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FOOTNOTES

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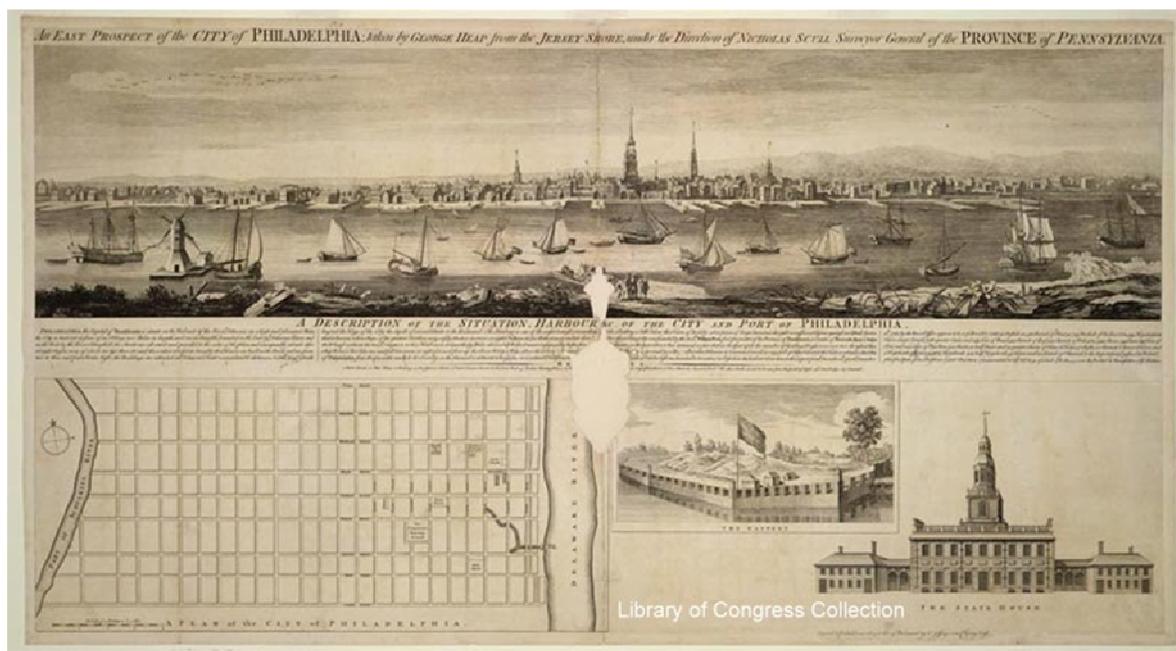
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PHILADELPHIA: HOW ONE CITY'S MARITIME HISTORY CHANGED THE WORLD

By Nicholas Pagon

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“Today, we remember less about the significance of Philadelphia to the history of the nation than the record shows.”
-- Gary B. Nash, *First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (2002)

Few cities can claim a more extraordinary historical legacy than Philadelphia. This claim may initially seem grandiose, but it is rather a matter of ascertainable history; and the mere fact that it might be considered grandiose, even by so many of its own citizens today, is itself somewhat extraordinary and worth exploration. The evolution of what is now sometimes referred to as the *Pax Americana*—as an emotive terminology expressing the degree of influence America genuinely does have in the world today, and considering all that this term really implies, including the political, the economic, and the military—truly took its initial form right here. The various influences which led to the American form of Democracy, the American manifestations of individual and religious freedom (and of individual rights and responsibilities), the American forms of economic enterprise (in most all of its guises), the American ideals of civic participation (even in contention), and even much of the American military (especially naval and marine), all truly first coalesced in this city—and then, evolving, spread back outwards to the world. This process began well before the events of the American Revolution—even if that is indeed its most famous manifestation; and it continued well into the early 20th century—even as Philadelphia gradually ceded pre-eminence in politics and the

military to Washington and in economics to New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. This is a spectacular legacy indeed, and the words “Philadelphia Freedom,” therefore, do still have some measure of resonance around the world even today.

And yet, oddly enough, we simultaneously tend towards the default view that this was somehow merely coincidental; that these events happened in Philadelphia only because they did not happen somewhere else; even, at its worst, perhaps that these events somehow managed to occur here in spite of, rather than because of, the multitude of influences and the sometimes contentious physical and social context. We know the individual components of this history quite well—many hugely significant cultural institutions do exist in Philadelphia in order to commemorate its particular manifestations—and rightly so. Yet something significant, a certain conviction and pride of place, and especially a certain practical unifying framework, seems to have been lost and forgotten. The general perception of Philadelphia’s history is therefore somewhat fragmented and insecure, like the distinct pearls of a necklace that have long since lost their binding string.

These historical events did not merely happen in Philadelphia, and it was not mere coincidence of time and place. Philadelphia was, at the time of the Revolution, already an attractive center of gravity both for the colonial states and for influences from overseas, for very practical reasons; and it was against, and because of, this practical background that these famous events transpired. All of this essential history, all of this impact, was explicitly rooted in Philadelphia’s already emergent central importance as an open, international maritime center. This was, and is, a city of two rivers, interlinking the interior of the New World to the oceans and ports of the Old—a linkage both physical and metaphorical, and one extending not merely to Europe but also to South America, Africa, and Asia. On boats and ships, the people and influences (along with the goods) converged from many parts of the world; then, like the strands of a ship’s rope, they were woven together into the revolutionary cord; and on boats and ships, this revolution (along with the goods) was promulgated back around the world. That Philadelphia was the physical manifestation of William Penn’s vision; the adopted home of Benjamin Franklin; the centerpiece (political and military) of the American Revolution; the location of the Continental Congress; the cradle of the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the United States Constitution; the primary home of George Washington’s presidency; the birthplace of the United States Marines and the United States Navy; a center of the Abolitionist movement and a network node for the Underground Railroad; the initial headquarters of the 1st and 2nd Banks of the United States; the staging ground for the Lewis and Clark Expedition; an industrial powerhouse, the home of the Workshop to the World, the home of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and the location of the Centennial Exhibition during the 19th and early 20th centuries; and an enormously significant contributor to the military from the Revolution and the War of 1812, through the Civil War, and on to the two World Wars; all of this developed against the critical background of this city’s rivers, boats, ships, shipyards, canals and ports, and the people (of all sorts and of all origins) who developed and worked them. This maritime presence is certainly not of itself Philadelphia’s most important contribution to world history, but it is nonetheless of the essence. This is the one factor that unites all the others, both tangible and intellectual, the string of the necklace and the essential frame on which all the rest of this history was intertwined. The historical legacy of Philadelphia was decidedly waterborne—as much so as a London, a Venice, or an Amsterdam, and arguably with even greater overall historical affect in the modern world.

The sad truth, however, is that Philadelphia has no effective historical vision, or presentation, of itself in maritime terms, and none whatsoever out on the water. Old City is disconnected, physically and metaphorically, from the waters that were its lifeblood, and the new city is as well. The tourists, and the citizens, know little about it. And without this binder in place, the enormous totality of Philadelphia’s historical contributions often also goes unrecognized as such. The history is indeed fragmented. It is not bound together in such a way that citizens have a definite pride of place or that visitors recognize the huge, unitary significance. Philadelphia has largely turned its back on its rivers, and on its maritime history.

This is not merely a question of nostalgia, nor is it of narrow historical concern to those interested in maritime matters. Such history and such culture really do have fundamental value—historical and philosophical value, educational value, personal value, and ultimately significant economic value—and many a modern city has quite effectively reinvented itself by once again realizing this truth. Because it is possible to make the presentation of maritime history so tangible, visible, and engaging, both for children and for adults, and because it can bind so much of the city’s history into a single necklace, an historical maritime presentation really is important to the continued development of this city as a place to live and a place to visit. And fortunately for Philadelphia, neither the history nor the culture is really that far beneath the surface—it was still very real not that long ago, and many components (physical and cultural) still exist. For the educational engagement of our children and the educational renewal of our adults, for the quality of residential life for our families, for the economic value of tourism, as well as for a motivational civic pride of place, we should want this history and culture back at the fore.

A VISION AND A CATALYST

An historical maritime program for Philadelphia need be neither grandiose nor expensive. The history is real and it is still there—in the museums, in the waterfront properties, in the rivers themselves, and even within the memories of the people who still live here. Its revival needs only an organizing vision and a substantive catalyst.

Such a vision might begin with the simple recognition of the city’s maritime history for what it really was—not as

Philadelphia's most important legacy of itself (although significant maritime contributions were indeed made here over a long period of time), but rather as the essential string on which the more significant historical pearls were bound. A Philadelphia maritime vision might therefore have several key components:

- **It must be steeped in the city's actual maritime history, not merely tangential to it. It should consider the distinct physical realities of its two rivers, the commercial and naval traffic that actually navigated upon them, and the people who were involved.**
- **It must consciously seek to interconnect all of the other components of Philadelphia's history, becoming once again the organizing framework it actually once was. This interconnection can be both physical (that is, manifested on the water) and metaphorical (explicitly tying in the land-based collections of existing museums).**
- **It should also be pursued from the outset as a cooperative venture, a partnership of sorts, amongst existing cultural and historical institutions, each bringing its own particular expertise to the fore. There is no need to reinvent what already exists. There is a need to effectively highlight what does already exist.**
- **There is, however, a need to reinvent what has actually been lost. The vision must therefore be waterborne – it must manifest itself on the water and not solely in museums or at the water's edge.**
- **It must incorporate engaged activity, not merely be a static exhibition for tourists. This would include traditional boat-building activities as well as on-water activities in traditional craft. It would also include activities targeted not solely at tourists, but also at residents and their children.**
- **It must also, in this modern world, incorporate the modern technologies as well as the traditional – the internet and social networking especially.**
- **It should therefore explicitly encompass historical, theatrical, environmental, recreational, and educational components. It should, in other words, cross into the engagement of tourism, the education of the city's children, the employment of the city's youth, and the recreation of the city's families.**

A catalyst must reference all of these points, yet do so in a particularly visible and engaging manner, to start the ball rolling down the hill.

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