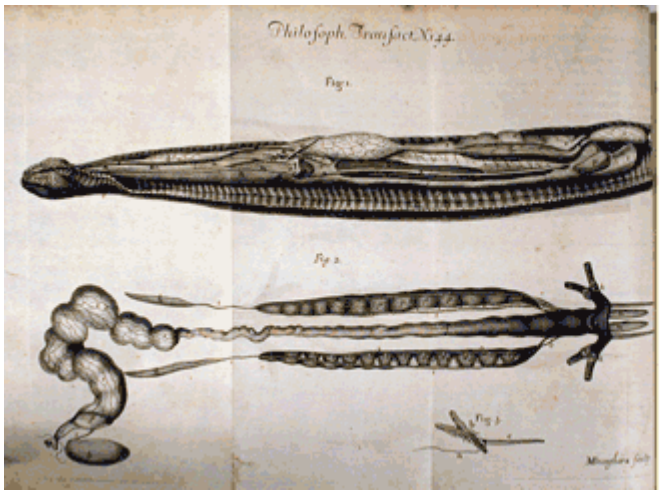
Natural Curiosity: Curious Nature in Early America





Presented as part of the special issue: “A Cabinet of Curiosities”

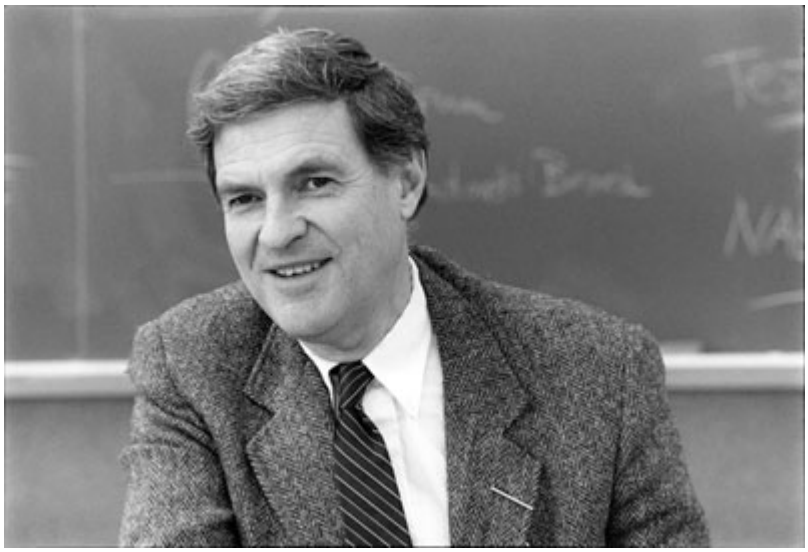
“Not only did it seem possible that species were radically different in the New World, but some early observers reported evidence that the boundaries between the plant and animal kingdoms were crossed in some cases.”

Open House



“So when we’ve lost our traditions we can come here and learn them from you.”

Opening the Academy Theodore R. Sizer, 1932-2009



Rarely has any figure in modern intellectual life so successfully harnessed the power of private institutions for public good, or achieved the fusion of

thought and action, that Sizer did in his remarkable career.

Hesperus and Colonial American music



Hesperus was founded as a baroque ensemble in Arlington, Va., in 1979, but quickly expanded its repertoire to include colonial American music. The D.C. area, including Virginia and Maryland, is a marvelous place to research and perform music from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America; there are many restored historical sites, most of which regularly present concerts and festivals. The Library of Congress has one of the best collections of colonial and Federal American music in the country, and Colonial Williamsburg and Monticello both provide many additional resources.

Hesperus Early American Band 1982-89. Courtesy of Chancey/Hesperus.

The earliest colonists brought the music of their homelands with them; American music before the mid-eighteenth century represents the diversity of our nation

of immigrants. As the colonies began to see themselves as independent from Great Britain politically and economically, they began to develop a cultural independence as well. The creative energy that carved out a new nation also fueled its lively, idiosyncratic musical style. That energy wasn't reflected in its pleasant but undistinguished parlor/classical music, but rather in other genres: dance music, broadside ballads and ballad operas, dissonant, modal devotional hymns, marches, and play-party songs.

Hesperus Early American Band 1989-2005. Courtesy of Chancey/Hesperus.

Our concerts feature a mixture of classical and popular musics, with a good representation of Scots-Irish ballads, dances, variation sets, and airs. We frequently program such British composers/collectors as John Playford (*The English Country Dancing Master*), Benjamin Carr (*The Division Flute*), and Thomas Ravenscroft (*Deuteromelia*, *Pammelia*); Scots-Irish composers/collectors Burke Thumoth, Turloch O'Carolan, and James Oswald, as well as tunes from such lute manuscripts as the Rowallan and the Dixon. We also program vocal music by composers of the First New England School: William Billings, Daniel Read and Supply Belcher, whose music became the cornerstone of our current Sacred Harp repertoire. One of our biggest sources for dance music is the Library of Congress's collection of Cotillion books. Printed between 1780 and 1850, they drew from an intriguing mixture of French round-o's and rigaudons, Irish jigs, Scottish reels, English country dances, opera arias, and a smattering of other European popular tunes. The broadside ballad was vastly popular: taking a familiar tune as a model, scribblers would pen a lyric about some happening of the day—such as a battle, a murder or hanging—and print it on a wide sheet of paper known as a broadside. Since it was "sung to the tune of," people didn't have to read music. Particularly during the ups and downs of war or an especially vituperative presidential election, the broadside ballads expressed current popular sentiment as up-to-date as any blog.

Our approach to this eclectic repertoire can be summarized as informed and participatory. In our opinion, very little written music was meant to be played as written (even there, the eighteenth-century printer's typical slipshod proofreading can obscure a composer's original intentions). Much written popular music was meant as a memory aid, a foundation for improvisation and arrangements. Rather than reading the music and playing it as written in the classical style, we learn from current, continuous living traditions, extrapolating from modern-day traditional rural fiddle players like Tommy Jarrell and Clyde Davenport; ballad singers such as Jean Ritchie and Molly Andrews; Irish fiddlers like Kevin Burke and Brendan Mulvihill, and Scottish fiddlers Bonnie Rideout and Elke Baker. In order to best reflect the different styles of music, we've studied with many of these performers, as well as inviting many of them to perform with us.

Visit Hesperus's website.

Sound files:

"Bobbing Joe Medley: Bobbing Joe," Tina Chancey, violin, Mark Cudek, recorder, Scott Reiss, hammered dulcimer. Track from *Early American Roots* (1997). Courtesy of Chancey/Hesperus.

"Federal Overture," by Benjamin Carr. Scott Reiss, recorder, Tina Chancey, fiddle, Grant Harried, lute, guitar. Track from *Colonial America: spirited sounds from across the sea to the shores of the new land* (2003). Courtesy of Chancey/Hesperus.

This article originally appeared in issue 13.2 (Winter, 2013).

Twenty-First Century Perspectives on the Eighteenth Century



In the near future, it may be possible to write an early American history that considers the role of gut microbiota, which, as scientists are documenting, play a critical role in everything from obesity to disease progression.

[Free Silver and the Constitution of Man]



This article is presented as part of the Special Issue: Money

“Who or what gave these metals . . . their peculiar qualities for serving as coined money?” asked A Currency Primer of 1896. “Men did not,” came the answer. “Law did not. Government could not. It was done by Nature.”

Seeing a Different Visual World



Presented as part of the Special Issue: “Revolution in Print: Graphics in Nineteenth-Century America”

“Let Them Study as Men and Work as Women”



Presented as part of the Special Issue: “Revolution in Print: Graphics in Nineteenth-Century America”

Unlike the starving seamstress or the prostitute, both represented as victims of male commercial culture, the women trained as designers, wood engravers, and illustrators represented a new, respectable, potentially comfortable form of female industry.

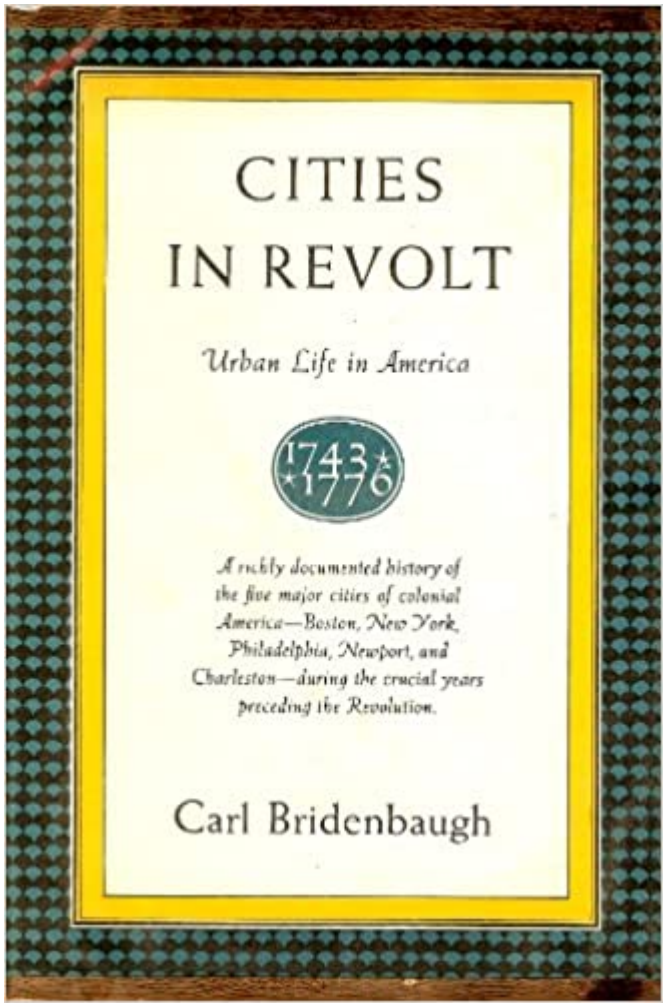
Imitation is the Sincerest Form of Appropriation



Presented as part of the Special Issue: “Revolution in Print: Graphics in Nineteenth-Century America”

. . . scrapbooks created to save newspaper and magazine items often used few of the pictures from those publications. Perhaps pictures undercut the seriousness of a homemade object that mimicked the look of a book or newspaper.

Cities in Review



Presented as part of the special issue “Early Cities of the Americas.”

“With the cities’ growing political awareness and new methods and ideas, Bridenbaugh celebrates them as the seedbeds of a nascent American identity, the Enlightenment in the New World, the American Revolution, and its concurrent social transformations.”