“A Thing of Concert”: The Politicization of Residential Spaces in Early National Philadelphia

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The house on the northwest corner of Third and Spruce Streets was undeniably a thing of beauty. The mansion was a larger-scale copy of the Duke of Manchester's London house, and the surrounding grounds were filled with spacious gardens of lemon, orange, and citron trees and protected by a high wall. Such a house would surely catch the appreciative eye of passers by. Completed in 1788, it rose three stories, stood about forty feet back from the street, and was approached by a circular gravel carriage way that set it apart from the bustle of the busy Philadelphia traffic. The inside of the elegant home proved no less impressive. A self-supporting white marble staircase, the first of its kind in America, led to the second story. When visitors entered the grand entrance hall, they saw parlors on either side. The conservatory stood behind the south parlor, with the dining room located just beyond. The Bingham's library was down a hall, behind the north parlor. On the second floor, to the south, stood a drawing room and card rooms with windows that looked down on the conservatory. Finally, the grand ballroom was located directly north of the staircase. This splendid house featured fine furniture, paintings and carpets—all made in France— and enough mirrors to dazzle unsuspecting guests as they sat down for dinner. Here, Anne Willing Bingham, socialite and wife to Pennsylvania senator William Bingham, held court with the Philadelphia elite. Here, the Federalist faction held some of the first partisan caucuses in the United States. During the tumultuous 1790s, the Mansion House developed into a hybrid space where elaborate social functions existed alongside the hushed political discussions that allowed Federalists to come to united conclusions on both routine congressional matters and decisions that would affect the United States' relationship with the larger Atlantic World.[1]

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[1] Rufus W. Griswold, *The Republican Court; or American Society In The Days of Washington* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1867), 207-209.

This essay examines the informal activities that Federalists hosted in order to allow their fledging government to function successfully. Federalists engaged in private caucusing as an instrument of necessity. Although denounced in explicit terms as "illicit" and "immoral" activity, language firmly in line with the guidelines set by the political culture of the period, the Federalist caucuses held at private residences throughout Philadelphia would go on to gain an important and legitimate place in American political life. Quite ironically, the Democratic Republicans had adopted the same "illicit" activities as the Federalists by 1800— a surprising turnaround from their previous position as detractors of Federalist "caballing." Partisan caucusing became a normalized and accepted means of organization in the years after 1800. However in the sensitive and paranoid climate of the 1790s, the Federalists' caucuses were seen by many as evidence of un-republican behavior, rife with intrigue and corruption, affecting the highest political offices. More importantly, many therefore concluded that the caucuses provided a direct threat to the republic's survival.

Despite these ongoing criticisms, Federalists actively devised innovative solutions to difficult political problems in the 1790s. These solutions would paved the way for the creation of integral political machinery—most notably, the implementation of official congressional nominating caucuses to select candidates. This essay builds on the scholarship of Rosemarie Zagarri, Paul Finkelman, and others who have sought to complicate the one-dimensional view of Federalists as conservative, backwards-looking, aristocratical elitists. It argues that Federalists must also be understood as a group of inventive, innovative, and selectively inclusive problem-solvers, whose efforts helped the American experiment function successfully during its earliest and most unstable years.

The Binghams had their magnificent “Mansion House” built primarily for entertaining. The near constant parties held at the Bingham home were part of an extensive social network populated by the Philadelphia elite. This “republican court” was made up of powerful provincial families that had been in Philadelphia for generations, and newer elites who had gained power through political office. After Philadelphia became the federal city in 1790, Anne Bingham’s elaborate social gatherings, inspired by her time attending French salons in Paris, proved a popular topic of conversation. Not content with the traditional domestic roles afforded to women, Bingham appreciated, and eventually emulated, the lively society of French salonniéres during an extended three-year stay abroad, beginning in 1783.

The frequent gatherings at the corner of Spruce and Third grew into an American version of the political salon, at which Mrs. Bingham entertained foreign dignitaries, politicians, and the elite members of Philadelphia society. Her gatherings were open to women and men alike, and created a relaxed, social space in which elite women were given the chance to engage in political conversation. Presiding over these politicized spaces, elite women functioned as informal political actors. Moreover, Bingham’s salons proved instrumental in giving women a space in which they could have a political voice. At American salons, politically minded elite women conversed about politics with the men who held formal posts in government, indirectly applying informal influence on American governance. The gatherings also allowed politicians a space to discuss political business under the guise of an innocent social call, far away from the constraining and noisy halls of Congress. Although much has been written about salons’ role in furthering the political voices of elite women, few have considered the impact that salons had on the dealings of politicians outside of Congress.

After Anne Bingham's highly popular salons opened the doorway for political conversations to take place in the residential space, William Bingham and his fellow Federalists seized the opportunity to congregate at the home to discuss the goals of their party. These secret caucuses politicized the Bingham's home further, leading to decisions that had direct impacts in Congress. In the privacy of the Bingham parlor, leading Federalists discussed political issues ranging from routine congressional business, such as the election of the Senate pro tempore and the creation of senate committees, to decisions with larger domestic and international implications, such as the adoption of the Sedition Act and a possible declaration of war with France. A social space created by a woman, the Mansion House ultimately proved instrumental in furthering elite men's political ends. Anne Bingham's salons helped normalize the discussion of political ideas in residential and unofficial spaces. This enabled William Bingham to gather Federalist politicians at his home to discuss partisan matters under the cover of polite sociability, without earning the accusation of fomenting dangerous faction, at least at first.

The rationale for the political meetings held at the Bingham residence can only be understood within the context of the unique political culture of the 1790s. Mindful of the failures of republics in the distant past, Americans were concerned that their own republic could only survive successfully if it was governed by men of integrity, virtue, and morality, whose highest concerns were for the common good and not their own interests. To work around these cultural constraints, leading politicians talked politics under the guise of social activities out of necessity, a response to the political atmosphere that scholar Joanne B. Freeman calls a "politics of indirection."[2]

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[2] Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 51.

Within this framework, politicians adopted an honor-bound political grammar of combat. Many of these political weapons relied on activities conducted outside of the workspace, such as political gossip and dinner table-politicking. Anne Bingham's salons came to be instrumental in solidifying the view of the Mansion House as a place of innocent social gatherings, as well as a space in which partisan "caballing" was unlikely to take place. Indeed, these spaces were private enough for quiet conversations to take place, but public enough to avoid seeming secretive. William Bingham and the Federalists took full advantage of this development and used the residential space to further the goals of their party, without putting their political honor in jeopardy.

Despite the guidelines dictated by political culture, as well as efforts by George Washington to discourage the formation of factions, the late 1790s witnessed the Federalist and the Democratic Republican factions struggling for influence and control. As America became embroiled in the larger international conflict occurring between France and Britain, men and women drifted into partisan camps closely aligned to their support for each country. Indeed, the development of partisan alliances was intimately bound together with international crises and foreign policy positions, and American citizens became fiercely divided between the pro-British Federalists and the pro-French Democratic Republicans.

In this tense environment, Americans became so concerned with the implications of certain political persuasions that everyday choices became rife with political meaning. In Philadelphia and throughout the young country, taverns, shops, and churches were known to cater to either Republicans or Federalists, but not to both. Thomas Jefferson noted with concern that "Men who have been intimate all their lives cross the streets to avoid meeting, and turn their

heads another way, least they be obliged to touch their hats." Throughout the public spaces of early American cities, lines of partisanship appeared.[3]

Partisanship etched itself into Philadelphia's landscape as well. Republican and Federalist ideologies appeared in the character of the very buildings where factions gathered. Federalists embraced wealth and status as symbols of their power and legitimacy to lead the nation. With just a glance at the aristocratic, European style, splendor and grandiosity of the Federalist-inhabited buildings, the passerby could construe much about the Federalist belief system. Because their ideology embraced an American version of European court culture, Federalists allowed much more space for semi-political roles for elite women to engage in. Democratic Republicans, by contrast, congregated in taverns and boardinghouses, broadcasting the conception that they were welcoming to men from all walks of life and emphasizing the faction's connection to the industriousness, masculinity, and simplicity of the American common man. Partisan lines appeared not only in the official political struggles of Congress, but also in the material and cultural contrast of partisan spaces in Philadelphia.

The manifestation of partisanship didn't end with its presence in the geography of Philadelphia. Beliefs on family life, gender roles, material culture and class hierarchy, showcased stark differences in the ideologies between the two political factions. To members of the Federalist and Democratic Republican factions, the partisan divide signified more than a simple struggle for control over policy decisions; they saw it as a bitterly contested struggle for the future of America. The Federalists' firm belief in an existing class hierarchy, with a republican

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[3] Rosemarie Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 119. Thomas Jefferson to Edmund Rutledge, June 24, 1797 in *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd et al. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1950).

ruling class of worthy men in the highest social and political positions, allowed elite women a space for informal political action through their involvement in social activities—such as Anne Bingham's salons. Conversely, Democratic Republicans sought to demolish the existing social hierarchy Federalists relied on, simultaneously creating a rough equality among free white men, but also effectively erasing the small space for elite women to exert informal political influence. Indeed, the Republicans sought to replace one social hierarchy, based on wealth and property, with another, based on race and gender. Republican opponents hotly contested Bingham's salons for this very reason. Moving beyond the idea that Federalists were engaging in political intrigue behind closed doors, certainly incriminating enough in the eyes of the opposition, the Republicans saw the politicization of a feminized space as a betrayal of their version of American identity, a crime against the so-called "natural" order of the republican way of life.

Salon Culture

The initial conditions that eventually allowed Federalists to benefit from the creation of a hybridized socio-political space were present long before Philadelphia became the nation's capitol. Philadelphia's elite were a tight-knit group of provincial families who had been in the area for decades. Many of the most notable families—including the Willings, the Powels, the Morrises, and the Binghams— were members of a merchant-based elite that increasingly imitated the English gentry in its consumption, manners, leisure, and social practices. These families created the social infrastructure that was necessary for both political salons and Federalist caucuses. In the years succeeding the Revolutionary War, Philadelphia elites engaged

in brilliant social seasons— going to dancing assemblies, theater performances, dinners, afternoon tea parties, and dressing in the latest styles, newly arrived from England.[4]

It was among this lively and exuberant social scene that the same elite families who would soon host important political figures mingled with each other, the recently-married Binghams among them. Dr. Arthur Lee, observing the effervescent social scene in Philadelphia, disapprovingly noted to Boston's James Warren, "Mr. Morris, Mr. Bingham, Mr. [James] Ross, and others, who have made large fortunes during this war, employ their wealth in a manner not very consistent with that unostentatious virtue which ought to animate our infant republic. Extravagance, ostentation, and dissipation distinguish what are called the ladies of the first rank." Indeed, the social foundations that would support federal caucuses and American political salons alike were already well established before the 1790s even began. The social liberalism that pervaded Philadelphian society in the 1780s allowed for the Federalist undertakings that were soon to follow.[5]

Anne Bingham's time abroad had a strong influence on her future endeavors. In 1783, Bingham, along with her husband, decided to leave the jovial social scene in Philadelphia to embark on an extended trip to Europe, visiting London and Paris as well as taking a tour of other European countries. Having been recently rejected for a seat in Congress and therefore free to travel, William Bingham saw the trip as one of combined business and pleasure and, as a merchant, hoped for a commercial treaty with Britain. While in London, Mr. Bingham sought out details about trade arrangements and planned to report on British trade inclinations when he

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[4] Robert C. Alberts, *The Golden Voyage: The Life and Times of William Bingham,* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 119.

[5] Lee on William Bingham, *Warren-Adams* Correspondence, II, 184. Quoted in Alberts, *The Golden Voyage,* 120.

returned to America. However, the social experiences that Anne Bingham had in Europe were of equal importance to her husband's business opportunities.[6]

During her time in London and Paris, Mrs. Bingham became a popular and well-loved socialite. She attended balls, French salons, and court presentations regularly, taking in the lively spirit of European society. John Adams, whom the Binghams had become familiar with during their time in Europe, wrote in his diary on June 22, 1784: "Last night at Court, one of the Ladies of Honour, told me that the supper was given, in a great measure, for Mrs. Bingham. There was great enquiry after her, and much admiration expressed by all who had seen her, of her beauty." During her time in Paris, Mrs. Bingham, an active participant in court life, familiarized herself with French salon culture, as well as the active lifestyles of French women. Although Parisian life proved very different from life in America, Mrs. Bingham quickly adapted to the customs and conditions of the country. "The state of society in different countries, requires corresponding manners and qualifications" she wisely advised Thomas Jefferson, whom she had met and become friendly with while in Paris.[7]

The Binghams continued their tour of Europe and returned to London in 1786. Anne was something of a public figure in the city by this point, having gained the admiration of many elite men and women in both France and England. London shops even sold an engraving of her likeness by the time that the Binghams arrived to attend Queen Charlotte's birthday. Abigail "Nabby" Adams wrote of her growing popularity in a letter to her brother, February of 1796:

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[6] Alberts, *The Golden Voyage*, 124.

[7] John Adams, *Adams Family Correspondence, Vol. 5 and 6: October 1782-December 1785.* ed. Richard Alan Ryerson (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1992), 167. Bingham to Thomas Jefferson, June 1787. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, vol. 11.* ed. Julian P. Boyd, et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950-96), 392.

"Mrs. B—- is going quite into fashion here, and she is very much admired. The hairdresser, who dresses us upon court days, inquired of Mamma whether she knew the lady so much talked of from America— Mrs. Bingham. He had heard of her from a lady who saw her at Lord Lucan's, where she was much admired… he said, with a twirl of his comb, "Well, it does not signify but the American ladies do beat the English all to nothing."[8]

The Binghams and the Adams attended the Court presentation together and Mrs. Adams wrote to her son, John Quincy, about her experiences accompanying Mrs. Bingham to the event. "She [Mrs. Bingham] had prepared herself in France for this occasion, and being more fleshy than I have seen her before, she is consequently handsomer than ever. She shown a goodness and she moved a queen. "Is she an American, is she an American?" I heard frequently repeated, and even the *ladies* were *obliged to confess* that she was truly an elegant women." Mrs. Bingham had won the hearts of much of Europe, but more importantly Europe had made quite an impression on Mrs. Bingham. She would take her experiences of salon culture and court life, as well as her admiration of French women's active public lifestyles and relative political voices, back to America. These experiences would in turn mold Anne Bingham's own American salons when Philadelphia became the nation's capitol city and her husband, a Federalist senator.[9]

While Mrs. Bingham received an education in European court life and Parisian salon culture, the unique evolution of the American political salon occurred slowly in New York City. Although American salons went on to establish a space for political conversation, French salons were not inherently political in nature. The salons that Anne Bingham would have encountered in

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[8] Miss Adams to John Quincy Adams, Feb. 16, 1786, *Adams Papers Microfilm*, Reel 367.

[9] Mrs. Adams to John Quincy Adams, Feb. 16, 1786, *Adams Papers Microfilm*, Reel 1676.

France were spaces where groups of men and women came together for the purpose of discussing cultural and intellectual pursuits in a relaxed and social atmosphere.

The role of a French salonniére was to facilitate intellectual, mixed-gender meetings in a civilized setting. Scholar Susan Branson explains that the rules of salon culture prescribed to the philosophical notion of "complementarity," which implied that "autonomous, rational begins (gendered male) were not sufficient to the attainment of the ends they sought by nature, whether philosophical, social, or political." Women, then, proved indispensable to French salon culture. The salonniére sought to bring intellectual order to a variety of educational subjects for her guests. Therein lies the reason that Thomas Jefferson, who saw women as inherently apolitical beings, often participated in French salons. He enjoyed sharing intellectual and philosophical, but not political, conversations with both men and women at such functions.[10]

The character of American salons however, proved to be a uniquely American invention. In the new Republic, the salon existed alongside other politicized public spaces, such as taverns, bookstores, and Masonic lodges. It was, however, the only one that allowed women to hold positions of leadership. The American salon developed in conjunction with the rise of republican society, and began with the development of Martha Washington's Friday evening levees in 1789. These events were serious, courtly, and required full evening dress for attendees. Abigail Adams described Mrs. Washington's highly formal demeanor at the receptions: "Her manners are modest and unassuming, dignified and feminine, not the tincture of hauteur about her."[11]

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[10] Susan Branson, *These Fiery, Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 126.

[11] E. F. Ellet, *Court Circles of the Republic* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Publishing Company, 1872), 16-17.

During a visit to New York City, Judith Sargent Murray attended one of the levees. "The apartments are always crowded—- The Lady is introduced by some gentleman in waiting— she curtsies low to Mrs. Washington, who returns the ceremony—but not a single word is exchanged — the Lady then steps back, mixes in the rooms, takes her share of tea, Coffee, and Cakes, in their variety— fruits, ices, Lemonade, wines etc etc and at the close of the visit, she is again led up, makes her silent obeisance as before, and departs." Martha Washington's formal and stiff events left no room for the kind of informal political and intellectual conversation that would occur at Anne Bingham's salons, but they set a precedent by gathering together the national elite in a social atmosphere. These events opened the door for the formation of the American political salon once the capitol made its way to Philadelphia.[12]

When Congress deemed Philadelphia the new capitol city in 1790, American political salons fully coalesced. As Philadelphia would be the nation's capitol for an extended period of time, from 1790-1800, the city's existing social scene allowed a group of elite women to establish themselves as uniquely American salonniéreses. Bursting with vibrant activity, Philadelphia had one of the largest populations in the country; it was home to 28,000 citizens. With its lavish gardens, diverse social occupations, balls, hunting, dancing assembles, theaters, and elegant architecture, the city was an ideal place for the incoming national elite to hold court. Many, acutely conscience of the republican character of the new nation, disapproved of the aristocratical qualities that the Quaker city increasingly seemed to exhibit. In 1784, Joseph Swift, a conservative Philadelphian, complained about the city's extravagant mode of living, and in the

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[12] Bonnie Hurd Smith, ed. *From Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790: Observations, anecdotes, and thoughts from the 18th Century letters of Judith Sargent Murray Gloucester to Philadelphia in 1790* (New York:Judith Sargent Murray Society, 1998), 254.

early 1790s a friend of David Humphreys wrote to him that ever since their city had become the capital, Philadelphians "seemed to have been seized by a frenzy, and that there was no limit to their prodigality and profligacy." Abigail Adams agreed, writing flatly that Philadelphia had become "as vile and debauched as the city of London."[13]

Philadelphia life wasn't all lavishness, beauty, and excess. As partisan fervor deepened, the city became a hotbed for violence, riots, and conflict. Recounting his experiences to Thomas Jefferson in 1813, John Adams painted a dramatic picture of the capitol city. "You certainly never felt the Terrorism, excited by Genet, in 1793. When ten thousand People in the Streets of Philadelphia, day after day, threatened to drag Washington out of his House… nothing but the Yellow fever could have Saved the United States from a total Revolution of Government." He went on to challenge Jefferson's notion that violence was only effected by one party. "Both parties have excited artificial terrors and if I were summoned as witness to Say upon Oath, which Party had excited, machiavillialy, the most terror… I could not." Adams remembered a time of great violence, uncertainty, and genuine fear for his own well-being, adding to Jefferson that "I had certain Information, that the daily language..was.. "We must go to Philadelphia, and dragg that John Adams from his Chair." Philadelphia in the 1790s was a city in social and political flux, a strange conundrum of lavish aristocratical balls and social functions, coupled with public unrest and partisan violence.[14]

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[13] Joshua Swift to John Smith, July 20, 1784, Swift Family Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Rufus Griswold, *The Republican Court* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1854), 328. Mrs. Adams to Mrs. Cranch, May 24, 1797, Stewart Mitchell ed., *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), 91.

[14] J. Jefferson Looney, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, vol. 6, 11 March to 27 November 1813 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 253-256.

Such was the scene in Philadelphia when the Binghams returned home from Europe. Anne was quick to establish the Mansion House, which had been built while the Binghams were abroad, as the location of Philadelphia's most popular salons. Enterprising, wealthy, and high born, the Binghams understood that the ability to hold sumptuous social functions was integral to maintaining a favored place in Philadelphia social and political society. However, success in the world of elite sociability was a delicate tightrope. William Bingham's deeply ambitious attitude and fierce desire to attach himself to men of high office did not endear him to everyone. Seen as opportunistic, he was disliked by many. Nabby Adams remarked that she was "mistaken if he does not lack some essential qualifications to make him either admired or respected."[15]

Thomas Jefferson also had a poor opinion of William, despite harboring a fondness for Anne. Jefferson wrote to James Madison that "[Bingham] 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." Despite some poor assessments of his character, William was also seen by friends as a man of "firm mind and stern integrity, solely occupied with the consideration of what was correctly right, without suffering the slightest bias or partiality to operate upon his mind."[16]

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[15] Nabby Adams, Journal and Correspondence of Miss Adams, 8 April, 1785 (New York: Wiley & Putnum), 70-71.

[16] Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, 30 January, 1787, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson,* ed. Julian P. Boyd, 21 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 11:95. Sir Francis Baring to Rufus King, 1 March, 1804, as quoted in Alberts, *The Golden Voyage*, 283,428.

Anne certainly maintained a high opinion of William and the two enjoyed a close and affectionate relationship until Anne's death in 1801. During a separation, Anne's father comically wrote to William that "[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." This close bond contributed to the Binghams' status as one of Philadelphia's most popular and successful "power couples". Anne's talents as a likable and clever hostess and salonniéres aided William in his pursuit of political and social advancement, something Anne "passionately" supported. Anne was likely acutely aware that the salons held at the Mansion House allowed William and his fellow Federalists an opportune space to congregate and discuss important political matters, and by her social actions, worked diligently to assist him in his many ambitions. The Binghams pooled their individual talents and operated in tandem to gain social and political power. Anne's ability to draw important men into their home helped William to make useful connections that wouldn't have been possible without his wife's charm and wit. William then used his position as a man of influence to further their shared goals and ambitions.[17]

Mrs. Bingham's salons brought together elite men of diverse political sentiments and encouraged them to converse in a relaxed and low pressure environment that could not be more different from the tensions of Congress Hall. The salons at the Mansion House also offered an informal setting for members of Congress to strengthen the ties of their political factions while in a serene and relaxing environment. Mrs. Bingham's impressive skills in polite conversation

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[17] Thomas Willing to William Bingham, 29 August, 1788, Bingham Correspondence.

served to make guests comfortable, while also keeping conversation lively. Nabby Adams observed that "[Mrs. Bingham] joins in every conversation in company; and when 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 every one." Bingham's skills allowed for men and women to engage in political discussion in an informal setting by harmonizing different political opinions and making the entire party feel at their ease.[18]

Bingham's salons doubled as diverse political arenas, with guests ranging from politicians with opposing ideologies, such as Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton, foreign dignitaries such as Sir Robert Liston, British minister to the United States, and political refugees, such as the Viscount Noailles, Louis Philippe, the son of Louis Philippe, the Duke of Orleans, and related to Louis XVI. Bingham took part in conversations about dress, food, entertainment, reading, and politics. John Adams, seated next to Bingham at one of her dinners, was surprised to find that he had engaged in "something of a political conversation with her.. [she] had more ideas on the subject" than he had expected, "and a corrector judgement."[19]

Mrs. Bingham's political thoughts were not just reserved for her skills as a good hostess and conversationalist. Her correspondence with Thomas Jefferson speaks to Bingham's belief in the propriety of women's involvement in politics. In a letter written from Paris in 1788, Jefferson derided Parisian culture, stating that "all the world is run politically mad. Men, women, children talk nothing else; and you know that naturally they talk much, loud and warm." Jefferson complained that this misplaced political zeal disrupted the polite social exchange that he valued

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[18] Abigail "Nabby" Adams diary entry, October 1784, *Journal and Correspondence of Miss Adams, 2 vols.* ed. Caroline Amelia Smith DeWindt (Boston: Wiley and Putnam, 1841), quoted in Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 143.

[19] Branson, 138. Charles Page Smith, *John Adams, 2 Vols.* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 864, 911.

from French salons. “Our good ladies, I trust, have been too wise to wrinkle their foreheads with politics.” He reassured Bingham, also claiming that American women had “the good sense to value domestic happiness above all other.” To drive his point home, Jefferson patronizingly refused to give Bingham any details of “political news of battles and sieges, Turks and Russians, because you would be less handsome after reading them.”[20]

Bingham certainly opposed Jefferson’s beliefs and told him so. She defended French women and their involvement in politics: “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.” These women had “obtained that rank and consideration in society, which the sex are entitled to, and which they in vain contend for in other countries.” Bingham went on to tell Jefferson, despite his chauvinism, that American women were “bound in gratitude to admire and revere [French women], for asserting our privileges, as much as the friends of the liberties of mankind reverence the successful struggles of the American patriots.” Influenced by the actions of French women she had met in Europe, Bingham declared her belief that women deserved a voice in politics.[21]

Bingham’s salons created a space that allowed women to join together with elite men and hold political conversations in an accepted and normalized environment. The salons that Bingham hosted at the Mansion House allowed her, and other elite women, a space in which they could express political convictions and opinions that otherwise would have had difficulty reaching a male audience. Because women were already at the head of the salon, there was no

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[20] Jefferson to Anne Bingham, Paris, May 11, 1788. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Vol 13.* ed. Julian P. Boyd. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 151-152.

[21] This letter is the only piece of Bingham’s correspondence known to exist. Quoted in Alberts, *The Golden Voyage,* 464-465.

outcry against them taking part in the political conversations occurring there. Branson writes, "What transpired in the 1790s was not a break with the past, but rather a widening of the scope, an increasing of opportunities, and a raising of the stakes" for women in the realm of political interference. Simultaneously, William Bingham and his fellow Federalists considered the space as an ideal place to come together and discuss their party goals. Not long after Anne Bingham created and legitimized the Mansion House as a politicalized space, William Bingham strategically began to gather Federalist party men in the home, creating America's first political caucuses.[22]

Political Culture and the Rise of Democratic Clubs

William Bingham's desire to gather Federalist party members in his home was a direct response to the profound difficulties and disfunction that pervaded Congress and the new government. During the years of the Washington and Adams administrations, members of Congress wrestled with numerous and contentious issues as they struggled to set up an effective and legitimate system of government. Topics of fierce debate included the assumption of state debts, the location of the national capitol, the creation of a national bank, and the issue of neutrality in the war evolving between England and France. Despite politicians' supposed adherence to a strict code of disinterested republican honor, partisan disagreements and factionalism appeared as early as 1790. Groups of men whispered in the corners or antechambers of Congress, seeking to quietly create political alliances. Indeed, intrigue and factionalism continued to quietly grow in the political ranks, as politicians struggled to bring their own vision of America's future to fruition. Although some men, like Pennsylvania senator William Maclay,

[22] Branson, 141.

saw this "intrigue" as inherently negative and harmful, these activities ultimately greased the wheels of government, creating the precious consensus that allowed political business to be accomplished successfully.[23]

Increasingly, partisan activity made its way outside of Congress and into numerous social spaces, in which political actors drank, slept, and socialized. Operating within a political framework that valued unselfish republican virtue, rejected ambitiousness, and esteemed the opinions of the public, politicians sought out creative ways to realize their political goals without explicitly stepping outside of the precise boundaries outlined by this virtue-based political culture. Political conversations occurred in a variety of environments, as the process of government increasingly took the form of secret negotiations hidden from the public eye. Every politicians's actions and behaviors were scrutinized, as men battled over differing views of the correct way their new republic should be run. Therefore, careful acts of indirection helped politicians to engage in political organizing without damaging their reputations. William Bingham likely followed a similar logic when he and his fellow Federalists moved their secret caucuses into the traditionally feminized, domestic, and apolitical space created by Anne Bingham's salons at the Mansion House.[24]

The chaotic state of the Congress floor established itself as another motivating factor for politicians such as Bingham to take their activities into other spaces. From its conception, Congress proved to be a loud, disorderly, and sometimes dangerous place. Often, men could not be found in their seats, and it proved an even more rare occurrence to find them actually listening

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[23] For a full exploration of political culture in the 1790s, see Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

[24] Ibid., William McLay, *The Diary of William McLay and Other Notes on Senate Debates.* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 292.

to whoever was speaking. Members wandered the halls, wrote letters to family, and carried on private conversations with each other during the average day in congress. The sound of boots on wooden floors and outside noise consistently caused whoever was speaking to have to bellow to be heard.

Women who visited Congress regularly, hoping to see the political process in action, instead met with the general disarray that pervaded its sessions. Expecting to observe astute and well-mannered congressmen doing the virtuous work of governing, spectators were often surprised to find the exact opposite. During her visit to New York City in 1790, Judith Sargent Murray attended Congress, sitting in the upper gallery which was set aside for women spectators. Murray, expecting to listen with "enraptured veneration", was disappointed to find Congress members walking "to and fro— their hats occasionally off—reading the newspapers— lolling upon their writing stands—picking their nails, biting the heads off their canes, examining the beauty of their shoe buckles, ogling the gallery." Given the tumultuous and disorderly state of the Congress floor, early politicians looked for alternate locations for unofficial meetings to conduct political business. Adding to the discomfort and noise that pervaded its halls, Congress also came to be known as a place of occasional violence. Tensions rose to the point that shouting matches were common. Worse yet, instances of physical violence, such as the 1798 conflict between Matthew Lyon of Vermont and Roger Griswold of Connecticut, added to the growing reputation of Congress as a place of pandemonium rather than political decorum. With chaos and violence running rampant within Congress itself, the idea of government by consensus seemed unattainable by traditional methods.[25]

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[25] Samuel Eliot Morison, *Harrison Grey Otis, 1765-1848: The Urbane Federalist* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 110-111.

Given the realities of governing the new republic, political organizing and partisanship became part of how politicians accomplished their goals. Indirect means of politicking became commonplace by necessity, as men on both sides of aisle employed new ways to accomplish their agendas without publicly violating the expectations of political culture. Importantly, although all politicians denounced "intrigue" and "caballing", none of them actively avoided it. As senator William Maclay resignedly wrote in his diary, reflecting on a dinner conversation rife with potential political intrigue, "Men Will not emerge to Office in republicks without submitting either directly or indirectly to a degree of intreague."[26]

The question remains, then, how did politicians justify actions that were so obviously out of line with the political culture that they all supposedly accepted? The answer lies in the fact that politicians of both factions saw the opposing side as a serious threat to the very survival of the American republic. Politicians were willing to do whatever it took to protect their own American vision, even if it meant quietly bending the carefully constructed rules of political conduct. Members of the Federalist elite, who were ushered into power with the election of George Washington as the first president, conceived efforts to form an opposing Democratic Republican faction as a virtual threat of insurrection. Insisting that common people were too ignorant to govern their own affairs and needed to be led by well-educated and accomplished elites, Federalists believed themselves, rich and well-born, to be the legitimate leaders of America. They had been elected by the people and therefore it was their right to rule as they saw fit, controlling both domestic and international policy. Inspiring suspicion and outrage among the public, encouraging dangerous mob rule, and publicly speaking out against official policy,

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[26] McLay, 360.

Federalists saw Democratic Republicans's efforts to mobilize as a malicious threat to the government they had worked so hard to create and maintain.

Looking back at the period, pro-Federalist Joshua Francis Fisher commented bitterly, "All would have gone well but for that Democratic serpent, Jefferson, who, like his prototype, the one in the garden of Eden, whispered his devilish lies about human equality into the ear of our people, and aspersed the noble President with his venom, and scattered every falsehood, which could stimulate envy and suspicion among those who should have been contented in their own appropriate sphere, and thus planted and fostered the deadly tree of Party. . ." Although Fisher places the blame squarely on Jefferson's shoulders, he did not singlehandedly spearhead Republican efforts. Rather they began at the local level, with Democratic Republican clubs popping up in major cities, the first being Philadelphia, as early as 1793.[27]

Inspired by articles in Philip Freneau's *National* Gazette, which advised citizens that it was "not only a privilege but a duty to criticize measures their government took", Democratic Republican clubs developed quickly during 1793, in ever increasing numbers. Democrats saw Federalist actions and ideology as an attempt to reimpose the rule of an aristocratic minority at the expense of the general population. If Federalists were allowed to continue to lead America, Democrats feared that the country would fall back into old patterns of elitism and aristocracy, and all that they had fought for during the American Revolution would be lost. These feelings were echoed in pro-Republican newspapers such as the *National Gazette* which encouraged Americans to "erect the temple of LIBERTY on the ruins of *palaces and thrones*."[28]

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[27] Joshua Francis Fisher, *Recollections of Joshua Francis Fisher* (Boston: Merrymount Press, 1929), 103.

[28] *National Gazette* (Philadelphia), July 4, 11, 18, 1792. Ibid, July 17, 1793; Minutes, Democratic Society of Pennsylvania.

Democratic Republican clubs quickly gained momentum and further solidified the partisan divides in Philadelphia. Federalists watched these societies with a weary eye, viewing them as potential threats to the government itself. The apprehension is clear in a letter to Alexander Hamilton written by David Ross. "Democratic society" with whatever good (in)tentions it may be instituted by some yet I fear (oth)ers may wish and hope to give it the conse(que)nce & power of a Jacobin Club— indeed the (ver)y name of the Society holds out the idea to (th)e People of America that there are such defects (in) our Government as to require an association to guard against them and will of course become the Standard for the Anti's to resort to, to effect their purposes." The Federalists were well aware of the increasing influence of the Democratic Republican faction and likely felt that they needed to step outside of the established rules of political culture to combat this internal threat. Democrats came to a similar conclusion.

Firmly believing that the future of the republic was at stake, both sides came to bend rules privately in an effort to mold the country's future. Partisan tensions flared, the specter of disunion loomed, and the pressures that accompanied the founding of a new and fragile country pushed America's politicians to privately circumvent established regulations of political culture as they feverishly sought new ways of establishing their goals. Because of the dysfunctional state of Congress Hall and the urgent political issues that faced politicians, Bingham and his Federalist counterparts actively looked for new ways to solve political problems. For Bingham, his wife's salons supplied one of those solutions. Likely with Anne's full support, Bingham utilized the Mansion House as an ideal meeting place for informal Federalist caucuses, not in some illicit act of intrigue, but as an innovative and creative reaction to the political difficulties that he and his fellow Federalists were faced with daily in Congress Hall. Federalist party activity did not

overwrite Bingham's salons, but rather the Bingham Mansion became a hybridized space in which female-led political salons existed alongside Federalist caucuses.[29]

Federalists viewed the salons as creating a space that they could utilize to organize their budding party goals. Unlike Democratic Republicans, whose ideologies were highly masculine, anti-aristocratical, and strongly opposed to women having any semblance of a political voice; Federalists supported an Americanized version of European court culture— which traditionally included an informal role for women in political discussion. This likely made them more tolerant of women taking part in political conversation and explains why Federalists had few qualms about moving into a feminized space to conduct secret party business. William Bingham certainly did not attempt to keep his wife ignorant of political matters, but rather worked together with her to realize shared goals. Indeed, Federalist and Republican ideologies played a strong role in shaping responses to the political business conducted within the traditionally domestic space of the Mansion House.

The Federalist Political Underground

The affairs at the Mansion House didn't occur in a vacuum. Importantly, Anne's salons were part of a complex social network in Philadelphia. Federalist elites created an Americanized version of European court culture in Philadelphia that satisfied both the social and political needs of the elite. Indeed, the very nature of court culture allowed for private meetings between politicians at various social engagements, far away from the public eye. Although the Binghams likely hosted the most politically-minded social functions, there were many other opportunities for Federalist politicians to mingle and form political connections. The Philadelphia elite were a

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[29] ed. Harold C. Syrett, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 15, June 1793-January 1794 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 121-122.

tight-knit group of politicians and wealthy families, almost exclusively of the Federalist persuasion. As Abigail Adams noted in 1791, "In Philadelphia there is an agreeable society of friendliness kept up with all the principal families, who appear to live in great harmony, and we meet at all the parties nearly the same company." At a network of locations, clustered mostly in the stylish and elegant neighborhood of Third and Forth Street, the same group of powerful elites met together for entertainment and, more quietly, political business.[30]

The cast of characters in this social and political underground was quite extensive. Lucy Knox, Mary Morris, Elizabeth Willing Powel, and Henrietta Liston joined Anne Bingham as Philadelphia's established salonniéreses. Each used her own skills as a hostess to throw lavish parties, in which the Philadelphia elite could convene for social engagement. These women were also friendly with the most powerful and influential political figure of the period. Indeed, George Washington wrote in his diary of the many warm evenings that he spent with the Bingham, Powel and Morris families during the summer of 1787.

Mary Morris was the wife of wealthy merchant, financier and speculator, Robert Morris. Because of her husband's wealth as well as through her own grace and dignity, Mrs. Morris had generally taken a leading role at most social gatherings of the 1780s. Morris shined at the top of the social world of the Philadelphia elite. Lucy Knox was wife to the Secretary of War, Henry Knox. Knox was known for her skills as a hostess, her entertaining personality, and the close relationship she enjoyed with Martha Washington. Elizabeth Powel was an aunt of Anne Bingham, as well as wife to Philadelphia's first republican mayor, the "Patriot Mayor," Samuel Powel. High-born, witty, and well-educated, Powel dazzled as a leading hostess of early

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[30] Mrs. Adams to Mrs. Smith, Dec. 26, 1790, Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Letters of Mrs. Adams* (Boston, 1848), 351.

republican Philadelphia throughout the 1780s. During Elizabeth's thirty-three years as a married women, Powel House was a familiar location for the Philadelphia elite. Henrietta Liston was wife to the British minister to the United States, Robert Liston, who moved through the circles of the Philadelphia elite during the height of the tumultuous 1790s.[31]

Each women brought her own unique talents and circumstances to her salons. Consequently, the efforts of all furthered the social network that Federalists employed for unofficial politicking. Elizabeth Powel's contributions are of special note for two reasons. First, Powel enjoyed a particularly close relationship with Washington, who genuinely enjoyed her company. She coquetted with the President in a gay and bantering manner he enjoyed. Powel teased him, she inspired him to sallies of wit, and she kept him amused. Powel even eagerly and passionately discussed politics with Washington, who found her insightful views of value, as she "had improved her mind with reading." When Powel sent Washington a pamphlet,·which she had viewed with alarm, the President assured her gaily that "the sentiments and charges therein contained have not given me a moment's painful sensation." He then signed himself, "with very great esteem, regard, and affection."

Powel's close relationship with Washington would have aided her in getting political views that she supported heard by men of power. It also suggests a political bent to her salons, which Washington often attended. These salons were, much like those of her niece, elaborate occasions with the city's most influential men and women in attendance. John Adams

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[31] For accounts of Washington's dinners and teas with the Morris, Powell, and Bingham families, see Washington's diaries from May to September 1787. *The Diaries of George Washington,* ed. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig (July 1786 to December 1789) (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), vol. 5. Sarah Templier, "Under the Roof and the Pen of Elizabeth Willing Powel Material Culture, Sociability, and Letters in Revolutionary and Early Republican Philadelphia," (University of Montreal, 2013), 20.

commented with satisfaction on dinner at the Powel house, calling it, "A most sinful feast again. Everything which could delight the eye or allure the taste. Curds and creams, jellies, sweetmeats of various sorts, twenty sorts of tarts, fools, trifles, floating islands, and whipped syllabubs." Indeed, Powel's salons presented a comfortable and refined social space for conversations to take place. Elizabeth skillfully discussed a wide array of topics—"commerce and business, health and happiness, literature, men and women's place in society, education and, importantly, politics."[32]

Powel was also a strong influence on her niece, Anne, tutoring her on the proper social graces required of a women of high standing. Powel's influence likely had much to do with Bingham's outgoing, witty, and engrossing personality and her skills as a salonniere. Elizabeth certainly thought so, often speaking herself of her influence on Anne. Writing about her niece during her stay in Europe, Powel commented "It 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." Powel likely passed along her own skills as a salonniere to Bingham, thereby aiding her in future endeavors at the Mansion House.[33]

Federalist court culture allowed for politicians to move through private spaces in Philadelphia that were highly elite, and open only to the wealthiest and highest stationed citizens. Indeed, the very nature of Federalist ideology and material culture did much to exclude the populace from a role in political decision-making, while also allowing elite women a larger indirect role in political life. The Mansion House is not necessarily unique, it is best seen as an example of the broad range of lavish mansions and homes included in a social network that

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[32] GW XXXII, 22-23, Wansley, 138. Quoted in James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington and the New Nation: 1783-1793* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1969), 321. Leach, Moon, II, 485. Templier, 67.

[33] Elizabeth Powel to Margaret Hare, 2 October, 1783, *Elizabeth Powell Correspondence,* 1783-1786, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

easily doubled as an arena for political conversation and activity. Shrewd politicians took advantage of these locations, knowing that the closed nature of the environment allowed for them to quietly do political business without the public's knowledge. Republicans worked to fashion themselves as the exact opposite— eschewing open, egalitarian political discussion that was accessible to white men of all backgrounds, while also remaining exclusionary of women and people of color regardless of wealth or station.

Federalist Caucuses at the Mansion House

In the waning years of Adams presidency, Federalists were faced with the increasing pressure to take a side in the escalating conflict between France and England. After the unpopular Jay Treaty calmed trade tensions with England, France felt that the United States had betrayed commitments made during the American Revolution and the prospect of war with France became an increasingly real danger. These international pressures directly affected domestic policies in the United States, leading to controversy surrounding the Alien and Sedition Acts and increasing partisan support for either the pro-Britain or pro-French faction. Indeed, as scholar Francis Cogliano writes "By the latter 1790s international relations and domestic politics had become so intertwined that the existence of the union was endangered by international questions."[34]

Amidst the increasingly desperate international situation and acutely aware of the growing need for unity within their faction, Federalist party leaders congregated in William Bingham's home. These men would likely be well-acquainted with the layout of the lavish

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[34] Francis D. Cogliano, *Emperor of Liberty: Thomas Jefferson's Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 118.

rooms, having previously spent many evenings at the home attending Anne Bingham's grand salons. The results of these meetings were clear— unified decisions on the part of the Federalist faction in the House and Senate. The caucuses allowed Federalists to make decisions ahead of time that were in the best interest of their party. It is helpful to highlight three examples of decisions made in the Bingham home and their corresponding implications in Congress. Indeed, there was a learning curve to the decisions made at the caucuses. Federalists were cautious at first— using the meetings to make small congressional appointments before gaining the confidence to use the space to make decisions with international implications.

In March of 1797, shortly after arriving in Philadelphia to take the oath of office as Vice President under John Adam's administration, Jefferson received an undated letter. A conversation between two unidentified correspondents, the letter expressed suspicions over machinations involving the choice of Pennsylvania senator, William Bingham, as president pro tempore of the Senate, on February 16. One correspondent conveyed the rumors circulating in his "part of the Country" that a number of senators were holding "clandestine consultations out of Doors." The letter added that on the 14 of February, the day after Adams announced that he would leave the Senate, Bingham, along with Benjamin Goodhue and Theodore Sedgwick, both Massachusetts Federalists, invited "the federal part of the Senate" to a private meeting at Bingham's house "to arrange measures for chusing a president of the Senate pro tempore." The invitation, so "derogatory to the honor of the Members of the Senate," was accepted by some Federalists, who met at the designated hour and agreed to support the man who had the most votes. The letter charged that Bingham had gained his position through "this disgraceful combination." Bingham and his fellow Federalists had been holding unofficial meetings at his home to discuss political

business and make decisions with official implications. Bingham's appointment as Senate president pro tempore was likely a direct result of Federalist compromise that had occurred, not in Congress, but in a caucus held in Bingham's own parlor. [35]

Although this letter came unsigned and undated, Jefferson took its concerns seriously. On the first of February, he had also received a letter from Henry Tazewell, a senator from Virginia, that expressed similar concerns in regard to secret Federalist meetings at Bingham's mansion. Tazewell informed Jefferson that the Senate had chosen a committee to "report a Method of counting the Votes, and of notifying those concerned of their appointments", for the election of the President and Vice President. This committee, Tazewell claimed, was a "thing of concert" since its three members, John Laurence, Theodore Sedgwick, and Jacob Read, were all Federalists. Tazewell believed that the decision of who would be on the committee had previously been decided at Bingham's mansion. Both letters that Jefferson received pointed to political decisions that Federalists had come upon in secret meetings. These decisions had direct political implications, as evidenced by the creation of the vote counting committee in the Senate and William Bingham's election as Senate Pro Tempore. Throughout the late 1790s, Federalists continued to use the Mansion House to organize the interests and goals of the faction. [36]

The most significant example of Federalist caucusing and its official implications occurred in 1798, when war with France loomed. Federalist party leaders called for a declaration

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[35] William Bingham*, Extract of Political Intrigue*.1795. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib008576/. Thomas Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* Vol. 29: 1 March 1796 to 31 December 1797. ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 282-283.

[36] "To Thomas Jefferson from Henry Tazewell, 1 February 1797," Founders Online, National Archives, accessed February 21, 2020, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/ 01-29-02-0224.

of war with France largely on principle. Writing to Rufus King, party leader Theodore Sedgwick claimed that if Congress did not declare war, "the people… will be induced to believe the friends of peace [the Republicans] may save them from the calamity of war." Some Federalists wanted war as retaliation against French attacks on Americans ships; a few others saw it as a means of consolidating political power against the Republican "French party". It seemed inevitable that a war with French was forthcoming. The vote on a declaration of war was set for July 4 and a few days before, on July 1, a caucus was held at Bingham's home to discuss the issue.

This caucus revealed a surprising split in Federalist opinion on an incredibly important and contentious political situation. During the caucus, senator Bingham and a number of Federalist representatives refused to vote for a declaration of war. As a result, Congress rejected the motion by a majority of five votes mere days after the caucus. This vote was a notable one; indeed, it was "the most serious attempt in American history to declare war without a recommendation by the President." Organized decisions made during the Federalist war caucus resulted in direct effects on official political policy. After discussion at the Bingham Mansion, members of the Federalist faction, Bingham included, had broken with party leaders on an important decision. The end results in Congress proved to be closely aligned with decisions made at the caucus, highlighting the significance of the meetings that occurred at the Bingham residence and their ability to aid Federalists in making decisions before they even set foot in Congress Hall.[37]

[37] "To Thomas Jefferson from Henry Tazewell, 5 July 1798," *Founders Online,* National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-30-02-0320. Sedgwick to King, July 1, 1798. *King, II,* 352. Quoted in Alberts, *Golden Voyage,* 341. Manning J. Dauer, *The Adams Federalists,* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1953), 170.

Before long, the existence of Bingham's Federalist caucuses was common knowledge among Republicans, who repeatedly decried the Federalists as involved in "illegal intrigue." Republican newspapers used talk of Federalist caucuses to fuel public outrage against supposedly anti-democratic Federalist intrigue. During the fierce election cycle of 1800, Federalists held multiple caucuses in a desperate attempt to unite their party, precariously divided behind the leadership of Charles Cotesworth Pinckney and John Adams. Party leader Alexander Hamilton believed this was the only way for a Federalist candidate to have a chance at winning. In a letter to Theodore Sedgwick in May of 1800, Hamilton wrote: "To support Adams & Pinckney equally is the only thing that can possibly save us from the fangs of *Jefferson*. It is therefore essential that the Federalists should not separate without coming to a distinct and solemn [con]cert to pursue this course *bona fide.*" Pro-Republican newspapers heard reports of the meeting and fanned the flames of outrage against Federalist "caballing." In September of 1800, the Philadelphia *Aurora* published a scathing account of the Federalist caucus, exclaiming, "Here we see the consultation of all the members of the federal party is confessed; and it is boasted of that this *factious* meeting, this *self appointed, self elected*, self delegated club or caucus, or conspiracy, of about 24 persons.. unknown to the Constitution or the law undertook to decide for the people of the United States who should be president and vice president."[38]

The *Aurora* offers a second example of Republican newspapers using Federalist caucuses to defame the party. William Duane, the newest editor of the Jeffersonian newspaper, reported a story about a bill concerned with the count of electoral votes in the contested presidential

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[38] "From Alexander Hamilton to Theodore Sedgwick, [4 May 1800]," *Founders Online,* National Archives, Accessed February 22, 2020. Philadelphia, *Aurora,* September 22, 1800.

election. This bill would have given a Grand Committee of the House and Senate absolute power to decide in secret session the validity of any objections to any of the electoral votes. Duane charged that this bill attempted to change the constitutional system for counting the presidential vote, and worse, the plan had been prepared at a Federalist caucus. In explaining the evils of Federalist caucusing, he recalled one of the first caucuses, held at the Bingham home. "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… Upon a division of the caucus it was found that [the Senators] were divided nine against eight. This majority...held the minority to their engagement, and the whole seventeen voted in Senate upon all the measures discussed in the caucus... In other words, a majority of nine members of the Senate *rule* the other twenty three members." Duane intended his withering remarks to turn public opinion against the Federalists and their illicit activities—during a crucial election cycle no less. Republican newspaper editors in both cases sought to align the Federalist party with intrigue, despotism, and anti-Republican practices, all while making the Republican party out to be the honest, virtuous party of the common man.[39]

Importantly, Republicans engaged in the same "caballing and intrigue" that they decried in their Federalist enemies. Republicans simply went about their partisan actions in a different setting, one more in line with their egalitarian sensibilities. As we have seen, Democratic clubs existed alongside Anne Bingham's political salons and William Bingham's secret caucuses. These clubs proved to be another example of the many politicized spaces in Philadelphia. Democratic club meetings were held at ordinary, rank and file locations, such as boarding

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[39] *Annals X*, 67-184. Quoted in Alberts, *Golden Voyage*, 386-387.

houses, taverns and hotels. One such location was Marache's boarding house in Philadelphia, a residential space that became an unofficial headquarters for Republican party members. Multiple Republicans, such as Nathaniel Macon of Virginia, David Stone from North Carolina, Joesph H. Nicholson of Maryland, John Langdon of New Hampshire, and John Nicholas from Virginia, lived at Macache's. John Randolph, another representative from Virginia, liked to call it "Marache's Club." Scholar Noble Cunningham explains, "With Jefferson in Philadelphia to direct them, these informal associations of party leaders gave considerable unity to the Republican party as a national organization and enabled Republicans to coordinate their efforts throughout the nation."[40]

Throughout the same period that Republicans criticized Federalists for their so-called illicit caucusing, they were holding caucuses of their own—nearly indistinguishable from the Federalist caucuses they claimed to detest. For example, during the debates regarding John Jay's treaty with Great Britain, President Adams refused to release the treaty details for congressional inspection. Republican members met in a caucus to determine a way forward after the president's announcement. Two days after the Republican caucus, James Madison wrote to Thomas Jefferson that he believed there would be "sufficient firmness" to answer the President's refusal to submit the treaty papers with resolutions regarding the constitutional powers of the House to require the papers. The caucus, much like its Federalist counterpart, helped the Republicans to unify their response to difficult issues encountered in Congress.[41]

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[40] John Randolph to Joseph H. Nicholson, May 3, June 21, 1800, *Nicholson Papers*, I, 1054d, 1058a, Library of Congress. Noble E. Cunningham, *The Jeffersonian Republicans: The Formation of Party Organization, 1789-1801.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957), 162.

[41] Madison to Jefferson, April 4, 1796, ed. Gaillard Hunt, *The Writings of James Madison Vol. VI* (New York: G.P. Putnum's Sons, 1900), 265.

Additionally, much like their Federalist counterparts at Bingham's Mansion House, Republicans met in caucus at Marache's boarding house during in election cycle of 1800 to discuss their plan of action. As Jefferson was already the unanimous Republican candidate for president, the caucus's primary goal was to discuss the prospect of supporting Aaron Burr as vice president. Forty-three Republicans were present and it was ultimately decided that Burr was the right man for the position. The results of the caucus appeared when, during the election, every elector who cast his vote for Jefferson also voted for Burr. The Republicans matched the Federalists in their efforts to meet in caucus and make united party decisions and arrangements for the election- ironically the very action, when taken by Federalists, that caused such outrage in Republican newspapers. Clearly, despite what they were publicly claiming, Republicans saw the usefulness of Federalist organizational tactics and adopted them to their own ends.[42]

Republicans used many of the same strategies as Federalists to unite their party during the 1790s. Why then were most Republicans so convinced that Federalist actions would ultimately bring the country to ruin? In order to fully understand why Republicans were so opposed to William Bingham's Federalist caucuses, we must turn to the stark differences between the parties in regards to ideology, material culture, and family relations. Republicans were not critical of the Federalists exclusively because they were holding "illicit" caucuses, as it is clear that Republicans were often using similar organizational tactics. Much of the rationale behind Republican opposition to Federalist activity lies in the strikingly different ideologies that both parties held in regards to gender roles, proper republican lifestyle, and the American identity itself.

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[42] Gallatin to his wife, May 12, 1800. *Niles' Weekly Register, 27* (1824), 66. Cunningham, 164.

The Impact of Republican and Federalist Ideology

To better understand Republican ideology, examine party leader Thomas Jefferson's beliefs on gender roles. As scholar Brian Steele explains, Jefferson saw gender roles as tightly bound up with American national identity. In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson pointed toward the domesticity of women as a signpost of the development of a civilization. He argued that since Native American women were "submitted to unjust drudgery," the Indian society was in a state of barbarism. He went on to explain that "It is civilization alone which replaces women in the enjoyment of their national equality." This equality, for women, was the freedom to exist in their so-called natural state, which was one of domestic bless— free from unfeminine labor or political roles. Therefore, if "civilization alone" granted women their natural equality and if such equality for women guaranteed their domesticity, then civilization could be measured by the extent of women's domestication." Indeed, for Jefferson the advancement of society and the idea of women reaching their highest natural state, domesticity, were inexplicably entangled with one another. Jefferson connected this belief to his own nationalism by claiming that America was the only country in which natural gender roles were not interrupted by cultural or political constraints. Jefferson believed that America was the only place that provided the political, social, and economic means for men and women to exist in their "natural" roles. Both sexes were "equal" in the sense that they were free to exist as they were naturally meant to.[43]

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[43] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia,* ed. William Peden (1784; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1954), 60. Brian Steel, "Thomas Jefferson's Gender Frontier." *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 1 (2008): 22. Accessed February 23, 2020.

Jefferson's nationalistic belief in American exceptionalism was bound tightly with his views on domestic roles for women. Democratic Republican ideology largely followed this line of thinking, arguing that women could only reach true domestic bliss if they removed themselves from political life. Moreover, they believed that the republic's survival could only be insured if women provided a domestic refuge for their husbands, far away from the conflict of public life. Jefferson and his Republican party viewed the notion of Federalist politicking taking place in a highly feminized space, such as the Mansion House, as unacceptable. Indeed, it was a direct violation of their beliefs regarding the republican role of women and therefore a threat to proper American identity and the prosperity of the nation. Women's political activity reversed gender roles in a way that reinforced the worst features of European life and, if brought to America by Federalist action, could spell the death of republican society. This explains how Republicans could view their own caucuses— taking place in highly masculine environments open only to male participants— as legitimate, while simultaneously decrying the Federalist caucuses at the Bingham House as illicit, villainous, and un-American acts.

Moreover, Jefferson perceived the Federalist espousal of aristocratic court life as a direct threat to American masculinity. For Jefferson, European aristocrats were foppish, insolent beings who prized fashion, idle conversation, wit, card playing and martial infidelity— all things that Jefferson deplored. He also believed that French aristocracy encouraged a certain effeminacy in men that he found abhorrent and anti-republican. He wrote in 1788, that "Under the most imposing exterior," the nobility "are the weakest and worst part of mankind." Jefferson worried that exposure to French ideas of what passed as masculinity would poison America's distinctive version of manhood. The Federalist effort to create a distinctive Americanized court culture,

then, revolted Jefferson and his followers. Republicans saw Federalists' aristocratical ways as a direct threat to good republican masculinity, something they strongly based their party ideology on.[44]

The Federalists, for their part, held a more pragmatic view. They did not necessarily see themselves as complicit in creating a new political space for women, nor did they see their party as anti-republican or effeminate. Federalists perceived Bingham's political salons as an opportunity to unite their party by congregating in a social space, while adhering to the constraints of political culture. The Federalists identified the Mansion House as a space that had already been legitimized as a place of harmless social gathering, and believed that they would be less suspected of so-called illicit intrigue if they met there. Importantly, Federalists were not feminists, explicitly advocating for a direct political role for women. Still, the party as a whole was more welcoming of certain degrees of indirect female participation in political business than their Republican counterparts, largely because their idea of social hierarchy was based on wealth and property. Within this framework, women of high social standing were afforded a small space that they could take advantage of to play an indirect role in political activity.

Because Federalists did not contest the existing social hierarchy and embraced a European style court culture that already allowed for more flexible roles for women, they were accepting of women involving themselves in indirect political roles. Indeed, Federalists supported women's indirect participation in politics but did not advocate for a stronger political position for women. This was largely because of Federalist support for the concept of Republican

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[44] Jefferson, "*Traveling Notes,"* June 3, 1788, in *Writings,* ed. Peterson, 660. Steele, "Thomas Jefferson's Gender Frontier", 35.

Motherhood, an ideal in which women, although not able to vote or hold office, had an important, though indirect, role in politics. Within this framework, Federalists believed women could be involved with politics, but only within the context of their traditional roles as wives and mothers. Conversely, Republicans saw no political role for women because they were seeking to replace the existing social hierarchy with a new one. They advocated social equality for all white males, but did not seek to give marginalized groups, such as people of color or women, a voice. Therefore, Republicans did not see women as having any role in political life at all. Republicans were attempting to deconstruct the class structure that Federalists espoused and it was this very class structure that allowed elite women the space to maintain an indirect political voice.[45]

Ultimately, there is much that can be learned from a close examination of the politicized informal spaces in Philadelphia during the 1790s. On a broad level, these spaces can help illuminate the evolution and pervasiveness of partisanship in early politics. Indeed, the hard-fought, highly contested battles waged between Federalist and Democratic Republican factions during the 1790s affected almost every part of American life. Fashion, architecture, gender roles, and ideals of republican sensibilities all spoke to differences in the belief systems of the two factions. As we have seen, often partisan disagreements had less to do with official policies and more to do with profound anxieties and differing ideologies in regard to what the country would become. Both factions had a distinct idea of what it meant to be an American and believed that their victory would save the infant nation from certain destruction. The apprehensive mindset and actions of politicians of this period are easier to understand if we consider how high the

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[45] For a full explanation of gender and the first party system, see Rosemarie Zagarri's excellent chapter "Gender and the First Party System" in *Federalists Reconsidered*, ed. Doren Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 118-134.

stakes were for them. No decision was taken lightly as Federalists and Democratic Republicans scrutinized each other from every angle, certain that every move the opposition made would lead to the undoing of their fragile republic.

On a more specific level, exploration of the activities that occurred within these spaces reveals the pragmatic innovation of the Federalist faction and its influence on both important policy decisions during the 1790s, and the evolution of party machinery in early politics. Federalist caucuses, seen by their detractors as illicit and immoral intrigue, would go on to become accepted and useful political instruments. Arguably, without borrowing from the playbook of their adversaries, Republicans would not have been successful in overthrowing Federal leadership. The election cycle of 1800 reveals the Democratic Republicans adopting organizational techniques, such as caucusing, first employed by the Federalists and then improving upon them— creating a nationally organized party machinery that was highly successful. In many ways the Federalists were ahead of their time, finding innovative ways to unite their party despite the stringent expectations of the existing political culture of the period. Moreover, the innovation and subsequent normalization of Federalist caucuses was not the only instance in which Federalist ideas cast a long shadow, but instead is best understood as part of a larger pattern of Federalist influence. Although intensively criticized, often for valid reasons, during the short time they were in power, many of the Federalists' goals and policies ultimately outlived the party itself. Policies such as the creation of a national bank, protective tariff regulations, and internal improvements were adopted by the Whig Party in the 1820s and 1830s, long after the Federalists as a party had faded from view. Despite the fact that many influential politicians of the later period, such as Whig party leader Henry Clay, grew out of the Jeffersonian

tradition, they ultimately supported and encouraged policies that were more in line with the early Federalist party.

This period of political turmoil and informal politicking also proved to be a unique time of opportunity for elite women, who emerged as informal political actors, voicing their opinions at feminized political salons and social gatherings— a development that simultaneously offered Federalists a place to gather and unite their party. Federalists' acceptance of the established social hierarchy and an Americanized court culture allowed them to be selectively inclusive of women of high social standing, creating a space for female political involvement and ultimately helping to provide an opportunity for men to engage in informal political organizing. The victory of the Democratic Republicans in the election of 1800 saw women lose this political space. Thomas Jefferson was eager to further Republican principles by wiping away the court culture of the Federalists, and with it the feminized political space that women like Anne Bingham had created. Although Democratic Republicans are often considered to be the more inclusive and egalitarian faction, they were also quite hostile to political roles for women. They sought to demolish the existing social hierarchy, allowing for the eventual mass enfranchisement of white men, regardless of wealth or property status, but effectively erasing the small political space for marginalized groups that had existed within Federalist understandings of hierarchy. The Republicans, therefore, simply replaced one social hierarchy with another. Democratic Republican egalitarianism featured equality for one group, white men, at the disenfranchisement of another— Native and African Americans and women.

In this way, Federalists, with their emphasis on an exclusive class hierarchy based on wealth and class status, were ironically more inclusive than the allegedly egalitarian Republicans. This speaks to the fact that straight-forward binaries, such as egalitarian and non-egalitarian or conservative and progressive, are not entirely helpful when considering the earliest political parties. It's important to examine these political factions with an eye toward nuance and complexity. The exploration of politicized spaces in the national capitol can reveal much about the complicities of the two parties. Uncovering what the spaces looked like, what political activities were being conducted within them, and who was allowed within those spaces can help to explain how the Democratic Republican and Federalist factions saw themselves and their country, and how they responded to the onerous demands of creating a new nation with little to guide them.

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