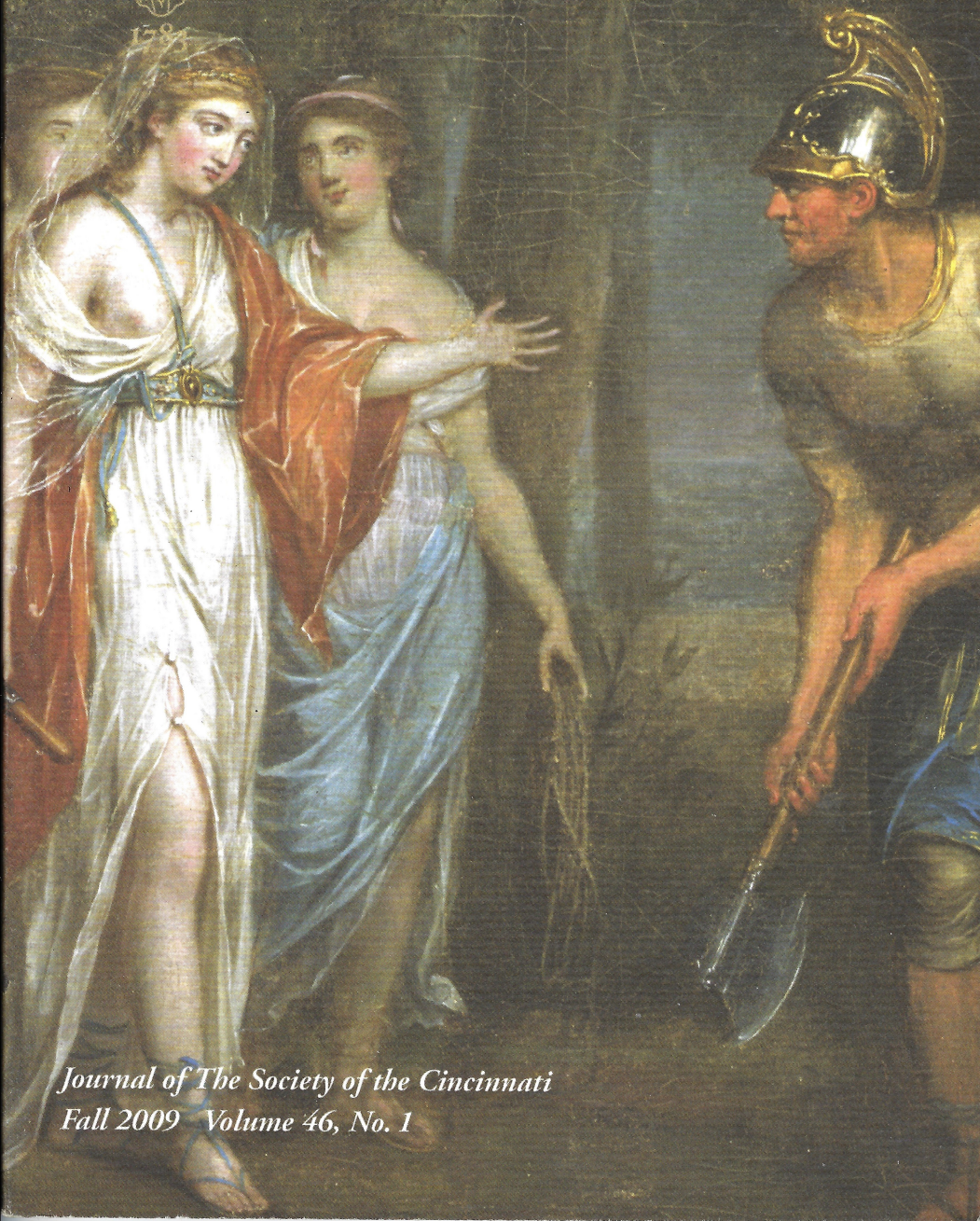




# Cincinnati *Fourteen*



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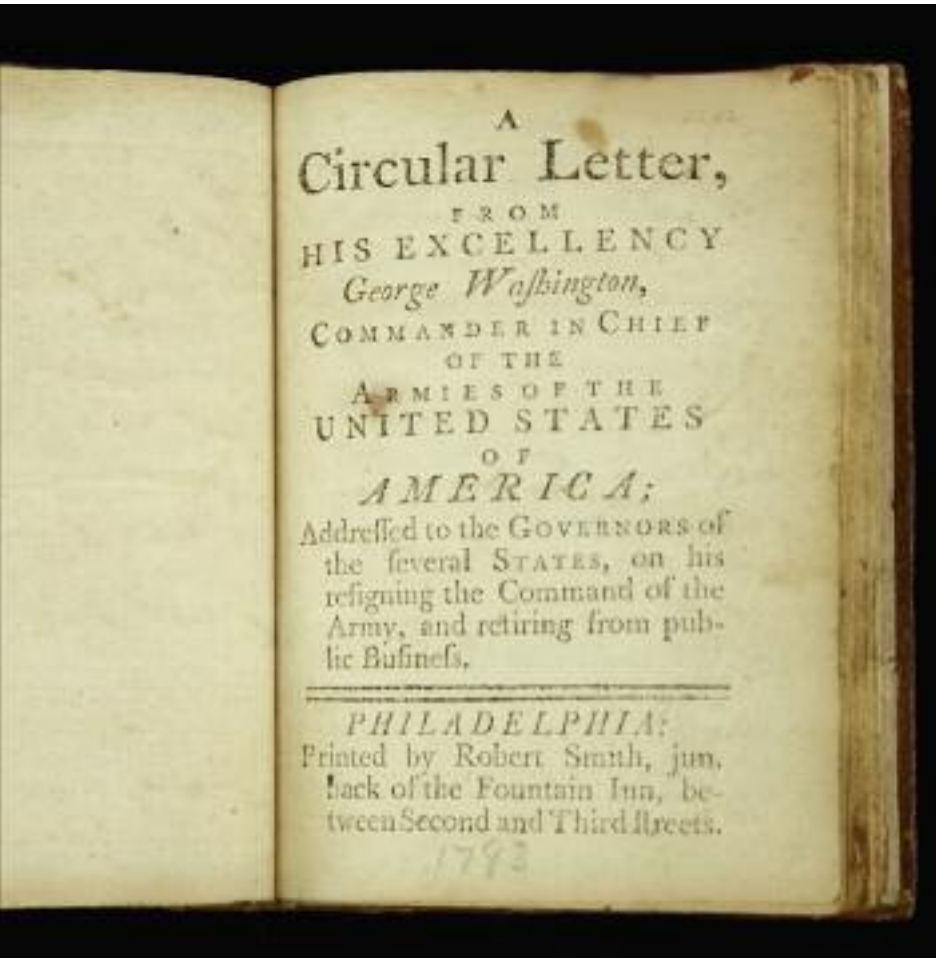
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*Full Circle: Robert Coltman's Copy  
of George Washington's Circular Letter*



The founders of the Society of the Cincinnati set in motion a vehicle that would link themselves to their descendants in perpetuity. As individuals in each succeeding generation seek out membership in the Society, they learn anew about the lives and sacrifices of their Revolutionary War ancestors as they pledge to carry forward the Society's mission to perpetuate the memory of the achievement of American independence.

Such connections were wonderfully exemplified in the Society's recent acquisition of an early printed edition of *A Circular Letter, From His Excellency George Washington, Commander in Chief of the Armies of the United States of America; Addressed to the Governors of the Several States, on His Resigning the Command of the Army, and Retiring from Public Business* (Philadelphia: Printed by Robert Smith, jun., [1783]). This landmark document is in itself a major and most fitting acquisition for the collection, but this copy happened to belong to an original member of the Pennsylvania Society, Robert Coltman, and it bears his signature on the front endpaper. Robert Coltman is currently represented by Charles Lilly Coltman III, the Society's assistant treasurer general, whose generous gift supported the purchase of this exceedingly rare book for the Robert Charles Lawrence Fergusson Collection.

In June 1783, while waiting for the news of the definitive peace treaty, General Washington composed his final official communication to the governors of the thirteen states. In the resulting "circular letter," which ran more than 4,000 words, Washington reflected on the great achievement of independence and offered his opinions on how the nation must proceed to keep the independence secure. "[T]his is the moment when the eyes of the whole World are turned upon them," Washington wrote, "this is the moment to establish or ruin their national Character forever." While reiterating his determination to retire completely from public life, Washington strongly and eloquently laid out the principles he believed were essential to the well-being and continued existence of the United States:

- 1st. An indissoluble Union of the States under one Federal Head.
- 2dly. A sacred regard to Public Justice.
- 3dly. The adoption of a proper Peace Establishment, and
- 4thly. The prevalence of that pacific and friendly Disposition, among the People of the United States, which will induce them to forget their local prejudices and policies, to make those mutual concessions and policies which are requisite to the general prosperity, and in some instances, to sacrifice their individual advantages to the interest of the Community.

Inextricably entwined with these tenets, and foremost on Washington's mind, was the fulfillment of Congress's promise of full and fair compensation to his officers and men for their services to their country

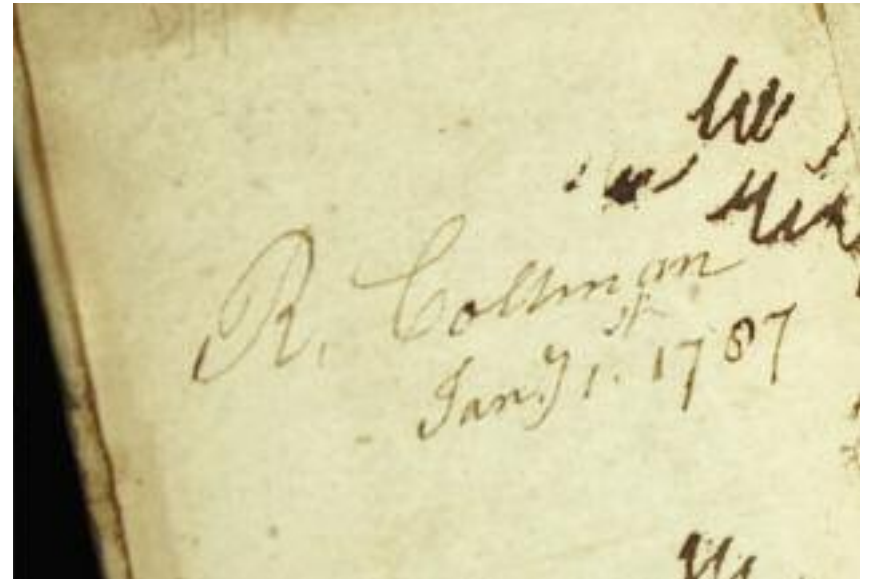
during the war. “It was a part of their hire,” wrote the commander in chief who refused any pay for his own service, “it was the price of their blood and of your Independency, it is therefore more than a common debt, it is a debt of honour.”

The letter’s closing paragraph has been adapted as “Washington’s Prayer for His Country,” which continues to be read at gatherings of the Cincinnati:

I now make it my earnest prayer, that God would have you, and the State over which you preside, in his holy protection; that he would incline the hearts of the Citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to Government; to entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another, for their fellow Citizens of the United States at large, and particularly for their brethren who have served in the Field; and finally, that he would most graciously be pleased to dispose us all, to do Justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that Charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, that were the Characteristicks of the Divine Author of our blessed Religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example, in these things, we can never hope to be a happy Nation.

From the moment it was sent out, General Washington’s circular letter was recognized as his legacy to his country. The text was circulated widely in newspapers and broadsides, and was published in book form in Fishkill, N.Y., Newport, Boston, Hartford, Richmond and London, as well as in this Philadelphia edition. The Society’s new acquisition is a small pocket-sized volume (more formally described as a sextodecimo), set in a plain, proportionally large type so that the text spans fifty-two pages. It was apparently one of the first publications issued by the printer, Robert Smith Jr., who included an advertisement in which he “humbly intreats the Public for their Encouragement in the Line of his Business.”

Robert Coltman (1739-1816), the original owner of this copy of the *Circular Letter*, was commissioned captain lieutenant in Proctor’s Continental Artillery in 1777. He was promoted to captain the following year and took over command of Capt. John Bryce’s company, a position he held until his retirement in early 1783. He signed the original parchment roll of the State Society of the Cincinnati of Pennsylvania.



*The signature of Robert Coltman, propositus of Assistant Treasurer General Charles L. Coltman III, on the inside cover.*

After the war Captain Coltman purchased a tract of land in Cheltenham Township, Pennsylvania, that had been confiscated from a Loyalist and, after a protracted effort to secure his rights to it, he settled there in the late 1780s. His signature on the *Circular Letter* is dated January 1, 1787.

Two-hundred-twenty-two years later, members of the Society staff were privileged to witness a true “Cincinnati moment” when Mr. Coltman was handed the little *Circular Letter* and immediately recognized the signature of his great-great-great-great-great grandfather. Noting that the signature was dated the year of the Constitutional Convention, Mr. Coltman commented that it meant a great deal to him to know that in the years after the war his ancestor remained actively engaged in the founding events of the nation.

*Ellen McCallister Clark, Library Director*



a local event coordinator was discussed. We decided to contract with Ray Mar Guides Inc. Members attending the post meeting luncheon were introduced to the event coordinators. To prepare for the New Jersey Triennial, a steering committee has been appointed, comprised of Guy K. Dean III, Denis B. Woodfield, Benjamin C. Frick, Nicholas Gilman, and Ross W. Maghan. It was noted that New Jersey is filled with historical sites related to the Revolution some of which might be incorporated in the Triennial.

We discussed the new book being written by Kelly L. Stewart, *An Illustrated History of the Society of the Cincinnati in the State of New Jersey*. The cost of publication was discussed and we decided to spend up to \$1,000 to obtain estimates of these costs, which will be reported at a later time. Conservation of the old New Jersey Society minutes was discussed by Denis B. Woodfield. A motion was seconded and approved to spend up to \$2,000 to preserve these valuable records. The nominating committee presented a motion which was seconded and approved to appoint John Harvey to fill the vacant position of assistant treasurer. History Prize Chairman Ross W. Maghan, announced that this year's winner is Edwin G. Burrows for his book, *Forgotten Patriots: the Untold Story of Prisoners during the Revolutionary War*. The meeting adjourned and we enjoyed a luncheon at the Nassau Club. We were introduced to event coordinator Marie Clarke of Ray Mar Guides, Inc., at the completion of the luncheon. Our annual meeting is scheduled for October 3 at Anderson House.

*John W. Gareis, M.D., Assistant Secretary*

### *The Society of the Cincinnati of Pennsylvania*

On February 16, the State Society of the Cincinnati of Pennsylvania held its annual celebration of Washington's Birthday at the Philadelphia Club. The Pennsylvania Society selected one of its own honorary members, Richard R. Beeman, to speak on the subject of "George Washington: The Indispensable Man of the Constitutional Convention." It would be difficult to find a speaker more learned in the subject. Dr. Beeman is a professor of American history at the University of Pennsylvania and over a career of forty years he has authored six books and numerous articles on British North America in the eighteenth century. He has received many

scholarly awards, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, and the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. He has served as a Fulbright Professor and as Harmsworth Distinguished Professor of American History at Oxford University. He is also a member of the Board of Trustees of the National Constitution Center and is a member of the scholarly advisory board of the American Revolution Center.

Professor Beeman's well-received address served as a rich prelude to the March 2009 release of his newest book—*Plain, Honest Men: The Making of the American Constitution*—the product of five years of meticulous research and graceful writing. Published by Random House, *Plain, Honest Men* has received favorable reviews in the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times Book Review*, and the *Chicago Tribune*. Accessible to the scholar and layman alike, *Plain, Honest Men* should be required reading for every member of the Society of the Cincinnati. Though long (514 pages), it offers a sure foundation in the history and politics of the Constitutional Convention.

*Mark Frazier Lloyd*

### *Delaware State Society of the Cincinnati*

The annual meeting of the Delaware State Society of the Cincinnati was held on April 4 at the Wilmington Club. The meeting was called to order by President Bryan Scott Johnson and continued with the reading of the Immutable Principles, followed by a moment of silence and prayer in memory of two former presidents of the Delaware Society who had passed away since the last annual meeting: William Leland Hires (president, 1960-1963) and Herbert Keyser Zearfoss (president, 1996-1999). After the reading of various officer and society reports, the following officers were elected: Bryan Scott Johnson, president; Lee Sparks IV, vice president; Paul Kent Switzer III, secretary; David Arthur McCormick, assistant secretary (registrar); Richard Saltonstall Auchincloss Jr., treasurer; Charles William Swinford Jr., assistant treasurer. President General George Forrest Pragoff discussed the activities and plans of the General Society for the upcoming year. He spoke with great pride of the