

**A SHORT HISTORY OF  
THE LIBRARY COMPANY  
OF PHILADELPHIA**

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A Short History of the Library Company of Philadelphia by George Maurice Abbot

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**GEORGE MAURICE ABBOT**

**A SHORT HISTORY OF  
THE LIBRARY COMPANY  
OF PHILADELPHIA**



*A*  
*Book of Minutes,*  
*containing*  
*An Account of the Proceedings*  
*of the Directors*  
*of the*  
*Library Company*  
*of*  
*Philadelphia.*  

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*Beginning*  
*November 8<sup>th</sup> 1731.*  

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*taken by*  
*the Secretary to the Company.*



*Vol. 1<sup>st</sup>*

*Printed by J. B. Franklin*  
*1731*



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A Short History  
of  
The Library Company  
of Philadelphia

Compiled from the Minutes, together with  
some personal reminiscences

By

George Maurice Abbot  
Librarian and Treasurer



Published by order of  
The Board of Directors

Philadelphia  
1913

This attempt to tell the story of the Library Company in a few words, has been read before the Philadelphia Booksellers' Association, for whom it was prepared, and also before The Pennsylvania Library Club.

November, 1912

G. M. A.



Charter granted by John, Thomas and Richard Penn, in 1741



THE LIBRARY COMPANY  
OF PHILADELPHIA

THE beginning of the Library Company of Philadelphia was largely owing to the "Junto," a club founded by Benjamin Franklin for literary and scientific discussion, the reading of original essays, poems, and so forth, called a "Club of Mutual Improvement." Franklin says in his autobiography:—

"About this time, our club meeting, not at a tavern, but in a little room of Mr. Grace's set apart for that purpose, a proposition was made by me, that since our books were often refer'd to in our disquisitions upon the queries, it might be convenient for us to have them together where we met, that upon occasions they might be consulted; and by thus clubbing our books to a common library, we should while we lik'd it keep them together, have each of us the advantage of using the books of all the other members, which would be nearly as beneficial as if each owned the whole. It was lik'd and agreed to, and we fill'd one end of the room with such books as we could best spare. The number was not so great as we expected; and tho' they had been of great use, yet some inconvenience occurring for want of due care of them, the collection, after about a year, was separated, and each took his books home again. And now I set on foot my first project of a public nature, that for a subscription library. I drew up proposals, got them put into form by our great scrivener, Brockden, and by the help of my friends of the Junto, procured fifty subscribers of forty shillings each to begin with and ten shillings a year for fifty years, the term our company was to continue. We afterwards obtained a charter, the company being increased to one hundred; this was the mother of all the North American subscription libraries, now so numerous."

The Instrument of Association was dated July 1, 1731, and between that date and 1742, when they obtained their second charter, eighty-five signed the Articles.

The first to sign was Robert Grace, described by Franklin as being, "a young gentleman of some fortune, generous,

lively, and witty; a lover of punning and of his friends." The second was Thomas Hopkinson, father of Francis Hopkinson, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. The share passed from father to son for four generations and finally became the property of Christ Church, in which name it now stands, having been in but five names in one hundred and eighty years. The third signer was Benjamin Franklin; his share descended to Benjamin Franklin Bache, William Duane, Jr., Franklin Bache, and is now in the name of Thomas Hewson Bache.

Other original shares are still owned by the descendants of those who first signed the Articles of Association.

As the "Junto" was composed of but few members, the greater part of the subscribers were not those associated with the original club. William Rawle acquired share No. 42 in 1732; he appears to have been the first American donor, having presented on the 12th of March, 1733, "six volumes of the works of Mr. Edmund Spenser" and the Minute recording this gift with great simplicity says: "the famous old English poem called Spenser's Fairy Queen is included in these works." The William Rawle share is now in the name of William Brooke Rawle. Samuel Coates had share No. 67, in 1736, which descended to Dr. Benjamin Hornor Coates and is now owned by Joseph Hornor Coates, having been in the name of Coates for one hundred and seventy-six years.

By one interested in such matters quite a long list might be made of original shares coming down in the same family to the present time, in fact one of the most interesting books in the Library is "A Chronological Register of the names of Members," prepared in 1839 by Zachariah Poulson, one of the Directors, and continued to the present time.

The first Board of Directors was as follows:—Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Hopkinson, William Parsons, Philip Syng, Jr., Thomas Godfrey, Anthony Nicholas, Thomas Cadwalader, John Jones, Jr., Robert Grace, and Isaac Pennington, Treasurer William Coleman, and the first meeting was held on the evening of the 8th of November, 1731, at the house of Nicholas Scull. The Minutes of the Company begin as follows:—"The Minutes of me, Joseph Breintnall, Secretary to the Directors of the Library Company of Philadelphia, with such of the Minutes of the same Directors as they order me to

make. Begun the 8th Day of November, 1731. By virtue of the Deed or Instrument of the said Company dated the first Day of July last." Several meetings were held at the house of Nicholas Scull and much discussion took place as to when the first importation of books should be made and what books should be ordered. At a meeting held March 29th, 1732, "it was thought best to meet for a private conversation, Thomas Godfrey at this meeting informed us that Mr. Logan had let him know he would willingly give his advice of the choice of the books . . . he was desired to return the thanks of the Committee to Mr. Logan for his generous offer—and the Committee esteeming Mr. Logan to be a Gentlemen of universal learning, and the best judge of books in these parts, ordered that Mr. Godfrey should wait on him and request him to favour them with a catalogue of suitable books." At a meeting held March 31st, 1732, Robert Grace, "to expedite the affair, offered to draw on his own correspondent in London for such a sum sterling as would answer the money in the Treasurer's hands." Accordingly a Bill of Forty Five Pounds Sterling, on Peter Collinson, Mercer in Gracious Street, London, payable to Thomas Hopkinson, together with a list of the books wanted, was sent to Mr. Hopkinson.

It is of interest to know what books were on this list as showing the tastes and wishes of the readers of that time and it is also of interest to know that at the present time (1912) a number of the books then ordered are still on the shelves of the Library.

Books ordered March 31st, 1732:—

#### CATALOGUE OF BOOKS

Puffendorf's Introduc'n. 8 vo.	Hayes upon Fluxions.
Dr. Howel's History of ye World. 3 vols. Fo.	Keil's Astronomical Lectures.
Rapin's History of England. 12 vols. 8 vo.	Drake's Anatomy.
Salmon's Modern History.	Sidney on Government.
Vertot's Revolutions.	Cato's Letters.
Plutarch's Lives in small vol.	Sieurs DuPort Royal moral essays.
Stanley's Lives of ye Philosophers.	Crousay's Art of Thinking.
Annals of Tacitus by Gordon.	Spectator.
	Guardian.
	Tatler.
	Puffendorf's Laws of Nature, &c.