

## ❧ INTRODUCTION

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In November 2008 I knew this volume, on which I had been working since 2006, would be coming out in 2010. There was one more sketch to do, this introduction to write, maybe some concluding observations to make, and the usual myriad tasks to complete to get a book to press, but I could at last see the end. On the way to the History of Science Society meeting in Pittsburgh, I stopped in Carlisle to see Whit Bell, with a threefold mission: to see how he was faring, to let him know how close the volume was to completion, and to collect some files that he had found. I left Carlisle without any hoped-for material for the last sketch (William Smith), but happy that I had seen Whit. I very much wanted to make him a present of the book. Unfortunately, I did not have the honor and satisfaction of doing so. I can only console myself with the fact that Whit showed confidence in me until the end, and that with his example as historian and writer to guide me, I had a good model to follow, one I had followed even before I took on *Patriot-Improvers*.

I knew Whit for about fifteen years, from when I worked at the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, where Thomas Horrocks had hired me as a reference archivist in 1995. I worked there for nine years, during my tenure sounding the depths of the expansive sea of the history of medicine in Philadelphia and America. I met and worked with many knowledgeable, accomplished people, beginning with Tom, who at one time worked at the APS and had married one of my predecessors, Beth Carroll. Another was Richard Wolfe, formerly head of the Countway at Harvard, author or editor of many books on the history of medicine, who retired to Philadelphia and whose position was taken by Tom Horrocks when he left the College in 1997. Another was bookseller Richard Foster. I was the last of the College's librarians to be treated to a Foster lunch, which consisted of a deli sandwich, a bag of chips, a can of soda, and Mr. Foster's reminiscences and opinions—and, one time, a \$1,000 check for the library. Another was Whitfield Bell.

Despite problems with his knees, which eventually were replaced, Dr. Bell would walk up the broad stairs of the College of Physicians, into the library, to seek references for his latest project. I soon learned why Tom liked and respected him. Although not without opinions, or even eccentricities (he hated the voice mail on the reference desk, and once left an angry message about not being able to reach a real person), Whit was considerate and easy to talk with, a learned, modest man who, without any arrogance, took pride in his work and profession. Whit's contributions to the history of medicine were significant. I had read Dr. Bell's history of

the College, but after reading that book, I discovered his biography of John Morgan, *The Colonial Physician and Other Essays*, and that he had been the president of the American Association for the History of Medicine; later I would learn of his other interests, especially Benjamin Franklin. He had also worked at a mysterious place called the American Philosophical Society, an institution even older than the College of Physicians. I did not envision that one day I would work at the APS, or that I would have the special privilege of working on a book with Whitfield Bell.

*Volume Three* is 90 percent Dr. Bell's. That 90 percent represents decades of learning and collecting information, especially about the obscure. Of the 106 sketches in the book, 93 were written by him. Dr. Bell told me he had fun writing about the obscure members, enjoying the historian's pursuit of the elusive bits of information that survive in the historical record. He had left the final thirteen in part because there was a lot of biographical information available about them; it was more fun to accumulate the bits than to abstract what had already been found.

My first task as editor was to find all the electronic files of completed sketches (entered into a computer by Celeste Bivings) and make corrections to the files that Whit had made on paper copies. I also made copyedits and added text in a few places. One sketch, David Hall, had a paper copy different from the electronic file, which had to be reconciled. A paragraph was added to the sketch of Thomas Gage, briefly explaining his role in the Revolution.

The largest task was to complete the remaining sketches. APS staff agreed to do a number of them. Valerie-Anne Lutz Van Ammers wrote the essay on Joseph Galloway. Earle Spamer wrote on John Winthrop. Richard Shrake did the Pemberton brothers, James and Israel. Joseph-James Ahern, now with the University of Pennsylvania Archives, did two, William Livingston and William Allen. I was fortunate to recruit two people with long experience in early American history. John Van Horne, director of the Library Company of Philadelphia and APS member, wrote the sketch on Richard Peters. Gail S. Rowe, Professor Emeritus at the University of Northern Colorado, did the sketches of Joseph Reed and Thomas McKean. I wrote four sketches: David Rittenhouse, William Smith, Ezra Stiles, and Thomas Willing.

I sent the authors examples of Dr. Bell's completed sketches and instructions about a general form to follow. However much my editorial soul wished it, I knew none of the writers—myself included—would write exactly like Dr. Bell, whose dispassion, clarity, and use of primary sources are models of disinterested biographical exposition. I strove, however, to have certain points in all sketches. There is in each sketch an outline of the subject's personal life, covering his birth, education, marriage, children, and death. The most important aspect of each sketch is the subject's relationship to the APS. In most cases, the relationship is covered in the first paragraph or two. In all cases, the main evidence for participation in the Society comes from the minutes of the meetings. *Volume Three* covers mostly the men

elected to the APS itself in 1768, the year the united Society was formed, the first joint meeting being held on 2 January 1769. Dr. Bell's history of the revival of the APS in this volume provides more details.

Whit noted in the preface to *Volume One* that he anticipated "several volumes" of biographical sketches that would cover the members from 1743 up to the union of the societies in 1769. *Volume Three* fulfills that part of Whit's project. His files in the Library, however, contain research folders for members elected from 1769 and beyond, into the 1790s. He has left the door open for others to follow, and perhaps to continue the project he so ably started.

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