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Making the private public: Anne Willing Bingham's role as a leader of Philadelphia's social elite in the late eighteenth century

Nicholson, Wendy Anne, M.A.

University of Delaware, 1988

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MAKING THE PRIVATE PUBLIC

ANNE WILLING BINGHAM'S ROLE AS A LEADER OF

PHILADELPHIA'S SOCIAL ELITE IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

by

Wendy A. Nicholson

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture

May 1988

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In 1900 Anne Hollingsworth Wharton wrote *Salons Colonial and Republican*, an anecdotal social history of the American elite in the second half of the eighteenth century. "It has always been the ambition and delight of a certain class of superior women to rule and shine in a social atmosphere somewhat different from that of the conventional ball and dinner," she declared. The author ranked Anne Willing Bingham among these "superior" women, calling her "a great social leader in Philadelphia life." Wharton's assertion raises many issues that historians have begun to address in studies dealing with gentility and with the intersection of material goods and elite social and political behavior. If Anne Bingham was indeed a social leader in postrevolutionary Philadelphia, an examination of her life should demonstrate the ways in which a woman might use genteel behavior and material possessions to achieve and maintain a position of prominence in society.

There are nearly two hundred references to Anne and her husband, William Bingham, in contemporary letters and diaries, in addition to William's own letters and letterbook, inventory information, descriptions of their houses in eighteenth-century correspondence.
and later histories, and records of the Bingham estate. These references touch on various aspects of the Binghams' lives and, although they do not lend themselves to a comparison of descriptions on any one subject, specific references can be used to form and illuminate particular points about their actions, houses, and furnishings. Anne Bingham's behavior, material possessions, and entertainments are aspects of her life that were self-consciously created and performed for an audience of her peers. Therefore, the views of Anne's contemporaries provide a commentary of her actions and the methods she used to attain and maintain a position of social leadership.

Anne Bingham (1764-1801), informally known as Nancy, was Thomas and Anne McCall Willing's eldest child (fig. 1). The Willings were one of Philadelphia's wealthy families, established when Charles Willing moved to the city from Bristol in 1728 to take charge of his family's mercantile house in the colony. Charles married Ann Shippen in 1730 and proceeded to build a lucrative business trading with Europe and the West Indies, to involve himself in politics, becoming mayor of the city in 1748 and 1754, and to become a pillar of the Anglican church. The eldest of their eleven children was Thomas, Anne Bingham's father, who inherited his father's business in 1754 at the age of twenty-three. He took as his partner twenty-year-old Robert Morris, and the two made Willing and Morris a successful Philadelphia firm. Like his father before him, Thomas also assumed an active role in politics. He represented Pennsylvania in both
Fig. 1. Anne Willing Bingham, ca. 1786. From a sketch by Gilbert Stuart. Decorative Arts Photographic Collection, Winterthur Library.
Continental Congresses. His fortune survived the trade dislocations of the Revolution, and he later became president of both the Bank of North America and the Bank of the United States.

Thomas Willing was as fortunate in his marriage as he was in his political and business ventures. He married Anne McCall, member of another wealthy, Anglican, mercantile family, in 1763. According to the only surviving description, this "sweet fine lady" was possessed of an "excellent understanding and did the honours, as well as shine in the economy and management of a family."² Anne McCall Willing bore thirteen children between 1764 and 1780, eight sons and five daughters, three of whom died in infancy. She never recovered from the birth of her last child and died in 1781 at the age of thirty-six.

On October 26, 1780, Thomas and Anne's eldest child, sixteen-year-old Anne, married twenty-eight-year-old William Bingham, a merchant with whom Willing and Morris had had several business arrangements during the late 1770s. William Bingham's father, also William, began his career as a saddler. An excellent marriage to Mary Stamper and a partnership with his father-in-law, John Stamper, allowed the elder Bingham to become a merchant and acquire a great deal of wealth in the rum trade with the West Indies. Son William Bingham (1754-1804) attended the College of Philadelphia, graduating with honors in 1768. The elder Bingham died in 1769, and the son,
after receiving a master of arts degree in 1771 and mercantile training at Thomas Wharton's firm, went on the grand tour in 1773 before establishing himself as a merchant. Bingham gained political recognition and improved his personal circumstances by issuing letters of marque and reprisal while serving as agent of the Continental Congress in Martinique between 1776 and 1779. During the 1780s Bingham made a second trip to Europe, constructed an imposing house in Philadelphia, and continued to build his fortune. The Bingham's first child, Ann Louisa, was born in 1782, shortly before they sailed for Europe; daughter Maria Matilda was born in England the following year.

While in Europe the Binghams spent the majority of the three years in London and Paris, where Anne became a member of social gatherings. William wrote the first of his two pamphlets in London in 1784, "Letter from an American Now Resident in London, to a Member of Parliament . . . on the Commerce of the United States," advocating the elimination of restrictions on the trade between the United States and Great Britain. The Binghams returned to Philadelphia in 1786. In the late 1780s and the 1790s Bingham consolidated a spectacular fortune, primarily through securities and land speculation in western Pennsylvania and Maine. When the Maine properties did not yield a suitably high profit, Bingham wrote another pamphlet, "A Description of the Situation, Climate, Soil and Productions of Certain Tracts of Land in the District of Maine and Commonwealth of
Massachusetts," in 1793 to promote the sale of the undeveloped lands as farms, an effort that failed. Eventually Bingham served as United States Senator from Pennsylvania during John Adams's administration and became deeply embroiled in the conflict between the Federalists and the Democrats, giving his support to the Federalists. He survived the financial and political fluctuations of the 1790s, maintaining his wealth and power until his death in 1804.

Bingham built his ostentatious house in 1786 on Third Street at Spruce, one block away from his father-in-law's house at Third and Willing Alley. Over the next eleven years Bingham purchased two others houses: Landsdown on the Schuylkill River and Bellevue in southern New Jersey. He and his wife entertained and participated in Philadelphia society on a grand scale throughout the late 1780s and the 1790s. The Bingham's third child, William, was born in December 1800. Possibly because Anne went on a sleighing party too soon after this confinement, she caught a cold that worsened and was eventually diagnosed as galloping consumption. On April 13, 1801, Benjamin Latrobe recorded:

Mrs. Bingham, as the last resort for life, goes this day on board a Vessel intended to carry her to Lisbon. Her husband & daughter & Abby Willing [Anne's sister] accompany her & she is scarcely expected to live a week her leaden coffin is part of the Cargo. What a melancholy set!
The Bingham's never made it to Lisbon. They were forced by Anne's deteriorating condition to disembark in Bermuda. She died there May 11, 1801.

Anne Bingham's life, at first glance, seems to have been made up of one social gathering after another. These entertainments may now seem frivolous, but then they were neither pointless nor unimportant. Her involvement in Philadelphia's social life served both the political and the personal needs of her husband and herself. Anne's hospitality was extended to William's political allies, and sometimes his political foes, providing an opportunity for the alliances and reconciliations that allowed Bingham to maintain the political power he had gained through his wealth. Although Anne could not wield political power, she exercised personal power in Philadelphia society based upon her social behavior, material possessions, and elaborate entertainments. Whether they praised or censured her appearance and behavior, people always paid attention to what Anne wore, what she did, and how she did it. Further, some of her contemporaries used Anne's actions as the standard for their own behavior, and the attention afforded Anne and her husband by others was the foundation of her social leadership.

An understanding of Anne's activities at the height of her popularity as a hostess must begin with an exploration of her social behavior and a comparison of this behavior with contemporary writings.
on gentility. To be genteel, according to the Oxford English Dictionary is to "belong to or be included among the gentry, to possess stylish, fashionably elegant or sumptuous clothing and dwellings, to be polished, well-bred, gentlemanly or lady-like in appearance, well-dressed, elegant and graceful." The eighteenth-century Dictionarium Britannicum defined the genteel as "having the Air, Behavior or carriage of a Gentleman; also handsomely dressed, neat, and gallant." The work of modern scholars in eighteenth-century deference and gentility indicates that the elite were constantly striving to meet high behavioral standards. Sociologist Norbert Elias assumes that a progressive sense of propriety and an ever-increasing number of rules for conduct governed social behavior from the fifteenth century onward, culminating in the rigid etiquette of the nineteenth century. Elias calls this the "civilizing process." Historian Richard Bushman considers the "ideal of cultivation," the personal quest for physical grace and the development of genteel attitudes, to be the norm for elite behavior in the eighteenth century. As the daughter of a wealthy family, Anne, according to the arguments of Elias and Bushman, should have absorbed and displayed the genteel behavior of those around her. Contemporary descriptions of Anne's appearance and behavior, measured against late eighteenth-century prescriptive literature, provide information on how well her behavior conformed to a general standard and the ways in
which her gentility, or lack of it, affected her role in Philadelphia society.

The second section of the thesis discusses the relationship between Anne's material life and her social success. Studies on the material culture of the Philadelphia elite show that an increasing number and variety of goods were available to these consumers and that wealthy homes became more elaborate after the Revolution. Historian Kevin Sweeney has argued that elsewhere an elite used the architecture of their houses to reflect and bolster their regional, social, and political supremacy. The Binghams' houses and their furnishings can be used to test how Anne and William used material possessions to convey social influence in Philadelphia.

Finally, the third section examines Anne Bingham's entertainments in the late 1780s and the 1790s, combining information gained in the analysis of her behavior and material possessions to illuminate the reasons for her social success. Anne entertained elaborately and brought to her houses a wide range of people, including upper-class residents of the city, politicians, and European travelers. With regard to Philadelphia's postrevolutionary elite, historian Ethel Rasmusson argues that there were two separate groups, the national elite and the provincial elite, each based on kinship and political and social orientation. According to Rasmusson, the national group, of which Anne was a member, flourished while
Philadelphia was the nation's capital and was characterized by an extravagant life-style and membership based on wealth. The provincial group was made up of older, more conservative families. The provincial elite gained the upper hand when the capital was moved to Washington in 1800 as the national group disintegrated due to the bankruptcies and deaths of its principal members. A discussion of Anne Bingham's entertainments will analyze the ways in which she achieved her personal success and, at the same time, will test the division of the elite set forth by Rasmusson, especially the requirements for elite status, and therefore the closed or open nature of Philadelphia's upper class in the 1790s.
Notes

1Anne Hollingsworth Wharton, Salons Colonial and Republican (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1900), pp. 11, 137.


4Alberts, Golden Voyage, p. 526 n. 411.

5Benjamin Henry Latrobe to a friend, April 13, 1801, in "Notes and Queries," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 42, no. 1 (1881): 183.


CHAPTER 2

"She Is Shown a Goddess and She Moved a Queen"
Anne Bingham and Late Eighteenth-Century Gentility

The many contemporary descriptions of Anne Bingham create a fragmented picture of an attractive, unconventional woman. These descriptions, based on Anne's public appearance and behavior, can be likened to a performance for the benefit of an audience of her peers. Because the records of Anne's performances are incomplete, it is necessary to compare Anne's behavior and appearance with the prescribed gentility of the late eighteenth century. This literature established a standard in light of which Anne's performances can be measured and understood. Prescriptive literature presents its own problems, since rules for behavior reflect ideal rather than actual conduct. Advice books written specifically for women, popular after the Revolution owing to a new emphasis on female education and morality, are particularly of limited utility when applied to Anne. In some respects, the literature designed for men is more useful. Still, a comparison of Anne's performances with the standards articulated in prescriptive literature helps to place Anne in her historical context, specifically comparisons of conversation, dress, and comportment. After discussing the ways in which Anne Bingham's
behavior and appearance differed from prescriptive standards, the reasons for these differences can be addressed.

The outstanding advice book of the late eighteenth century was the Earl of Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son*. The book first appeared in Philadelphia in 1775, the year after its initial publication in England, and was reprinted twice between 1775 and 1780 in addition to printings in New York, Boston, Newburyport, and Providence. The book's popularity was due, in part, to the fame of the author. Philip Dormer Stanhope, the fourth Earl of Chesterfield, an active politician and diplomat, devoted himself to his son's education, writing him copious letters expounding on the methods of becoming a gentleman. Chesterfield (1694-1773) held the positions of Ambassador to the Hague, Lord Steward of George II's household, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and Secretary of State between 1730 and his retirement from politics in 1748. In the midst of official responsibilities, frequent travel, and constant participation in society, Chesterfield began corresponding with Philip, his illegitimate son by Mlle. de Bouchet. The correspondence began when the boy was only five years old and continued until the young man's death in 1768. Throughout these letters Chesterfield stressed the importance of gentility, both to adorn knowledge and sense and to open the doors of the fashionable world.
Chesterfield's Letters to His Son were published posthumously in 1774 by Eugenia Stanhope, whom the younger Stanhope had married secretly, thus spoiling his father's plans for a better match. Eugenia compiled the letters immediately upon Chesterfield's death, and, although representatives of the earl's estate tried to stop publication by applying for an injunction, she successfully sold the letters to a printer for £1,500. Letters proved widely popular, going through eleven editions in England by 1800.4

American demand for advice manuals, fueled by the popularity of Chesterfield's Letters, was supplied by a number of similar books. Between 1776 and 1780, during Anne Bingham's adolescence, books such as A Father's Legacy to His Daughters, The Principles of Politeness, and The Art of Speaking were printed in Philadelphia.5 Numerous others were imported from England. The Lady's Pocket Library (Philadelphia, 1792), although a later book, provides a useful comparison with Anne's behavior because it is a compilation of essays previously printed in England and America including "Miss Moore's Essays," "Doctor Gregory's Legacy to His Daughters," "Mrs. Chapone's Letter on the Government of the Temper," "Swift's Letter to a Young Lady Newly Married," and "Moore's Fables for the Female Sex." All these essays explained the nature of suitable female accomplishments and emphasized the necessity for female morality.
While movement, bearing, and dress communicated an individual's grace and gentility in the eighteenth century, authors of prescriptive literature asserted that a proper manner of speaking and conversing was the most important accomplishment because speech displayed both knowledge and elegance. Chesterfield had warned, "Words were given us to communicate our ideas by, and there must be something inconceivably absurd in uttering them in such a manner that people cannot understand them." And, "all the knowledge, sense, and reasoning in the world will never make you an applauded speaker, without the ornaments and the graces of style, elocution, and action." But the greater part of his advice was directed at social conversation. A genteel person must talk often but not long in conversation, eschew long stories, refrain from holding anyone by the button or hand, avoid arguments in mixed company, abstain from speaking of himself, shun seeming dark and mysterious, and forego swearing and telling or receiving scandal. Chesterfield had much lower expectations for females in conversation: "Women, then, are only children for a larger growth; they have an entertaining tattle and sometimes wit; but for solid reasoning, good sense, I never knew one in my life that had it."  

Authors of prescriptive literature expected women to undertake a different role in conversation than men. Miss Moore exhorted women to "promote the most useful and elegant conversation, almost without speaking a word."
A woman, in a company where she has the least influence, may promote any subject by a profound and invariable attention, which shows that she is pleased with it, and by an illuminated countenance, which proves she understands it. This obliging attention is the most flattering encouragement in the world to men of sense and letters, to continue any topic of instruction or entertainment they happen to be engaged in.7

Women placed themselves in danger of seeming imprudent or indiscreet in conversation when they mistook their own flippancy for wit, employed ridicule, and either censured or overapplauded other women. Of all the female qualifications for conversation, humility, if not the most brilliant, was the safest, most amiable, and most feminine—to display talents superior to the rest of the company was dangerous and foolish.8

From all reports, Anne Bingham's conversation came closer to Chesterfield's ideal for a man than to Miss Moore's for young women. As early as 1784 Anne had established her style

She joins in every conversation in company; and when she is engaged herself in conversing with you, she will, by joining directly in another chit chat with another party, convince you that she was all attention to everyone.9

Her conversation was often substantive in addition to entertaining. Well over a decade after her return to Philadelphia, she still would "talk of European politicks, and [could] give the history of the late King of France," even to men to whom she had just been introduced. Some men disliked her traits. Joshua Francis Fisher accused her of "too much freedom of speech, & an interlarding of oaths, a most detestable custom."10 Refusing to keep silent and humble, and
engaging in conversation of substance, Anne ignored prescribed behavior.

Proper dress, a second prerequisite for the genteel person, was presumed to be an outward indicator of character for men and women. The Earl of Chesterfield urged his son to be clean and to dress as well as the sensible, fashionable people around him. Dressing better than his peers branded a man a fop, while dressing worse proved him negligent. Yet, of the two extremes, Chesterfield preferred overdressing to underdressing. Beyond manifesting the character, dress was meant to impress the opposite sex:

to neglect your dress, is an affront to all the women you keep company with; as it implies you do not think them worth the attention which everybody else doth; they mind dress, and you will never please them if you neglect yours; and if you do not please the women, you will not please half the men you otherwise might. It is women who put a young fellow in fashion even with men.

Since men dressed well to please women, women were likewise advised to please men in dress and appearance. According to Miss Moore, beyond neatness, dress should conceal any blemishes and set off feminine beauty. Because men considered dress expressive of a woman's character, Miss Moore advocated elegant simplicity in clothing as evidence of feminine taste and delicacy. Lady Pennington agreed, adding that ill-placed finery was not ornamental but ridiculous. The late eighteenth century was a time of extravagance and rapid changes in female clothing, and Lady Pennington hoped that her
daughter would comply with changes in fashion so far as to avoid singularity, but shun extremes in dress, especially inconvenient extremes, as they were the sign of a weak mind.\textsuperscript{13}

Anne followed her own path. At the age of twenty-one, Anne, then mother of two, had few qualms about calling attention to herself or her husband's ability to keep her in stylish garb:

The elegance of her dress demands a description; a black Velvet dress with pink satin sleeves and stomacher, a pink satin petticoat, and over it a skirt of white crape, spotted all over with gray fur; the sides of the gown were open in front, and bottom of the coat trimmed in paste.\textsuperscript{14}

Two years later, shortly after returning to Philadelphia, Anne blaz'd upon a large party at Mr. [Robert] Morris's in a dress which eclips'd any that has yet been seen. A robe à la Turke of black Velvet, Rich White sattin Petticoat, body and sleeves, the whole trim'd with Ermine. A large Bouquet of natural flowers supported by a knot of Diamonds, Large Buckles, Necklace and Earrings of Diamonds, Her Head ornamented with Diamond Sprigs interspers'd with artificial flowers, above all wav'd a towering plume of snow white feathers.\textsuperscript{15}

Anne's robes à l'Anglaise and accessories were typical of those that were popular in Paris in the mid 1780s, where buckles in a variety of patterns were in huge demand and Marie Antoinette had brought the use of feathers in the hair into vogue.\textsuperscript{16} When empire gowns became fashionable in Europe at the very end of the eighteenth century, Anne was one of their early and chief proponents in Philadelphia, prompting First Lady Abigail Adams to comment that Anne showed "more of the [bosom] than the decent Matron, or the Modest woman."\textsuperscript{17}
The third hallmark of gentility was a combination of manners, deportment, and countenance, called the graces. In Chesterfield's view, having good manners included carving, eating, and drinking genteelly and with ease and guarding against ill-bred, disgusting habits, such as scratching oneself and putting one's fingers in the mouth, nose, and ears. In order to improve deportment, "a habitual genteel carriage and manner of presenting yourself," the earl advised his son to learn the minuet. Chesterfield also insisted that observing what fashionable people did with their legs, arms, heads, and bodies would improve his son's deportment. In terms of countenance, or the control of facial expression while in company, one must assume an open, cheerful, but unsmirking visage.  

Although the graces were as important for women as for men, writers of women's prescriptive literature preferred female morals to feminine accomplishments.

Let the exterior be made a considerable object of attention; but let it not be the principal. . . . Let the graces be industriously cultivated; but let them not be cultivated at the expense of the virtues.  

As in conversation and in dress, women were advised to be modest and unassuming rather than aggressive in their manners. Cultivate "an easy dignity in your behavior in public places, but not that confident ease, that unabashed countenance, which seems to set the company at defiance."
Anne Bingham's manners, like her conversation and dress, were closer to Chesterfield's pronouncements than to the advice of The Lady's Pocket Library. Anne eschewed passivity, especially in company. "The intelligence of her countenance, or rather I ought to say animation, the elegance of her form, and the affability of her manners, convert you into admiration."\textsuperscript{21} Anne's only surviving substantive letter discussed the accomplishments of French women and, by association, aspirations and goals for her own behavior:

The Women of France interfere in the politics of the Country, and often give a decided Turn to the Fate of Empires. Either by the gentle Arts of persuasion, or by the commanding force of superior Attractions and Address, they have obtained the Rank and Consideration in society, which the Sex are intitled to, and which they in vain contend for in other Countries.\textsuperscript{22}

The disjunction between Anne's behavior and prescriptive literature is clear. The Binghams' 1783-86 tour of Europe had a marked effect on this behavior. Used to the company of family, Anne suddenly enjoyed acquaintances and experiences completely foreign to most of her female contemporaries in Philadelphia. The combined influence of her husband, new company and activities, and widespread admiration produced a noticeable change in Anne's behavior and attitudes. This change provoked censure from her family, particularly the aunts who had helped to raise and educate Anne. Shortly after their arrival in Europe William Bingham responded angrily to a letter from Anne's Aunt Francis:
Indeed [Anne] possesses Virtues, which were but little known in America, or she might have escaped the ill directed Censure of Some of her Relations, which have often given her the most exquisite & Poignant Distress. A letter recently received from her Aunt Francis (though originating from the most affectionate Views) has caused the Tears of Sensibility most plentifully to flow from her. It seems intended in a pointed Matter to address Advice to her, as if she stood in very urgent need of it. For my part, I do not believe that in Thought, Word, or Deed, she was ever imprudent.  

Another aunt, Elizabeth Powel, also feared Anne’s conduct while abroad:

I find from every direction that Nancy Bingham is charmed & delighted with London. Its gaieties & Pleasures are, I suppose, perfectly adapted to her juvenile Ideas, & she had no Affections to be wounded by Separation from her natural Friends, of course no regrets to allay her Joys. . . . [I]t will be happy for her if she has retained some of the ancient Impressions that I was so solicitous to make on her Mind when I was her Oracle.

Although Anne’s aunts worried about the combination of her youth and the novelties Europe had to offer, William assured his father-in-law that this combination was proving beneficial:

Should you discover any change in your Daughter, I can assure you, it will be for the better. . . . Her constant intercourse with the fashionable world may have polished her Manners, and a continual Variety of new Scenes may have furnished Reflections, which would otherwise have lain dormant, for want of opportunities to call them forth. Her Judgement is consequently riper, and her Knowledge of Mankind, more correct and extensive. She has seen the best of Company, which it was my Pride and Pleasure to have her introduced into.

The opportunities Anne found in Europe were made possible by her husband, the most influential person in her life. Because Bingham’s influence governed Anne’s life in Europe, as well as her
later experiences in Philadelphia, his character and his relationship with his wife are important. Bingham was an ambitious man, and his actions and behavior unfavorably impressed many of his contemporaries. Shortly after being introduced, Nabby Adams wrote, "I am mistaken if he does not lack some essential qualifications to make him either respected or admired," an opinion she never revised.\(^{26}\)

Thomas Jefferson thoroughly disliked and distrusted Bingham and warned James Madison:

> He will make you believe he was on the most intimate footing with the first characters of Europe and versed in the secrets of every cabinet. Not a word of this is true. He had a rage for getting presented to great men and no modesty in the methods by which he could effect it. If he obtained access afterwards, it was with such as who were susceptible of impression from the beauty of his wife.\(^ {27}\)

Alexander Baring, soon to be Bingham's son-in-law, left the most damming analysis of Bingham's character in 1796:

> There is a littleness about the man in trifles that will make him for instance dispute all the tavern bills on the road, but when he thinks the world looks at him, his pride makes him make up that artificial character which he thinks a man of his fortune should have. He knows how to treat his equals but not his inferiors and is consequently unpopular or he would otherwise have been raised to the Vice President's chair.

Baring's father, Sir Francis, remembered Bingham in a kinder fashion, eulogizing him in 1804:

> I never saw a more firm manly mind, nor . . . more stern integrity; solely occupied with the consideration of what was correctly right, without suffering the slightest bias or partiality to operate upon his mind.\(^{28}\)
In spite of what they thought about Bingham's personality, contemporaries agreed that he was consistently kind to his wife and that the Binghams enjoyed a close and loving relationship. John Jay, a friend, applauded their marriage, convinced that both partners had made a judicious choice that would lead to happiness. Nabby Adams conceded that the Binghams were "really domestic, and the principles of affection and domestic happiness are so very apparent, that I never see them that I do not gain a higher opinion of that state." Anne's affection for her husband amused her father who penned a comic passage in a letter to Bingham, then in New York, in 1788:

[Anne] is so nearly crazy at your long absence, that, although she has not yet walked in her sleep, yet she started up in her bed last night, dreaming of you, I suppose, and knocked her head violently against the wall. She complains of her head yet, and we all laugh heartily at her complaints--so you may believe she is not very bad.

Because their relationship was close, Anne entered fully into William's ambitions for political and social advancement in Europe and Pennsylvania. Bingham's primary political goal in the early and mid 1780s involved securing a diplomatic post. According to Charles Dumas, Anne not only supported William in this ambition but also "passionately desired" such a position for her husband. In order to obtain an office, Bingham, as Jefferson mightily complained, imposed himself on powerful men. Nabby Adams wryly recounted:
Mr. B[ingham] came flourishing out in the morning to accompany papa to Versailles, to be presented to his most Christian majesty, the King of France, with his four horses and three servants, in all the pomp of an American merchant. About twelve they returned, as there was no court.

Bingham finally managed to be presented a month later, but he never received his coveted diplomatic appointment.\textsuperscript{32}

The Bingham's social ambitions while in Europe proved more fruitful. Like many Americans abroad, they sought out the company of other Americans, but William and Anne also gained entry into the society of the European nobility. In Paris they dined at the Adamses' home with dignitaries like the Marquis de la Fayette and his wife, the Chevalier de la Luzerne, and the Dutch ambassador.\textsuperscript{33} The Bingham's pursuit of the English nobility became a family joke for the Adamses in 1786. Nabby recounted to John Quincy, "Mr. and Mrs. Bingham called in the evening. They had dined with Lord Landsdowne, and called to let us know it I suppose." A few days later Abigail wrote to her son:

Mr. and Mrs. Bingham arrived here about three weeks ago with a full determination to go out to America in March, but having as usual spared no pains to get introduced to the families of Lord Landsdowne and my Lady Lucans, they are so supremely blest that poor America looks like a bugbear to them.\textsuperscript{34}

Anne Bingham filled an important role in her husband's social ambitions. Her beauty and behavior charmed European nobles and American diplomats alike, opening doors that might otherwise have
been closed to her husband. Thomas Jefferson, with whom Anne carried on a correspondence after her return to Philadelphia, was one of her admirers, despite his distaste for her husband. John Adams described a supper given for Anne at the court of the Prince and Princess of Orange: "There was a great Enquiry after her, and much admiration expressed by all who had seen her, of her Beauty."35 Anne's social behavior was increasingly modeled on the examples she observed in European society and was reinforced by the widespread approval she received from her new acquaintances.

Anne's European popularity reached a zenith in London with her presentation to court in 1786. Abigail Adams, who was also present, wrote to her son:

"She is shown a goddess and she moved a queen." The various whispers which I heard around me, and the pressing of the ladies to get a sight of her, was really curious. . . . "Is she an American?" I heard frequently repeated, and even the ladies were obliged to confess that she was truly an elegant woman. . . . [T]he Emperor's Ambassador whispered your Pappa, "Sir, your country produces exceeding fine women!"36

Afterward Anne became something of a public figure, and her picture was engraved and sold in the shops. Even Nabby Adams's London hairdresser enquired after "the lady so much talked of from America."37

Anne Bingham began her travels in Europe as an inexperienced young woman from a provincial capital and emerged three years later a widely admired and fashionable lady. William Bingham's social ambitions had thrown his wife into the society of nobles and diplomats,
and she acquitted herself admirably. Returning to the contrast between Anne's behavior and prescribed female behavior in The Lady's Pocket Library, the reasons for Anne's lack of conformity with the authors' ideal becomes obvious in light of her European social success. Encouraged by approval and flattery, Anne developed outgoing behavior and an extravagant appearance because her goal was to shine in society rather than to reflect the brilliance of others. She also actively abetted her husband's aggressive maneuvers to gain a foothold in Europe's political and fashionable world. Anne Bingham's experiences between 1783 and 1786 formed both her behavior and her ambition to recreate the scenes of her European success upon her return to Philadelphia.
Notes

1 An interpretation of social interaction as theater can be found in Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959).


5 Evans, *American Bibliography*.


14 Nabby Adams, February 21, 1785, in Journal and Correspondence, p. 50.


16 Price, Dame Fashion, pp. 3-4.


19 Miss Moore, "Thoughts on the Cultivation of the Heart and the Temper in the Education of Daughters," in Lady's Library, p. 50.

20 Dr. Gregory, "Legacy to His Daughters," in Lady's Library, p. 94.


22 Anne Bingham to Thomas Jefferson, June 1, 1787, as quoted in Alberts, Golden Voyage, p. 465.

23 William Bingham to Thomas Willing, November 3, 1783, William Bingham Correspondence, 1783-86, HSP.

24 Elizabeth Powel to Margaret Hare, October 2, 1783, Elizabeth Powel Personal Correspondence, HSP.

25 William Bingham to Thomas Willing, December 14, 1784, Bingham Correspondence.

26 Nabby Adams, April 8, 1785, in Journal and Correspondence, pp. 70-71.

Alexander Baring to Hope and Co., February 26, 1796, Sir Francis Baring to Rufus King, March 1, 1804, as quoted in Alberts, Golden Voyage, pp. 283, 428.

John Jay to William Bingham, September 8, 1781, as quoted in Alberts, Golden Voyage, p. 100.

Nabby Adams, January 20, 1785, in Journal and Correspondence, p. 44; Thomas Willing to William Bingham, August 29, 1788, Bingham Correspondence.


Nabby Adams, October 19, November 30, 1784, in Journal and Correspondence, pp. 27-28, 34-35.

Nabby Adams, November 30, 1784, in Journal and Correspondence, p. 56.

Nabby Adams to John Quincy Adams, February 13, 16, 1786, as quoted in Alberts, Golden Voyage, pp. 153-54.


Abigail Adams to John Quincy Adams, February 16, 1786, as quoted in Alberts, Golden Voyage, p. 155.

Nabby Adams to John Quincy Adams, February 13, 1786, as quoted in Alberts, Golden Voyage, pp. 153-54.
CHAPTER 3

"A Palace Far Too Rich for Any Man in This Country"
The Material Life of the Bingham

To recreate their social success in Europe and assume a place of importance in Philadelphia elite society, the Bingham's tried to replicate a European material setting in America. They built Mansion House in Philadelphia in 1786 and later obtained Landsdown on the banks of the Schuylkill four miles from the city and Bellevue on Black Point in southern New Jersey. That Anne and William used their prosperity and material life to further their social ambitions is apparent from the construction, layout, and furnishing of their home and the two country houses.

Mansion House fronted Third Street at Spruce, and its grounds extended west to Fourth Street, occupying nearly three acres of land. In what seems to have been a typical Willing family pattern, the Bingham's built their house close to the homes of relatives. Anne's father, her younger siblings—Charles, Thomas, Elizabeth, Mary, Dorothy, George, Richard, Abigail, and William—her grandmother Ann Shippen Willing, and her unmarried Aunt Abigail lived in the Willing house at Third Street and Willing Alley less than a block away. Between the Bingham and the Willing houses on Third Street was

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the home of Anne's Aunt Elizabeth and her husband, Samuel Powel. On the north side of the Powel house was the Byrd/Penn/Chew house which had been built in 1761/62 for Aunt Mary Willing Byrd and William Byrd III who had sold the house to John Penn when they returned permanently to Virginia in the mid 1760s.

Bingham generally modeled Mansion House after the Duke of Manchester's London home, designed by Joshua Brown in 1776 and finally completed in 1788. The Binghams were the duke's frequent guests between 1783 and 1786 and admired both Manchester House's imposing facade and its generous interior space for entertaining. Like many London town houses of the eighteenth century, it had an impressive ground-floor entrance hall and staircase that led up to the grand rooms on the first floor. These first-floor rooms formed a circuit, in that a guest could not enter all of them from the center hall, but only from the previous rooms.1 In choosing Manchester House as a model for their own home, the Binghams set the tone for their material life in Philadelphia—a home that would be both imposing and designed to facilitate entertaining. Bingham, having decided to copy the plan soon after arriving in England, worried about building such a grand edifice in Philadelphia and requested his father-in-law in 1784 not to "permit any one but the Persons to whom it is necessary to exhibit this Plan, See it—as it would only expose it to Criticism."2
Bingham directed the initial stages of the construction from Europe using Willing as his agent. The property Bingham wanted was owned by Richard Peters. Bingham commissioned Willing to buy this land in 1784, exercising the oral option he had received in return for a favor he had rendered Peters. Willing then ordered 100,000 linear feet of cedar and pine boards from a local mill, receiving about 50,000 feet before an increase in price prompted him to cease purchasing the following year. High price was also the reason that Willing sent Bingham instructions to buy specific items for the project while in Europe: sash glass, sash boards, brass cogs and pulleys for the sashes, locks for the outdoors, parlors, and closets, hinges, nails, sheet lead and window lead ready to be cast, and "Coulours all Ready ground in Oil." When Anne's uncle Robert Hare returned to America from England in summer 1785, he took over where Willing had left off, bought the rest of the lumber, and supervised the laying of the foundation and the building of the shell of the house. The Binghams returned to Philadelphia in May 1786, and the house was completed that fall. In the interim they rented William Logan's three-story brick house on Second Street between Chestnut and Walnut.

Mansion House was a three-story building with a three-part facade (fig. 2). The main part of the structure was a typical Georgian center-hall plan, two rooms across and two deep. The ground floor had a wing on either side, providing the first floor with
Mansion House was architecturally faithful to its London model in its five-bay facade and venetian window on the first floor, but it lacked the giant pilasters which provided the strong verticals that relieved the definite horizontal appearance of Manchester House. The Bingham house also lacked Manchester House's rusticated ground floor. Otherwise, Mansion House was decorated with architectural details then fashionable in London, including back and front bow windows and stuccowork figures.6

Some contemporary reaction to the architecture of Mansion House was, as Bingham had feared, critical. Two comments are representative. Ann Warder, a young Quaker, called the house "very ungentle ... as it much resembles some of our heavy public buildings." Architect Charles Bulfinch evaluated it as a house "in a stile which would be splendid even in the most luxurious part of Europe," and, he added, it was "a palace far too rich for any man in this country."

The reactions of Warder and Bulfinch are significant, first, because they indicate that individuals with very different backgrounds and perspectives formed similar impressions of Mansion House and, second, because both recognized the great difference between the architecture of this house and that of all the other domestic structures in Philadelphia. Throughout most of the eighteenth century, Philadelphia was known for its plain brick houses, even for the elite. Mansion House was the first domestic edifice to break with this pattern, defying what Bulfinch called Philadelphia's universal "quakerish neatness."7
Since Mansion House was damaged by fire, then demolished in the mid nineteenth century, and because no floor plan has survived, the layout of the Bingham's home must be inferred from a room-by-room inventory of the house's contents for an auction in 1805 (see Appendix), the floor plan of Manchester House, and a description of Mansion House's interior left by Rufus Griswold. The ground floor contained a central entrance hall that opened onto parlors on each side and a conservatory beyond the parlor on the south side. The dining room was probably behind the south front parlor, while the library was behind the north front parlor. The first floor consisted of the drawing room, immediately south of the landing, with a parlor in the southwest corner, then a bedroom and dressing room, probably in the northwest corner, and finally the ballroom directly north of the staircase. Rooms in the top story are undifferentiated in the 1805 inventory, but the objects listed indicate that there was one or more bedrooms and storage rooms. No inventory survives for the outbuildings, which must have included at least one kitchen (the Powel house had two kitchens), as well as a pantry for food and perhaps utensil storage, and a cellar. According to George Tatum in his study of the neighboring Powel house, considerations of space and convenience led Philadelphians by the mid eighteenth century to prefer back buildings situated near the main house, linked by an enclosed passage or a covered walkway. Griswold stated that the back buildings adjoined the Bingham's house on the west.
The buildings were carefully laid out on the grounds:

[Mansion House was] approached by a circular carriage way of gravel, the access upon both ends of which opened by swinging gates of iron open tracery. A low wall, with an elegant course of balusters upon it, defended the immediate front, and connected the gates which gave admission. The grounds about the house, beautifully diversified with walks, statuary shade and parterres, covered not less than three acres.¹⁰

Because the plan of the grounds, like that of the house, has been lost, the existence and use of land and buildings must be inferred from contemporary descriptions. Henry Wansey, a guest in 1794, viewed "a profusion of lemon, orange and citron trees; and many aloes, and other exotics" in the garden. Besides the gardens, the Binghams had stables, a greenhouse, and for a time two pet fawns.¹¹ Deer were not the only animals to roam the grounds. In 1795 Thomas Twining visited the Binghams after his trip to India, later recalling, "Mr. Bingham ... not only gave me a general invitation to his house but offered to take care of my great sheep during my stay."

Twining's great sheep, or "doombah," grazing on the lawn, as well as his Bengal cow housed in the stables, created quite a stir in Philadelphia, so Bingham opened his gardens to the public.¹²

The furnishings of Mansion House complemented both its facade and its entertainment-conscious floor plan. In 1783 Bingham instructed Willing to sell his old "[silver] Plate, the Set of Nankin Tea China & Looking Glasses for the most they will bring" and used that and other monies to purchase many of the furnishings for the new
house while abroad. The entrance hall on the ground floor contained some of these European purchases. In addition to the dozen, probably locally made, Windsor chairs, the hall was filled with European statuary including a bust of Voltaire, one of Rosseau, and three of Franklin on composition pedestals, bronze figures, a stone carved female figure, and finally a sundial on another pedestal.

The dining room was spectacularly furnished for entertaining: a pair of glass chandeliers and mirrors, a Sèvres tea set, 2 large French dinner services and another French tea set, sets of ceramics, probably English although they are not specified as such, sets of champagne, lemonade, water, and wineglasses, and several japanned knife cases and paper trays, all of which were either purchased while the Binghams were in Europe or imported later. The many other furnishings of the room probably also came from Europe, although the chairs and tables may have been made in America. More important than the origin of the dining room furnishings is their quantity: 24 leather-bottom mahogany chairs; a "large range of dining tables"; 679 pieces of ceramics, excluding a blue dinner set with gilt edges and blue-and-gold and pink-and-gold dessert sets which were not quantified; 206 drinking glasses; 28 dishes, cups, and baskets; 200 pieces of silver, including silverware and serving pieces; as well as 15 pieces of silver-plated ware and an unspecified number with silver mounts.
The other ground-floor rooms, the two parlors and the library, like the hall and the dining room, contained objects for entertainment and for show, and many of them originated in Europe. The furnishings indicate that the two parlors were used for meals, perhaps for breakfast or tea or when the Bingham's were not entertaining on a grand scale. The south parlor held two dining and three breakfast tables, a tea urn, three looking glasses, and a pianoforte. The furnishings of the north parlor were similar to those of the south parlor, except that the north room held eight tables instead of five, a harpsichord instead of a pianoforte, and a total of ten looking glasses. The library was more remarkable for its art than for its books. The three mahogany bookcases held four bronze figures, two urns, two busts, and a "centre piece," and a collection of paintings and prints, probably begun in Europe, covered the walls. No books were mentioned in the inventory.

A combination of mahogany furniture, patterned wallpaper, and textiles of great quantity and quality characterized the grand rooms on the first floor. English traveler Henry Wansey was amazed by the drawing room:

The chairs . . . were from Seddon's in London, of the newest taste; the back in the form of a lyre, with festoons of crimson and yellow silk. The curtains of the room a festoon of the same. The carpet one of Moore's most expensive patterns. The room was papered in the French taste, after the style of the Vatican at Rome.14

The ballroom was equally elaborate. It, like the dining room on the
floor below, held many objects used in entertaining: fifteen chairs with upholstered seats, another "range" of dining tables, two settees, twenty-one tablecloths, and thirty-five napkins. In 1805, at least, the room had a mahogany bedstead with a complete set of hangings and seven quilts. The first-floor south parlor fit the same pattern. It had twelve armchairs and a matching sofa upholstered in yellow and pink silk, three card tables, and one lottery table.

The room in the middle of this circuit, which Joshua Francis Fisher described as Anne's state bedchamber, held a "state bedstead with damask satin curtains." State bedchambers had long been the center of the ceremonial apartments of royalty, and the focal point of every state bedchamber was the bed which symbolized the power of the monarch. Historian Peter Thornton described the spread of state bedchambers from the apartments of royalty to the houses of the European aristocracy in the seventeenth century, asserting that special guests entered an important house from the 1760s onward via a hall, went up a grand staircase, through a saloon, a withdrawing chamber, and an antechamber, to the state bedchamber with its great bed and small private rooms beyond. Since the Bingham house was modeled after the Duke of Manchester's, it is likely that its state bedroom also owed its origin to that of the duke's house. The Mansion House bedchamber fit the two characteristics of a state bedchamber in that it was intended for public use and that the focal point of the room was the bed. The furnishings of this bedroom were
sparse compared with the other public rooms—eight armchairs
upholstered in damask, three looking glasses (one quite large), a
chest of drawers, a dressing table, and a worktable.

The structure of Philadelphia's social activities was deter-
mined by the season. The entertaining season in the city proper, as
in London, generally lasted from early December until spring, but, as
Harrison Gray Otis discovered, people rather than the calendar dic-
tated the opening of wintertime festivities. "You must wait for [the
elite's] civilities untill the time arrives for commencing the Par­i-
ties, which is sometimes a month or six weeks later than at
others."\(^{17}\) Even if the entertaining season began late, wealthy
Philadelphians left the city in late May or early June for their
country residences. They did so in part to avoid yellow fever epi-
demics which raged during late summer throughout the 1790s and in
part to commence the summer season, which included a great coming and
going of house guests. The Binghams were no exception. They enjoyed
two country houses and hosted lavish entertainments there.

The Binghams' most accessible country house was Landsdown,
west of the Schuylkill River and north of Lancaster Road between the
Powel and Britton estates, about four miles from Philadelphia.\(^ {18}\)
The Landsdown property originally belonged to the Reverend William
Smith and totaled 142 acres. John Penn purchased the land in 1773 as
well as several small adjoining tracts, bringing the acreage to 200.
He built Landsdown House prior to his departure to England in 1777 and left the property to his wife, Ann Allen Penn, in his 1795 will. The Bingham had had extended visits with the Penns while in England and began renting Landsdown in 1789, continuing in residence after Penn's death. Ann Penn gave Landsdown to James Greenleaf, husband of her niece Anne, in March 1795. He went bankrupt in 1797 as the result of his close association with Robert Morris. Sheriff John Barker seized the property, and, after occupying the house for eight years, Bingham finally bought it on April 11, 1797, for $50,100.19

Landsdown, like Mansion House, was torn down in the mid nineteenth century. Thompson Westcott described the masonry of the house as "partially in the Italian style, modified in some details by French taste" (fig. 3). It had a centre and wings, a bay-window apartment at each end, and a steep roof. The front showed in the centre a pilastered portico and pediment of two stories, supported at each story by pillars in the Ionic style, double clustered at the corners, with double pilasters. This portico rose from a truncated pyramid of steps. There was a balustrade on the second story. The roof was hipped, terminating in an observatory with open railing. Upon the rear of the building was a portico of one story heavily arched and pilastered.20

In 1791 the Bingham bought their second country house, Bellevue, a 200-acre estate near the mouth of the Shrewsbury River on a promontory known as Black Point in southern New Jersey, and proceeded to renovate, furnish, and landscape it. The good-size farmhouse at Bellevue was remodeled in the fall and winter of 1791/92 and
first occupied by the Bingham family in the spring of 1792. The alterations included the addition of wings to the original structure and the complete renovation of the interior of the old house. A greenhouse, a necessary, a barn, a milk house, and an icehouse were built in 1792. \(^2\)

The furnishings of Bellevue originated in Philadelphia and New York. Furniture from Philadelphia was shipped down the Delaware, up the Jersey coast to New York, and then reshipped to Black Point, giving some indication of the difficulties involved in reaching the coast of southern New Jersey in the late eighteenth century. Bingham, concerned about the handling of his furniture once it reached Black Point, instructed his superintendent at Bellevue, William Lloyd, to fetch it with the oxen and cart and to be especially careful with the looking glasses. Once at Bellevue, Lloyd was to lock up the furniture in one of the ground-floor rooms until Bingham's arrival, since a "Disappointment in any of the Articles would be a Serious Matter, as it would be So difficult to replace them." Bingham ordered other furnishings from merchant Nicholas Low in New York. One of these orders was for "four dozen handsome Windsor Chairs. . . . If they were painted Straw Colour & picked out with Green I should prefer it." \(^2\)

A great deal of the Bingham's resources went for the purchase, building, furnishing, and maintenance of their homes,
particularly Mansion House. Although less is known about Landsdown and Bellevue than about Mansion House, all three conformed to a similar pattern. All were purchased, were designed or furnished based on European attitudes, and were used for entertaining. Mansion House was based on a European design and furnished primarily with European objects. Landsdown's rather exotic Italian- and French-influenced architecture fit in well with the Binghams' concept of a country house. Bellevue, too, fit this pattern, as it was purchased to provide the Binghams with a country estate and summer retreat much like those enjoyed by the English aristocracy. In turning to the subject of the Binghams' entertainments, it becomes apparent that the ownership of these houses and the extravagance of their material life proved to be great social assets.
Notes

The Wallace Collection: A General Guide (London: Trustees of the Wallace Collection, 1984), p. 13. Manchester House was renamed Hertford House by Sir Richard Wallace in 1871. The house was converted into a public museum by the Office of Works between 1897 and 1900 and now houses the Wallace Collection.

William Bingham to Thomas Willing, January 18, 1784, Bingham Correspondence.

Alberts, Golden Voyage, p. 496 n. 157, p. 158.


Tatum, Philadelphia Georgian, pp. 81, 60; Griswold, Republican Court, p. 300.


12. Thomas Twining, April 8, 9, 1795, in Thomas Twining, Travels in America 100 Years Ago (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1894), pp. 34-36.

13. William Bingham to Thomas Willing, October 14, 1783, Bingham Correspondence.


20. Westcott, Historic Mansions, pp. 333-34.


CHAPTER 4

"Brilliant Balls, Sumptuous Dinners and Constant Receptions"
The Binghams' Entertainments

An analysis of Anne Bingham's entertainments in the late 1780s and the 1790s interweaves the evidence from her behavior and material life. Three aspects of Anne's style of entertaining—her extravagance, her attempts to introduce European formality into Philadelphia social ritual, and the guests she chose—shed light on her position in elite society. A look at Anne's entertainments shows that the compelling nature of the Binghams' houses and their furnishings, allied with Anne's attractive behavior, enabled her to achieve and maintain a commanding role in Philadelphia society.

Full descriptions of Anne's large parties are rare. Only two, written by Mrs. Benjamin Stoddert and Robert Gilmor, survive, but snippets from other sources indicate that their experiences at Anne's events are representative of many others. Mrs. Stoddert arrived for a 1799 party at Mansion House at half-past seven and was received by Anne who stood near the chimney in the front section of the drawing room. The dancing began at nine. The first refreshments of the evening, punch and lemonade, were brought in after the first dance, followed shortly after by ice cream served in porcelain cups.
with gilt spoons. Supper, a spread designed to impress as much as to sustain, was served at eleven—"the most superb thing of the kind which I ever saw . . . though those who have been there before say that the supper was not as elegant as they had seen there." For this Anne had ordered an orange tree with fruit, surrounded by evergreens and flowers placed in the center of each of two tables. About thirty guests sat at each. Meats and desserts were placed on the table together and included turkey, fowls, pheasants, and tongues, and for dessert jellies, blanc mange, and three kinds of cake. Mrs. Stoddert concluded, "I never ate better than at Mrs. Bingham's."
Louise Belden, who has extensively studied dining and festive entertainments during this era, noted that many wealthy Americans laid lavish tables. Yet Anne's supper exceeded most expectations. Robert Gilmor, son of Bingham's Baltimore partner, visited Landsdown for a weekend in 1797. Gilmor's descriptions take the food Anne served or the decoration of her house for granted and instead comment on the wide range of activities Anne provided for the amusement of her country guests: lawn sports, hunting, reading, conversation, and card games, particularly the French "lottery."

Participation in elite society created obligations not to be taken lightly. If an individual like Mrs. Stoddert accepted one of Anne's invitations, she faced the responsibility of reciprocating Anne's hospitality, an expensive proposition even if she decided against matching Anne in extravagance. In addition to taking on
social obligations, a guest at Anne's entertainments had to purchase clothing in the current style and find proper transportation to and from the event. Only the wealthy could enjoy society. Timothy Pickering, recently appointed Secretary of State, decided to sidestep the situation. Writing to Bingham, Pickering explained that he and his wife could not afford to enter upon a social career, but that he alone was willing to "dine with you occasionally, but without promising to reciprocate all your civilities. You may expect me to indulge in the pleasure of your company Tuesday."\(^4\)

The Binghams' extravagance set their entertainments apart, as did their attempts to distinguish their parties with increased formality. They initiated the practice of having their guests announced. This practice was short lived as Samuel Breck recalled:

> Dr. Kuhn, and his step-daughter, drove up to the door. A servant asked who was in the carriage. "The doctor and Miss Peggy," was the reply. "The doctor and Miss Peggy!" cried out the man stationed at the door. "The doctor and Miss Peggy!" bawled out he of the stairs, which was taken up by the liveried footman at the door of the drawing room, into which Miss Peggy and her papa entered amid the laughs and jokes of the company.\(^5\)

The rationale behind the Binghams' attempts to formalize their entertainments was the same one that led them to put a state bedroom on the first floor of their house: the desire to introduce European standards in Philadelphia rather than to follow traditional forms. Some of the Binghams' contemporaries found these standards compelling. Guests such as Charles Bulfinch eagerly anticipated...
their entertainments: "We are told that [Bingham's] mode of living is fully equal to the appearance of his house. Of this we shall be better able to judge in a few hours as we are to dine there to-day."

Mrs. Stoddert's desire to be invited to Mansion House turned anticipation into impatience:

Mrs. Bingham has at last thought proper to show her painted face here, and her two daughters—they were without paint. You must not suppose from my manner of speaking about Mrs. Bingham that I am offended with her for not coming before. I should have been better pleased if she had, to tell the truth. . . . As she has put it in my power to go to her house, I shall certainly see all that I can see by asking for. I am determined to see her garden, her greenhouse and everything else that is worth seeing.

The comments of Bulfinch and Stoddert typify the attitudes toward the Binghams' life-style. Many in Philadelphia in the 1790s wanted to see Mansion House for themselves, participate in Anne's entertainments, and judge the extravagance. Anne was a popular hostess, in part because of her house, her possessions, her clothes, and her rather exotic life-style.

The elaborate nature of these entertainments, and innovations such as the announcing of guests and liveried footmen, elicited much comment and some criticism after guests had had the opportunity to see and judge the Binghams. William Maclay, one of Bingham's political opponents, noted, "I can not say that he affects to entertain in a style beyond everything in this place or perhaps in America. He really does so." Arthur Lee, the commissioner to Paris, complained that in manners the Binghams and their friends affect "The vanity,
and nonsense, if nothing worse of French parade. . . . [T]hey are more fit subjects of ridicule than admiration."

French traveler J. P. Brissot de Warville, while refraining from identifying her by name, places the blame for deleterious social innovation squarely on Anne's shoulders:

A very clever woman in this city is accused of having contributed more than any other to this taste for extravagant show. I am truly sorry to see her husband, who seems an agreeable man, display in his house and furniture an ostentation which ought to have remained forever unknown in Philadelphia.

The criticisms of Maclay, Lee, and Warville are balanced by the approbation from other contemporaries, including Abigail Adams: "Mrs. Bingham has certainly given laws to the ladies here in fashion and elegance; their manners and appearance are superior to what I have seen."

Criticisms of Anne Bingham were all but forgotten in the approving recollections and histories written in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An aging Joshua Francis Fisher, from the vantage point of the mid nineteenth century, praised Anne's entertainments: "There never was in our country a series of such distinguished reunions, Brilliant balls, sumptuous dinners & constant receptions. The house open to all distinguished residents & strangers." Anne Hollingsworth Wharton's portrayal of Anne Bingham in 1900 likewise presented her as a skilled hostess and social leader.
Fisher remembered that Anne "Attracted to her drawing room all that was distinguished & accomplished in the country--for Washington was there, & Congress was filled by the most eminent men the country possessed." Anne's guest lists were long; she extended invitations to many people in addition to heroes and politicians. The Binghams consciously entertained four different groups of people. The first group consisted of family members, close friends, and neighbors. This group formed the center of every entertainment, and its female members provided Anne with a retinue. When Anne went visiting she was invariably accompanied by either her daughters or her sisters. Likewise, whenever anyone visited Anne they found her surrounded by these women. "The room became full before I left it, and the circle very brilliant. How could it be otherwise when the dazzling Mrs. Bingham and her beautiful sisters were there . . . a constellation of beauties!"¹⁰ Anne's pretty young women gave added attraction to her entertainments and advertised her position of social leadership.

The second group of guests who enjoyed the Binghams' hospitality were William's political associates. Politicians could always be found at Anne's formal entertainments, and at times the Bingham house became a meeting place for particular factions. When the schism between President Adams and the followers of Alexander Hamilton developed within the Federal party in the late 1790s, the Hamiltonians, led by Bingham, often met at Mansion House to plan
their political strategies, as William Duane, editor of the Jeffersonian paper *Aurora*, complained mightily:

> In the summer of 1798—when federal thunder and violence were belched from the pestiferous lungs of more than one despotic minion, a caucus was held at the house of Mr. William Bingham in this City. . . . [A] secret self-appointed meeting of seventeen persons dictated laws to the United States.11

Most of the politics transacted at Mansion House were less dramatic; socializing gave government officials opportunities to reconcile differences or to come to a mutual understanding. Political opponents, as well as allies, were welcomed at the Binghams' receptions, and frequently guests included such ardent democrats as Jefferson and Albert Gallatin.

Philadelphia's hostesses competed to entertain national celebrities, and Anne frequently won such competitions. This third group of guests conferred additional prestige upon the Binghams, and no one did more so than George Washington. Anne and William often entertained Washington and Adams and their wives in the 1790s, an accomplishment that has secured them a place in such early social histories of the city as Griswold's *Republican Court* and Wharton's *Salons Colonial and Republican*.

Finally, the Binghams entertained travelers like Thomas Twining with his "doombah." Unusual foreign guests gave the Binghams' entertainments added intrigue and increased Anne's popularity as a hostess. The majority of these novel guests were French
émigrés, including the Count de Noailles, who lived for a time in a small house on the grounds of Mansion House, Talleyrand, the Duke de la Rochefoucault-Liancourt, the Count de Tilly, and the Duke of Orleans (later Louis-Philippe) with his brothers the Dukes de Montpensier and de Beaujolais.

An analysis of Anne Bingham's entertainments and guests supports the contention that Anne was a social leader, but can Anne's social accomplishments be compared with the work of the great women of the early national period like Judith Sargent Murray or Mercy Otis Warren? Anne did not work to further education for women, nor did she enter the debate over women's responsibilities and opportunities in the new country; she threw great parties. Yet Anne's ambitions and personal success paralleled some women's demands for greater freedom and recognition in the 1790s. Anne perfected a traditionally domestic role, that of hostess, and played this role unconventionally and actively in the public world. Anne Bingham's legacy was not ultimately as influential as that of the reformers of female education, but in her time she was admired and set a standard for society.
Notes

1 Mrs. Benjamin Stoddert to her sister, January 23, 1799, as quoted in Brown, "Mr. and Mrs. Bingham," pp. 317-18.


4 Timothy Pickering to William Bingham, December 17, 1795, as quoted in Alberts, Golden Voyage, p. 298.


6 Bulfinch to his wife, 1789, as quoted in Halsey and Towner, Homes of Our Ancestors, p. 168; Mrs. Benjamin Stoddert to her sister, January 23, 1799, as quoted in Brown, "Mr. and Mrs. Bingham," p. 317.


11 William Duane, 1800, as quoted in Alberts, Golden Voyage, pp. 386-87.
CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Anne Bingham's behavior, material life, and social success provide insight on the gentility, material environment, and social structure of the Philadelphia elite. Whenever historical conclusions are based on an individual's experiences, it brings up the question of typicality. Certainly Anne Bingham was an atypical member of Philadelphia's elite in terms of her trip to Europe and her material wealth. Yet Anne functioned successfully in elite society, and her outlook and life-style must be taken into consideration in the historical interpretations of gentility, material culture, and social structure.

Was Anne Bingham genteel? If gentility is measured by the standards of books like The Lady's Pocket Library, the answer is no. Anne was probably aware of such standards, but she chose to ignore them or at best stretch these standards to fit her own purposes. In terms of current scholarship on eighteenth-century gentility, Anne's experiences show that, rather than pursuing a single ideal of cultivation, individuals considered gentility to be an adaptable concept. Anne's personal form of gentility encompassed the wearing of scanty empire gowns and swearing at the table as easily as it incorporated
lively, polite conversation and widespread hospitality. A study of Anne Bingham leads to the conclusion that gentility may well have been conceived of as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself, and the standards of gentility depended to some extent on the goals of the individual.

An analysis of the Bingham's material environment supports the argument that possessions were used by members of the elite to attain and maintain a position of social prominence. The Bingham's created a material life based on European models and, in many cases, made up of the latest European objects. The desire on the part of contemporaries to see this rather exotic material life and participate in Anne's extravagant entertainments contributed to Anne's social success. Mansion House, Landsdown, and Bellevue and all that they contained afforded Anne a setting for her form of genteel behavior and therefore a means of promoting her family politically and socially. The Bingham's chose to spend more money on their material possessions than most of their peers, and the end result was that Anne enjoyed a position of influence in elite society.

Finally, was the elite open or closed in the 1790s? Both Anne and William Bingham came from prominent Philadelphia families and were connected by kinship to most of the city's elite families, yet it was hospitality based on wealth, not family connections, that attracted politicians and travelers to the Bingham's houses.
Essentially Anne's behavior and life-style were the products of her husband's wealth. Affluence allowed Anne to participate in European society and to strive to reproduce that society in Philadelphia. Her life demonstrates that wealth affected social position, and therefore the elite was, to some extent, open to those who possessed sufficient wealth. That extravagance and wealth could serve as an entrée in many if not all circles.

Anne Bingham was atypical, yet her behavior, material life, and social success illuminate historical trends in the experiences of elite women and deserve analysis. Anne's ambition was to be a social leader on a grand scale. She achieved this by performing the conventional role of hostess on her own public stage. Anne may have eschewed confinement to a domestic sphere, but she accomplished her goal by making the private public rather than by attempting to enter the traditionally male public sphere. Because Anne founded her success on the specifically female role of dispenser of hospitality, this success can be seen as a precursor of the Victorian ideal for elite women, and Anne herself as the prototype for the wealthy socialite of the nineteenth century.
APPENDIX

The 1805 Inventory of Mansion House


Hall:

1 Large Lamp
12 Windsor Chairs
3 Composition Pedestals
2 Marble ditto with busts of Voltaire and Rosseau
4 Bronze Figures
1 Female figure composition stone
   A Dial on Composition pedestal
2 Marble medallions in gilt frames
3 Busts of Franklin

Front Room South:

A Looking-glass, 5'9" by 3'9"
1 ditto 7'3" by 5'
1 ditto 4'6" by 1'10"
3 Chintz window curtains
   A lot, various pieces gilt china
1 small bureau
12 Mahogany arm chairs with dimity covers
2 Settees with ditto
2 Mahogany dining tables
3 Ditto breakfast ditto
1 Music stand and stool
1 Night ditto with marble top
2 Japanned dove cages
2 Small bird ditto
1 Pair cut glass lamps
1 Pair armed brass ditto
1 Derbyshire spar urn and 2 figures
5 Pair brass andirons
1 Polished steel shovel and tongs
   Bellows shovel and tongs
1 Tea urn
2 Mahogany writing desks and box with telescope
1 Large china churn
10 China milch pans
4 Mahogany knife cases
1 Plate warmer
6 lamps and a cat [sic]
1 Pianoforte

Front Parlor North:

1 Looking-glass 8'4" by 4'3"
1 Ditto 7'10" by 5'11"
2 Ditto 5'6" by 3'10"
2 Ditto 5'3" by 2'10"
4 Oval ditto
2 Rush bottom settees
10 Ditto arm chairs
10 Ditto single ditto
1 Mahogany breakfast table
1 Secretary
1 Range of dining tables containing 7 pieces
5 Mantle ornaments
5 Venetian blinds
1 Harpsichord

Dining Room:

2 Looking-glasses 7'8" by 4'3"
4 Sets dimity curtains
1 Pair glass chandeliers
1 Pair girandoles
2 Large mahogany urn knife cases
3 Smaller ditto
2 Large japanned ditto
2 Marble water vases
1 Large mahogany side board
1 Mahogany wine cooler
24 Mahogany chairs morocco bottom
1 Pair brass andirons
1 Shovel and tongs
1 Brass fender and bellows
1 Large dining set white French china, gilt edges—350 pieces
1 Blue dinner set of china, gilt edges
 Lot blue china—8 dozen pieces
 Desert set china blue and gold
1 Dining set French china about 100 pieces
1 Tea set of blue and gold china on waiter—43 pieces
1 Tea set save [Sèvres] china—47 pieces
19 Glass goblets
20 Plain
6 gilt tumblers
6 Cut glass ditto
25 Plain wine glasses
1 Pair salts
20 Lemonade glasses
32 Figured wine ditto
37 Ditto claret ditto
19 Champagne ditto
2 Cut glass quart decanters
11 Ditto pint ditto
12 Ditto water goblets
10 Decanters and goblets plain, cut
20 Cut glass dishes and
3 small cups
3 Baskets
2 butter
3 sugar tureens with gilt edges
2 Save [Sèvres] china bowls and plates
 Tea set French china about 30 pieces
3 Fruit dishes
8 plates ditto
 Desert set pink and gold china
1 Large plateau with 17 marble figures
1 Large range of dining tables
6 Patent brass lamps
3 Ditto ditto with reflectors
5 Glass ditto
1 Moon light shade
2 Japanned paper trays
Knives and forks silver mounted
Desert ditto ditto

Library:

1 Secretary
1 Copying machine
3 mahogany Book Cases
4 Bronze Figures on ditto
2 Urns on ditto
2 Busts on ditto
1 Centre piece on ditto
A collection of paintings, prints, &c.

Drawing Room:

1 Looking glass 7'6" by 5'
1 glass Chandelier
4 Girandoles
4 gilt Candlesticks
6 large Arm Chairs
9 small ditto to match
1 Sopha to match
1 Sopha to match
4 gilt Figures
8 sets blue satin Window curtains with gilt cornices
2 fire Screens
Shovel Tongs and Fender
2 gilt branch Candlesticks
3 china and gold vases
2 Pots of artificial flowers with glass covers
2 small Busts on Pedestals
1 elegant Carpet 33'6" by 23'

Ballroom:

1 mahogany Bedstead 7 feet square with canopy, curtains;
mattress &c. complete
1 carpet 22 feet square
6 Marseilles Bed Quilts worked
1 Ditto d[itt]o. plain
4 pieces Sattin
1 piece do. worked with Gold
2 Mandarin Figures
15 chairs, stuffed Bottoms
1 range of Dining Tables
1 large mahogany writing Desk
1 Clock and Orrery
2 Settees stuffed
3 sets muslin Window Curtains
2 ditto Chintz do.
1 do. pink silk do.
8 counterpanes Marseilles Quilting
21 table Cloths
35 Napkins

Bed Room:

1 State bedstead with damask sattin curtains
1 Looking glass 5'7" by 3'11"
1 Toilet ditto
1 Dressing ditto
8 Arm chairs, damask stuffed bottoms
1 Set of drawers
1 Cane cradle
1 Dressing table
1 Work stand, mahogany

Dressing Room:

2 Mahogany bureaus
1 Closet for papers

Front Room up Stairs S.W. Corner:

A full length portrait of Mrs. Siddons in the Grecian Daughter
2 Girandoles with mirrors
3 Sets yellow and scarlet window curtains
12 Yellow and pink chairs with silk bottoms
Shovel, tongs, fender, and bellows
1 Carpet 16'8" by 24'6"
2 Boxes of counters

Third Story:

1 Mahogany high post bedstead with curtains
8 Mahogany chairs
1 Clothes press
1 Chest of drawers
Bedsteads, beds and bedding
12 Mahogany chairs stuffed bottoms
1 Sopha to match
1 Table linen press with drawers
1 Mangle
A variety of kitchen utensils
Window cornices
5 Boxes of candles
4 Bags of coffee
2 Cases fowling pieces
1 Ditto pistols
Marble vases
Marble jamps, and head pieces for chimney
Ditto slabs
Composition stone ornaments, from the manufactory of Coade,
London, consisting of Fascia Medallions Entablatures
Mouldings, and Key stones

Plate
1 Soup tureen
1 ditto do.
1 punch Vase
4 sauce Tureens
4 ladles for do.
4 plated stands for ditto
6 Salts and 6 ladles
1 Dutch kettle with Lamp
1 soup Ladle
3 Coasters
4 Vegetable dishes
4 Covers for ditto
1 pair Candlesticks
2 round waiters, beaded edges
6 Plates
6 wine labels
1 fish Knife
1 small round Shaving Box
1 tea Urn
1 coffee Urn
1 tea Caddy
1 sugar Dish
1 cream Ewer
1 cake Basket
3 doz. Tea Spoons, gilt, 9 oz. 16 dwt. each doz.
1 sugar Tongs to match
2 silver Goblets gilt inside

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2 Salts without Glasses
1 soup Ladle
1 Strainer
1 bread Basket old fashion
1 large Tray
11 Forks
4 do. small
12 desert Spoons
6 do. do. French
6 do. do. English
17 Table do.
6 do. French
1 large oval Dish
1 smaller do.
4 smaller do.
2 smaller do.
2 small round waiters old fashion
1 pair Coasters
2 Skewers
3 gravy Spoons
1 punch Ladle
19 French Forks
16 do. do.
5 desert Spoons
4 tea Spoons
1 mustard Ladle
6 table Spoons
1 sugar Tongs

Plated Ware

1 large Oval Dish gadroon edges
1 smaller do. do.
1 smaller do. do.
1 round plate do.
1 Snuffers and Tray
1 pair Coasters
1 dish Cross
1 coffee Ewer
1 egg Frame with Ladles complete
4 oval Stands for Salts with silver edges
Primary Sources


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