuccessfully for assemblyman and senator on the Federalist ticket. According to the Philadelphia directory for 1791, Benjamin Morgan was living at No. 28 North Front St., and in that of 1793 his residence is listed as No. 5 South Fourth St.

⁴² "Minutes of the Library Company," III, 299.

⁴³ "Minutes of the Library Company," III, 313-314.

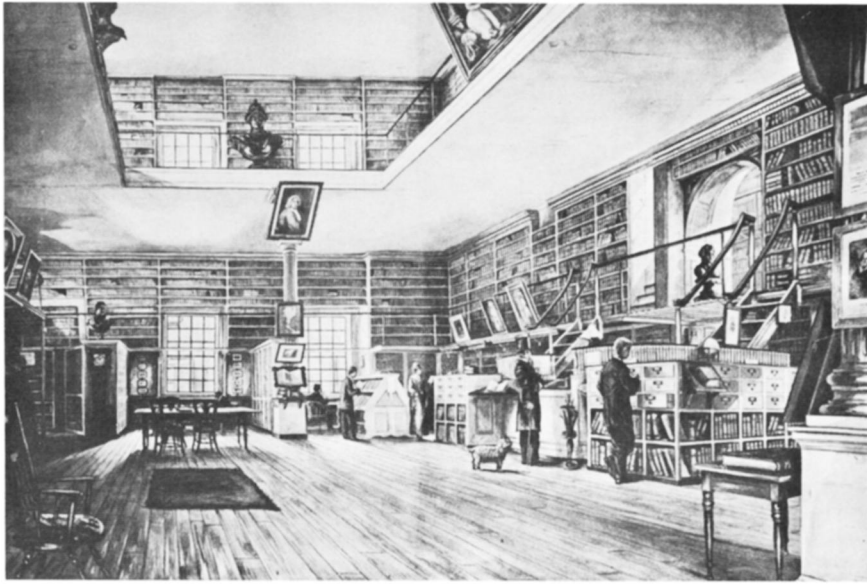


Fig. 4
Colin Campbell Cooper,
Interior of Library Hall
Showing Position of
Jennings Allegory.
Philadelphia, 1859.
Wash on paper ;
H. 13½", W. 21¾"
(The Library Company
of Philadelphia).

Museum offers on the North side, but I imagine you will find it necessary, to shut out the Light to the East, & *perhaps*, to the West, though from the Length of the Room, it may not be deemed necessary." The letter continues with the request that the authorities of the Library Company "be so obliging, as to afford the Publick every opportunity of seeing the Picture" and concludes "With every wish, for the general Welfare of my Country, the promotion of the Arts & Sciences, & *particularly* the encouragement of your noble Institution."⁴⁴

The only view of the interior of the building in which the Jennings allegory appears is a gouache sketch by Colin Campbell Cooper dated 1879 and in the collection of the Library Company (Fig. 4).⁴⁵ A portion of the lower section of the painting, showing Liberty's voluminous skirt, can be seen hanging, not over a mantel as the artist had wished, but affixed to the railing of the gallery opposite the main entrance. Just where the mantel-piece mentioned by Jennings and the committee was located cannot now be determined, for neither the plan of the Library Company building published by Charles E. Peterson nor the various insurance surveys of the old premises reveal this detail.⁴⁶ When the building was abandoned in 1880, the allegory was moved to the new home of the Library Company at Locust and Juniper Streets. When, in turn, this structure was leveled during the summer of 1940, the painting was taken, along with the rest of the collection, to the Ridgway Library, where it is now on display.

⁴⁴ Library Company of Philadelphia, MS. 7440.F.42.

⁴⁵ Cooper, who was born in Philadelphia and sometimes added "Jr." to his name, was a Fellow of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. In 1918 the Academy acquired his painting *Lower Broadway in War Time* (H. 57", W. 35"). He exhibited watercolors and oils at the Art Club in 1895 and 1902, along with his wife, Emma Lampert Cooper, who was also a painter. With his brother, John L. Cooper, C. C. Cooper edited *The Germantown Social*, a monthly periodical appearing from Aug., 1876, until at least April of the following year (copies in the collections of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania). He illustrated it with lithographs after his landscape drawings. Cooper, who died in 1937, is mentioned in Mantle Fielding, *Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors & Engravers* (Philadelphia, 1926) s. v. "Cooper, Colin Campbell."

⁴⁶ PETERSON, "Library Hall," p. 278, fig. 13; pp. 284-285.



Fig. 5 Jennings, Detail of the Goddess of Liberty from *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences* (Winterthur 58.120.2, Over-all View Fig. 2).

Like all good allegories, the Jennings painting is full of symbolism. This is largely explained by the title the painter submitted in his letter of March 13, 1792. He called it “Liberty displaying the Arts & Sciences by the most striking Emblems, Viz – Geography – Music – Poetry – Painting – Heraldry – Sculpture – Geometry – Mechanics – & Astronomy.” In his handling of the composition, Jennings carefully carried out the recommendations of the Philadelphians.



Fig. 6
George Richardson, Design for
the Emblem of Britannia from his
*Iconologia; or a Collection of
Emblematical Figures* (London:
G. Scott, 1789), I, Plate XIX,
fig. 71 (Winterthur).

Against a conventional architectural setting built up of several Doric columns and red drapery, the figure of Liberty is seated with the symbols of the arts and sciences forming what Jennings called “the Grand Groupe.” Blond and comely, dressed in a modish white gown, and with her symbolic white cap upon a long pole that leans against her shoulder (Fig. 5), she is an elegant precursor of the Yankee schoolmarm of a later day as she busies herself with her books and daintily treads on a broken chain—“an Emblem of her aversion to slavery”—spread out at her feet.

This figure is an interesting exercise in iconography because there is no doubt that in creating her Jennings combined elements appropriate to Britannia with the dress associated with Liberty. George Richardson, in his *Iconology; or, A Collection of Emblematical Figures*, published in London in 1779, describes Britannia as “a graceful woman, sitting upon a globe, and crowned with oak leaves. She holds a spear in one hand, and a branch of the olive tree in the other. . . . The cap of liberty by her side, is in allusion to the happy constitution of this country [Great Britain], to the equity of the laws and freedom of the subject”⁴⁷ (I, 39). The illustration of Britannia in Richardson’s book includes the oval shield displaying the British colors (Fig. 6), which Jennings placed at the feet of his Liberty. The liberty cap at the side of Richardson’s Britannia is set on the top of a pole in Jennings’ painting; the pole corresponds to the spear of Richardson’s Britannia. According to Richardson, Liberty should be represented wearing the liberty cap (II, 56). He added that she should be “dressed in white robes, to denote the various blessings that this goddess bestows on mankind in promoting their happiness and welfare”; this is how Jennings clothed his figure of Liberty.

⁴⁷ Richardson’s *Iconology* is based in part on a 17th century Italian publication by Cesare Ripa with the same title. At the New-York Historical Society, there is a flag carried at the siege of Louisburg in 1745 that is thought to have been made in British America and which features a seated Britannia carrying a spear in her right hand and resting her left arm on an oval shield displaying the British colors (JAMES THOMAS FLEXNER, *American Painting: First Flowers of Our Wilderness* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947], illus. p. 174).

Fig. 7
 Jennings, Detail of the
 Symbols of Geography, Music,
 Modern Poetry, and Heraldry
 from *Liberty Displaying
 the Arts and Sciences*
 (Winterthur 58.120.2,
 Over-all View Fig. 2).



In the allegory Liberty's clearly labeled books are arranged almost exactly as the directors of the Library Company had indicated. Commerce, to be sure, has been relegated, by the painter's decision, to the ships in the distance, but Agriculture and Philosophy are seen atop the classical pedestal before the figure of the goddess. The two volumes bearing these titles may symbolize two of the many cultural and charitable organizations in existence at the time in Philadelphia. Philosophy may refer to the American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge, which was organized in 1743. Agriculture may be an allusion to the Philadelphia Society for Promoting Agriculture, founded in 1785. On the other hand, the books may have been chosen merely because the subjects they represent are indispensable to a world in which Liberty is to prevail. Even more important seems to be the volume held by the goddess, apparently as an emblem of Knowledge. This book is the 1789 edition of the catalogue of the Library Company of Philadelphia,⁴⁸ a major repository of published learning in the new republic. The twin volumes of Homer

⁴⁸ *A Catalogue of the Books, Belonging to the Library Company of Philadelphia; to which is Prefixed, a Short Account of the Institution, with the Charter, Laws and Regulations* (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, Jr., 1789). This was the most recently published catalogue. Others were issued in 1741, 1756, 1764, 1770, and 1775.

and Virgil, representing the literature of antiquity, stand at the foot of the pedestal, which follows the taste of the time by suggesting a classical Roman altar.

Other books appear along the checkered red and white marble floor. In the lower left hand corner are great texts of English poetry, Milton and Shakespeare with Thomson's *Seasons*,⁴⁹ which represent modern literature (Fig. 2). Farther to the right, under a sheet of calculations identified as "Geometry" and behind a tablet of weights and measures entitled "Mechanics," can be seen another book labeled "Howard. Prisons." (Figs. 1, 2). This refers to the works of the English reformer and penologist Dr. John Howard, who before his death on January 20, 1790, had visited and described most of the prisons of Northern Europe.⁵⁰ The inclusion of Howard's publications may have been a delicate compliment to the Philadelphia Society for Relieving Distressed Prisoners of 1776, out of which had developed the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons. Founded in 1787, this organization must have counted among its members shareholders of the Library Company as did the Philosophical and Agricultural Societies.⁵¹

The other emblems of the arts and sciences can easily be identified. Beside Liberty is Geography's globe, appropriately turned to the western hemisphere (Fig. 7). Against it leans the gilded classicizing lyre of Music together with sheets of music on which the words and notes of Handel's air "Come, Ever-smiling Liberty" from *Judas Maccabaeus* of 1747 are fittingly inscribed. The palette and brushes of Painting (Fig. 7) appear side by side with the attribute of Architecture, a Composite capital with part of a shaft and triangle for making ruled drawings (Figs. 1, 2). Heraldry's emblem, a parchment covered with brightly tinted coats of arms (Fig. 7), is balanced by the attributes of science, already mentioned (Geometry and Mechanics), along with Astronomy's telescope (Figs. 1, 2). This perhaps is a discreet allusion to Philadelphia pride in David Rittenhouse (1732-1796), the builder in 1771 of the two orreries or planetaria for the colleges at Princeton and Philadelphia, and his successful direction since 1781 of the publicly supported astronomical observatory at Seventh and Arch Streets that gave Philadelphia its standard time.⁵²

⁴⁹ *The Seasons*, a group of poems composed between 1726 and 1730 by James Thomson (1700-1748), enjoyed great popularity throughout the 18th century in the English-speaking world.

⁵⁰ JOHN HOWARD, F. R. S. (1726?-1790), author of *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales, with Preliminary Observations, and an Account of Some Foreign Prisons* (Warrington: W. Eyres, 1777), and *An Account of the Principal Lazarettos in Europe . . . together with further observations on some foreign prisons and hospitals* (Warrington: W. Eyres, 1789).

⁵¹ The Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, now known as the Pennsylvania Prison Society, from its institution exercised influence upon the legislature to improve the penal code. It was responsible for the abolition of capital punishment for all crimes except murder in the first degree. The efforts of the society were reflected also in the enlightened regime of the Walnut Street Jail, which was built by Robert Smith and functioned as the county prison between 1784 and 1835. It became famous and was visited by foreigners interested in prison conditions for its general cleanliness, good order, and humanitarian direction.

⁵² WILLIAM MACPHERSON HORNOR, JR., "The Famous Rittenhouse Orrery Case Made by the Philadelphia Chippendale, John Folwell," *The Pennsylvania Museum Bulletin*, XXVII (1932), 81-90; Howard C. Rice, Jr., *The Rittenhouse Orrery, Princeton's Eighteenth-Century Planetarium, 1767-1954 . . .* (Princeton: Princeton University Library, 1954): "The Rittenhouse Orrery, Princeton's Eighteenth-Century Planetarium, 1767-1954: A Check-list of Items shown in the Exhibition held in the Princeton University Library, May-June 1954," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, XV (1954), 194-206; WHITFIELD J. BELL, JR., "Astronomical Observatories of the American Philosophical Society, 1769-1843," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 108 (1964), 7-14.



Fig. 8
Jennings, Detail of the Bust
Probably Representing Henry Thornton
from *Liberty Displaying the Arts
and Sciences* (Winterthur 58.120.2,
Over-all View Fig. 2).

In the foreground of the painting, slightly to the right of center, is a bronze bust of a youthful man in classical dress (Fig. 8). This bust seems to represent one of the English leaders of the antislavery movement. In first discussing the picture, I hazarded the opinion that it might represent William Wilberforce, M. P. (1759-1833), who in 1787 had brought in a bill for the repatriation of large numbers of Negroes to Sierra Leone (some had been taken by the British army in Virginia and transported to England). Wilberforce, on May 12, 1789, had made a famous speech in Parliament advocating the abolition of the slave trade. John Lettsom had written with enthusiasm of him to William Thornton.⁵³ No bust of Wilberforce of this period is known, but several paintings, especially the portrait by John Rising (active 1785-1815) of about 1790,⁵⁴ show a resemblance to the bust in the allegory.

There is, however, a stronger possibility that the bust may represent another abolitionist leader of the period, Henry Thornton (1760-1815), an almost exact contemporary of Wilberforce.⁵⁵ Thornton was chairman of the Sierra Leone Company founded in 1791 during the year the allegory was painted in order to provide a haven for freed slaves in Africa. An engraved likeness of Thornton, produced by James Ward after John Hoppner's portrait, clearly establishes the similarity of his features to those in the bust (Fig. 9). This resemblance, in addition to the date of the Sierra Leone Company, makes it very probable that Jennings intended the

⁵³ Lettsom to William Thornton (Library of Congress, Thornton Papers).

⁵⁴ The portrait is now at Wilberforce House, Kingston-upon-Hull.

⁵⁵ For this important suggestion, I am indebted to C. Kingsley Adams, Director of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

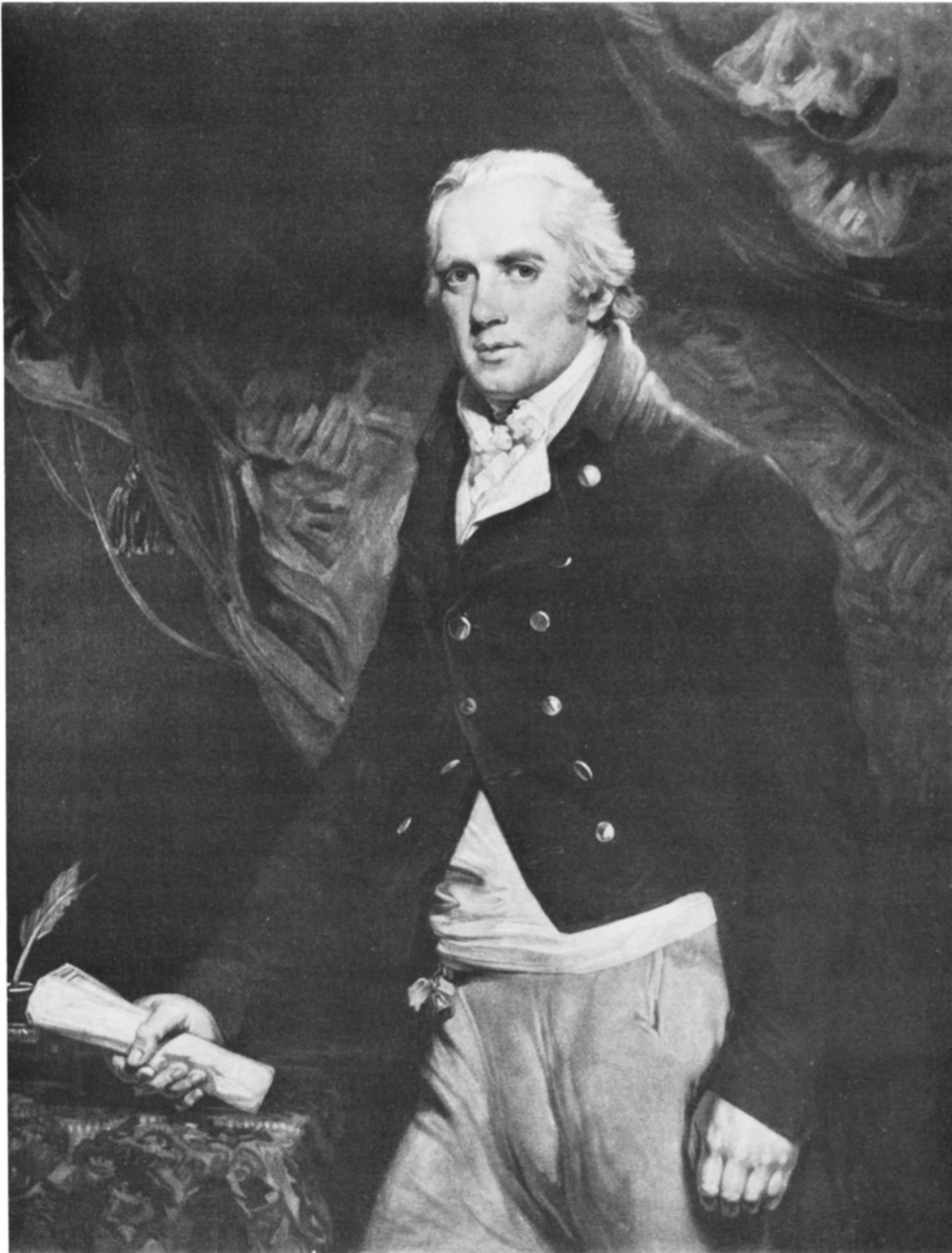


Fig. 9
James Ward,
Henry Thornton, Esq.
London, ca. 1802.
Mezzotint after the
painting by John Hoppner;
H. 19 $\frac{7}{8}$ "", W. 14"
(The National Portrait
Gallery, London).

bust to represent Henry Thornton. Jennings may have painted the portrait from life as he appears to have done that of Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846),⁵⁶ still another abolitionist contemporary of William Wilberforce.

So much for the foreground of the painting. "The Eye is conducted from thence," wrote Jennings in his letter of May 13, 1792, "to the Negroes paying homage to Liberty, by the different emblems in the Fore Ground, after which the distant Groups take the attention, from thence to the Shipping, & Sky."

⁵⁶ The portrait (H. 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ "", W. 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ ""), now in the possession of Mrs. Joseph Carson of Philadelphia, was exhibited in Philadelphia in 1795 at the Peale Museum. It was engraved (H. 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ "", W. 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ "") by Peter Maverick of New York.



Fig. 10 Jennings, Detail of Background from *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences* (Winterthur 58.120.2, Over-all View Fig. 2).

In arranging the Negroes for his picture (Fig. 10), Jennings followed quite faithfully the suggestions of the directors of the Library Company that they be placed in the background “in some attitude expressive of Ease & Joy,” a phrase which occurs again in the newspaper advertisement of May 31, 1792. Some Negroes indeed are seen “sitting on the Earth” with basket and baby as others form a boisterous group about a dancing figure whose pose and agitated scarf recall a posture used by Sir Joshua Reynolds in a number of allegorical portraits.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Sir Joshua Reynolds used this pose on at least three occasions. It appears first in his portrait of Mary Chaloner (Mrs. Hale) as Euphrosyne (1762-1764), now at Harewood House; then in the portrait of Diana, Viscountess Crosbie (1799) at The Huntington Foundation, San Marino, Cal.; and finally in his painting of Miss Emily Pott (or Bertie) as Thäis (1781) at Waddesdon Manor (Ellis K. Waterhouse, *Reynolds* [London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner & Co., Ltd. (1949)], Pls. 90, 208, 223).



Fig. 11 Stamp of James Poole on the Back of the Linen of *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences* (Winterthur 58.120.2).

A banjo player with an attendant child provides the music for this festival. To celebrate the cause of their gladness, these Negroes have erected a liberty pole with a laurel wreath, complete with blossoms, after the fashion of those Philadelphians who in 1789 had decorated the approach to Gray's Ferry with a laurel wreath and a liberty cap on poles in honor of Washington's visit as he journeyed northward to his inauguration.⁵⁸ Jennings was not content with these figures alone, as he noted in his letter of March 13, 1792. In the foreground he introduced a second group, which he has represented in poses expressive of their gratitude to the goddess who would liberate them. In the far distance, sailing on the choppy waters of a river with hilly, wooded shores suggesting the Schuylkill outside Philadelphia, can be seen the symbols of Commerce: first two brigs, then a great ship of three masts, followed by a schooner.⁵⁹

The two paintings of *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences* are, as we have seen, almost identical. The small version, which is now at Winterthur, offers, however, some additional information of special interest. On the back of the linen can still be seen a number of stamps. One reads: "J. POOLE / HIGH HOLBORN / LINNEN" (Fig. 11). This is undoubtedly the stamp of James Poole, an "artist's colourman" of 163 High Holborn,⁶⁰ from whom Samuel Jennings must have purchased his painting supplies.

In addition, this linen is stamped with marks imposed by excise officers under the practice of taxing linen that originated in 1712.⁶¹ One of these

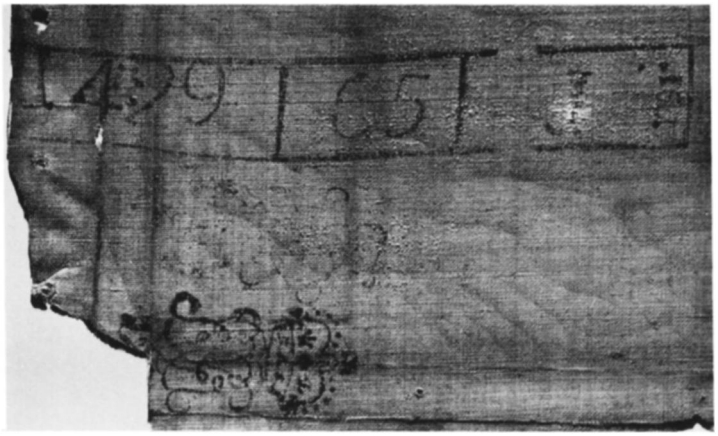
⁵⁸ An engraving of the decoration, entitled *An East View of Gray's Ferry* (drawn by C. W. Peale and engraved by J. Trenchard), was published in the May, 1789, issue of *The Columbian Magazine* opposite the title page and could easily have been seen by Jennings. On one shore hung a laurel crown and at the other a liberty cap was elevated upon a pole. Jennings had already used the latter motif in his allegory and may have put the crown on the pole for variety.

⁵⁹ Marion V. Brewington, Curator of Maritime History, Peabody Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, kindly identified these vessels.

⁶⁰ *A London Directory or Alphabetical Arrangement Containing the Names and Residences of the Merchants, Manufacturers and Principal Traders in the Metropolis and its Environs* (London: H. Loundes, 1799).

⁶¹ The statements that follow are based in large part upon information graciously transmitted by Mrs. Barbara J. Morris, Assistant Keeper of Circulation of the Victoria & Albert Museum, from the Customs & Excise Department, which most generously prepared them.

Fig. 12
Excise Stamps of 1791
on the Back of the
Linen of *Liberty*
Displaying the Arts
and Sciences
(Winterthur 58.120.2).



marks is that of a crown above a cypher (Fig. 12). Were the mark complete, it would include the words "British Manufactory" below the royal cypher that occur on an English chintz of the same period at Winterthur (Fig. 13). The number "92" that appears below these two words on the chintz is an indication of the date "1792." Presumably Jennings' linen was stamped in a similar manner with "91" for "1791." This may be conjectured from the date appearing in the mark above that of the incomplete crown and cypher.

Unfortunately this mark, like the dated cypher, is partly obscured. It was applied in connection with a duty on domestic linen (imposed in 1781) at the rate of $3\frac{1}{2}$ d. the square yard. The mark consisted of five compartments, as can be seen in the better preserved frame mark on the chintz of 1792 (Fig. 13). The date "1791" occurs at the extreme right, at right angles to the rest of the mark (Fig. 12); noted in this same compartment is the breadth of the bolt, which in the case of the linen is obscured. Then occurs the length, which is "65" (inches, feet, yards?). Beyond that appears the number "429"; it refers, perhaps, to the bolt, which could have been given its own number, and is followed by the last compartment, which is missing. It should contain the number of the stamp and the charging letter, as in the chintz, all of which were essential to the payment of the excise tax.

The linen on which the allegory is painted was applied to a spruce stretcher by means of thirty-two rose-headed tacks and secured at the corners with red sealing wax. The inscription "M. Jennings," written in ink on one section of the stretcher, seems to mean "Mr. Jennings" and is perhaps a framer's notation of the artist's name.

The directors of the Library Company were well pleased with the allegory by Jennings, judging from their letter of acceptance.⁶² Since then, the painting has elicited a variety of opinions. In 1884 Scharf and Westcott, historians of Philadelphia, considered it "a showy picture, but . . . not a work of high art."⁶³ Frank W. Bayley and Charles E. Goodspeed, who annotated William Dunlap's history of American art in 1918, thought it "not a work of great merit."⁶⁴ In 1926 Mantle Fielding found it "large and imposing."⁶⁵

Certainly from the technical standpoint Jennings' work is inferior.

⁶² "Minutes of the Library Company," III, 313-314. See above n. 41.

⁶³ J. THOMAS SCHARF and THOMPSON WESCOTT, *History of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts & Co., 1884), II, 1045.

⁶⁴ BAYLEY and GOODSPEED, eds. *History*, by Dunlap (Boston: C. E. Goodspeed & Co., 1918), II, 125, n. 1.

⁶⁵ FIELDING, *Dictionary* s. v. "Jennings, Samuel."

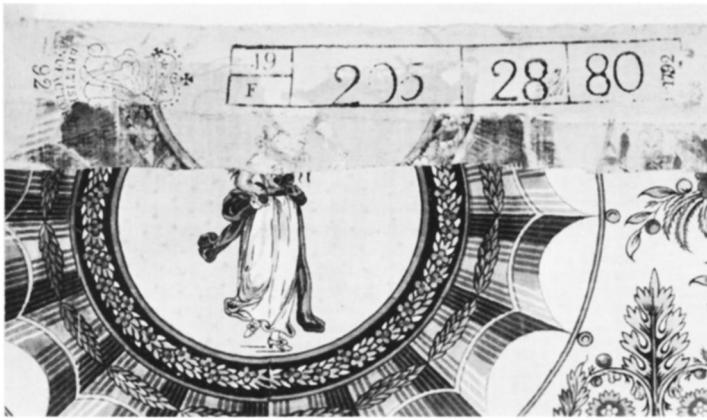


Fig. 13
Excise Stamps of 1792
on an English Chintz
Manufactured by Francis
and Crook, London
(Winterthur 60.9).

The columns and figures of the background are crudely drawn and poorly modeled. Liberty appears too large for the scale of the Negroes kneeling beside her, and one of the latter is almost entirely without form beneath his brick-red clothing. The various objects in the foreground, equally wanting in substance, have a distracting two-dimensional quality. As in most American paintings of the eighteenth century, there is no impression of space. The colors are not very subtle, and in the smaller version, they tend to be gaudy.

Yet the allegory makes up in historical significance for what it lacks in technical distinction. It contains especially interesting representations of Negroes. On the rare occasions when they were depicted by American artists of the eighteenth century, they usually appeared in portraits as servants attending their masters in the tradition of Van Dyck and Sir Joshua Reynolds. Typical of this theme are the portrait of Henry Darnell III with a Negro boy painted by Justis Englehardt Kühn (the earliest known American painting in which a Negro is represented)⁶⁶ and the later portrait of Mrs. William Byrd with a Negro by Charles Bridges.⁶⁷ In *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences*, however, there are no less than fourteen figures of both sexes and various ages. Their faces are convincing, in spite of the artist's limited ability in drawing. His accuracy in rendering them reflects his familiarity with the Negro from his youth in Pennsylvania as well as the possibility that he observed them in London while he was engaged on the painting. Some of his figures, like the musician and his companion in the background or the turbaned woman in the middle distance, are also characters who were to become stereotyped in sentimental American genre paintings of the nineteenth century. The goddess of Liberty is an equally notable feature in Jennings' painting; he represented her in the dress of his period rather than in Graeco-Roman garb that was often the rule at this time and later.⁶⁸ The greatest significance of his undertaking, however, may be that it is, as Jennings himself declared in 1792, one of the first allegorical subjects executed by an American and almost certainly the first with an abolitionist message.

⁶⁶ MARVIN S. SADIK and SIDNEY KAPLAN, *The Portrayal of the Negro in American Painting*, Catalogue of an exhibition at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art arranged by M. S. Sadik with "Notes on the Exhibition" by S. Kaplan (Brunswick, Me.: Bowdoin College, 1964). See No. 1 for an illustration of the portrait by Kühn and the "Notes" for comment on the Negro in American painting of the eighteenth century.

⁶⁷ FLEXNER, *American Painting*, illus. p. 104.

⁶⁸ For example, the line engraving *America Guided by Wisdom* (Plate: H. 15", W. 22 $\frac{1}{8}$ "") drawn by John J. Barralet and engraved by Benjamin Tanner ca. 1815. The impression at Winterthur (58.23.1) is illustrated in CHARLES F. MONTGOMERY, "The First Ten Years of Winterthur as a Museum," *Winterthur Portfolio*, I (1964), 61.