

Living an American Lifestyle in 18th Century Philadelphia—Robert Morris, Prosperous Merchant and Family Man

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Abstract

Robert Morris (1734-1806), an English-born merchant and later one of the American Founding Fathers, has not attracted the attention of national icons like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, or Alexander Hamilton. There are obvious reasons for his comparative obscurity. Morris was not a charismatic speaker; he did not write influential books or pamphlets and did not actively take part in military campaigns. He was, however, one of the most powerful political leaders during the Revolutionary period. His undertakings in the political sphere have been fairly well studied but his personal life, including his lifestyle has not yet been adequately examined by scholars of American history. In this paper, it is my intention to shed light on the daily existence of Philadelphia's wealthy merchant community by closely scrutinizing Robert Morris's life and character. My purpose is not to generalize too much based on analysis on Robert Morris, but to use him as a case in point to reveal

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some aspects of the life of upper class in 18th century Philadelphia.

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I. The road to fame

Robert Morris (1734-1806), an English-born merchant and statesman, and later one of America's "Founding Fathers," has not attracted the attention of other national icons such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, or Alexander Hamilton. There are a number of reasons for this relative obscurity: Morris was not a charismatic speaker; he did not write influential books or pamphlets; and he did not actively take part in military campaigns. Even so, he was still one of the most powerful American political leaders during the Revolutionary period.

Robert Morris's political and financial exploits were already controversial issues among his eighteenth-century contemporaries. Even today, historians have not yet come to an agreement over his significance during the Revolutionary period and having America's path toward nationhood. His undertakings in the political sphere have been fairly well studied, but his personal life and lifestyle has not aroused interest among scholars of American history. In this article, it is my intention to shed light on the social ties and consumption patterns of Philadelphia's wealthy merchant community via a careful examination of Robert Morris's life and character. As main sources, I have used Morris's private as well as public correspondence through his lifetime.

In contrast to many of the other American Founding Fathers, Robert Morris did not spend his childhood in America, instead he was born and lived his childhood in Liverpool, Lancashire,¹ England. He was raised by his grandmother after his mother, Elisabeth Murphet, died. When he was thirteen, he traveled from Liverpool to North America, where his father, a tobacco agent for the Liverpool firm of Foster Cunliffe and Sons,² stationed in

¹ Robert Morris was born on January 31, 1734 and christened in St. George's Church, January 28, 1735.

² Foster Cunliffe was a mayor of Liverpool and he and his sons were prominent slave traders, and some evidence points to the fact that Robert

Oxford, Maryland, had moved a couple years previously.³ After three years of residence in North America, Robert Morris Sr. died in an accident. In the meantime, Morris Jr. went to school under the patronage of tradesman Robert Greenway, a friend of his father's (Oberholtzer, 1968: 9-10; Wagner, 1976: 1; Chernow, 1978: 9; Young, 1950: 5, 9; Nash, 1986: 110; Simpson, 1859: 702). Soon, hating school, Morris quit his studies, and got a position as an apprentice in the respectable Philadelphian merchant house of Charles Willing. In April 1757, three years after the death of the former owner, Morris and Willing started a business together called House of Willing and Morris which was later expanded to include insurance services.

By the time the First Continental Congress took place, Robert Morris had established his position as one of the top of the merchants in Philadelphia. Morris's name was known from the West Indies to Europe, and his wealth was considerable. Because of the unstable situation between England and the American colonies, Morris, wanting to secure his own and his fellow colonists' interests, drifted into public affairs (Doerflinger, 1986: 26-27, 236-240; Smith, 1984: 640-641). Between 1775 and 1786, Morris was an active member in the local legislature called the Pennsylvania Assembly,⁴ where he served from 1775-1776, as a vice-president and at times as president of the Committee of Safety, whose task was to organize the war effort (which included oversight of recruitment, strategy, supply, and munitions manufacturing, among others) in the Pennsylvania area. Morris's

Morris Sr. was involved as well. See Talbot County Free Library (2004). Robert Morris's advertisement in the *Maryland Gazette* of July 8, 1746 announces the arrival of slave ship from Barbados. Liverpool tobacco merchants were also known to be active slave traders. See Walsh (2001: 152), Behrendt (2001: 172).

³ According to Dr. Elisabeth M. Nuxoll, Robert Morris was probably born illegitimate.

⁴ The Assembly was elected annually and held exclusive power over approving and enacting legislation and was responsible for the appointment of delegates to Congress. See Arnold (1989: 54).

successful administration convinced the Pennsylvania legislature of his capabilities, and, in 1776, he was elected to the Second Continental Congress as one of seven members from Pennsylvania.⁵

In 1776, the burden of Congress drastically increased, and they were forced to make some institutional changes: namely to create several standing committees (Rakove, 1982: 194-198). Robert Morris had a high profile in two of the most important committees created: the Secret Committee;⁶ and the Committee of Secret Correspondence. However, by the end of the 1770's Morris's public career temporarily stalled, as his political enemies alleged that Morris had committed some irregularities as a public official. The accusations were never thoroughly proved and in February 1779 he was exonerated. It might have been a relief when he reached his term limit at the end of the year.⁷

By the beginning of the 1780's the financial situation of Congress had become unmanageable. Due to administrative changes, Morris was able to stage his comeback to public life, and

⁵ Ver Steeg (1976: 7). See also *Minutes of the Committee of Safety of the Province of Pennsylvania*, July 3, 1775, MPCP X, pp. 280, 297, 469; XI, p. 653. *Pennsylvania Ledger*, October 7, 1775, October 21, 1775, July 17, 1776 and *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, October 3, 1775, October 14, 1775, October 26, 1775, November 7, 1775.

⁶ In May 1777, The Secret Committee of Correspondence changed its name to the Committee of Foreign Affairs and in September 1777, the Secret Committee changed to the Commercial Committee. See Committee for Foreign Affairs to the Commissioners at Paris, May 2, 1777 (sixth footnote) (*Letters of Delegates to Congress, LDC*), vol. VII, p.16. Robert Morris (RM) to William Whipple, September 4, 1777 (*Letters of Delegates to Congress, LDC*), vol. VII, p. 603. Morris also was a member of the so called Executive Committee, which operated in Philadelphia during the absence of Congress in 1776-1777, and the Committee at Headquarters, whose task was to repair the army and consult with George Washington for carrying on the next campaign. In the meantime, the Congress moved to Baltimore, because of the threat of occupation.

⁷ RM to the Citizens of Pennsylvania, July 7, 1779. Oberholtzer (1968: 52-55). Philadelphia Committee to RM, July 24, 1779 (*Deane Papers, DP*), vol. IV, pp. 19-22. Answer of Robert Morris to the Philadelphia Committee, July 31, 1779 (*Deane Papers, DP*), vol. IV, pp. 34-40. Wagner (1976: 54).

he eventually took the post of the Superintendent of Finance in 1781 (Henderson, 1974: 291). Shortly after that, Morris was appointed as the Agent of Marine, as well (Young, 1950: 109-117). In practice, this meant that Morris had become the most powerful politician in America until his resignation from both offices in November of 1784. After his resignation, with the exception of his memberships in the Pennsylvania Assembly and the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Morris concentrated on private business ventures. Between 1789 and 1795, he also served as a senator for Pennsylvania.⁸ At the end of the century, financial trouble stemming from failed land speculation deals eventually landed Morris in debtors prison from 1798-1801. Once one of the richest men in the United States, he lived his late years in poverty and was financially supported by his relatives and friends. Morris died in Philadelphia on May 8, 1806. (Oberholtzer, 1968: 355).

II. Merchant and statesman in Philadelphia

During the Revolutionary period, Philadelphia was the biggest city in the Thirteen colonies, with the first official U.S. census in 1790 counting a total of 28,552 inhabitants. It was a multicultural city peopled by whites hailing from distinct origins, socio-economical backgrounds, and adhering to various denominations and blacks both slave and free (Wolf, 1994: 232-233). While most Philadelphians lived in wooden houses located on the fringes of the city, the inner city streets were primarily inhabited by the wealthy, who lived in brick houses. In Philadelphia, the diversity of the population meant that it was difficult to point to any "general lifestyle," particularly when compared to other regions like New England, for example (Bushman, 1992: 61). Formerly known as the Quaker city, which

⁸ Pennsylvania Assembly Proceedings, September 17, 1787 (*Documentary history of the ratification of the constitution, DHRC*), vol. II, p. 58.

referred to the heritage left by its founder William Penn, Philadelphia was filled with taverns, poor houses, docks and churches, and moreover is a good starting point for a more in-depth study of how the imminent members of the American colony lived, as 1775 Philadelphia had become the political and economic center of the colonies. During the Revolutionary period, however, American society was on the cusp of broad change, which would render it more complicated and multilayered than it was before.

Morris, as a member of the “American gentry,” was separated from other members of his class, and did so by a not uncommon strategy: by demonstrating wealth through an ostentatious lifestyle. Social status was shown in the ownership of certain items, manners and clothing, and Robert Morris liked to show his wealth. Why Morris then? What could his lifestyle as an example show us about the American people’s urban and cultural life during the Revolutionary period? I base my justification on Richard L. Bushman’s contention that towards the end of the eighteenth century *large numbers of common people engaged polite society more directly* (1992: 183). When dealing with one individual case, if only among upper class, generalizations, at least on a small-scale, are possible. That does not mean that I see the upper class as a homogenous entity. But still, every study on the lifestyle of eighteenth century America moves us closer to a broader understanding of American culture and society at the time. Thus, this reconstruction of Robert Morris; life takes on a scope broader than one man, instead, shedding light on the broader ideological and cultural setting of 18th century America.

Naturally, as a prosperous merchant, during his life, he was in contact with representatives from many social classes and their life-styles both in England and America. It is evident that from the very beginning, he admired the upper-class way of life and struggled to enjoy the fruits of wealth and privilege. His habits of

consumption during the Revolution prove that he had partly accomplished that goal.⁹

When historians deliberate upon the question of which terms best describe Robert Morris's position in society, "conservative," "aristocrat," "member of the upper class," "elitist" are used most often. His opinions on the form of government, the construction of society, or, in this case, lifestyle, each reveal some aspect of his world view. What kind of residence did one own? What did one eat? What kind of clothes did one wear? What kind of things did one own? How did one spend their leisure time? These are questions that help reveal a person's ideals, beliefs and habits, and this was as true in the 18th century as it is now.¹⁰

III. Consumption and accumulation of luxury goods

Because of his successful career as one of the richest merchants in the Continent, Morris had the means and connections to live extravagantly. During his long period as a high-profile wholesaler, he gained a fortune unequaled in America. He gave as presents, and sometimes kept for himself, all kinds of exotic and luxury articles, for example, Chinese porcelain, furniture, tortoise shells, elephants teeth, furs, fine tea, Madeira wine, French wine, claret, oil, English ale and porter, and brandy. He once wrote to his son in Europe and ordered him to send some quality wines, saying: *do not send any inferior wines—I want for our own use and would choose only of the best*. According to historian Peter Thompson, drinking quality drinks among the upper-class circles was part of a social ritual, which demonstrated their gentility to lower classes. It is noteworthy that regular wine

⁹ I am indebted to Dr. Elisabeth M. Nuxoll for some ideas presented in this paragraph.

¹⁰ The study of material culture has become widespread among American historians. See Martin (1996: 5-12); Larkin (1989). Of European consumer culture, see Berg & Clifford (1999).

and beer were not luxury items, on the contrary, they were common consumer goods among lower classes without socially meaningful signals (Thompson, 1989: 550, 573).

When the *Empress of China*, a ship sponsored by Morris, returned from Canton in May 1785, it carried special Chinese luxury items for Morris and his family. Morris had also ordered a porcelain set with certain national and naval ornaments from Josiah Wedgwood. In the middle of the 18th century, porcelain began to replace silver in households in Europe and America.¹¹ Morris's wife was very interested in fashion and textiles, especially European, and personal items were regularly ordered from London and Paris.¹² He was a *high liver* indeed, as A. M. Sakolski, a

¹¹ Samuel Bean to RM, May 3, 1761 (*Levis Collection, LC*). RM to John Bradford, October 8, 1776 (*Letters of Delegates to Congress, LDC*), vol. V, pp. 321-322. Silas Deane to Messrs. Delap, July 30, 1776 (*Deane Papers, DP*), vol. I, p. 169. John Jay to RM, May 29, 1781 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), vol. I, p. 98. Notice of Willing, Morris & Swanwick, April 17, 1784 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), microform supplement (forthcoming), p. 1954, *Independent Gazetteer*, April 17, 1784. RM to Mess. Constable, Rucker & Company, June 30, 1786 (*NjP, Le Cappet Collection*). RM to James Chalmers, March 17, 1795 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. I, p.93. RM to John Richard, March 28, 1795 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris (Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM)*), vol. I, pp. 141-144. RM to John Bondfield, May 30, 1795 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. I, p. 328. RM to William Morris, June 1, 1795 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. I, p. 326. About drinking see Thompson (1989: 550, 573). Regarding water drinking, see Rorabaugh (1979: 97-98). About pottery, see Goldstein (1978: 20-21, 30); Roche (1998: 633). It is not entirely certain that Morris's porcelain was of Chinese origin. People of that time did not distinguish between genuine porcelain and imitations produced in Europe, or even in Philadelphia (Morris was involved in glass works manufacturing near the Falls of Schuylkill, Philadelphia). Most often they referred to *China* when they spoke of porcelain, irrespective of its real origin.

¹² Mary Morris to Mrs. Jay, July 29, 1781 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*). RM to Vicomte de Noailles, November 26, 1781 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), vol. III, p. 255. Matthew Ridley to Mary Morris, Mrs. Jay to Mary Morris, November 14, 1782 & November 25, 1782 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*). Matthew Ridley to Mary Morris, November 20, 1782 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), microform supplement

statistician from the first half of twentieth century describes him in a brief article concerning Morris's bankruptcy.¹³ However, although Morris certainly displayed his extravagance overtly, in my opinion he did not lose his common touch as will be showed later in this article.

Morris's homes were huge and beautifully and expensively furnished. Particularly extravagant was his mansion called the "Hills," located a little north from the City of Philadelphia, which was equipped with many things considered unusual at that time. In the large garden greenhouse, for example, Morris grew exotic fruits like pineapples. His houses and gardens also served a key social purpose. Besides serving as places for conversations and festivities, the social areas also displayed artifacts exhibiting the refined taste of their owner. In fact, Morris's parties were popular and he was renowned for his "hospitality."¹⁴ One visitor

(forthcoming), p. 983. Matthew Ridley to RM, November 20, 1782 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), vol VII, p. 94. Mary Morris to Kitty Livingston, October 2, 1783 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), microform supplement (forthcoming), pp.1540-1543, Ridley Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society, Mhi). Mary Morris to Matthew Ridley, November 5, 1783 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), microform supplement (forthcoming), p. 1607, Ridley Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society, Mhi). Mary Morris to Kitty Livingston, November 29, 1784 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), microform supplement (forthcoming), p. 2388, Ridley Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society, Mhi). RM to Mary Morris, September 6, 1789 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*).

¹³ Sakolski (1930: 36). *High liver*, an uncommon term used by Sakolski means briefly the following: one who lives in a specified manner. See *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition*. 2000.

¹⁴ John Adams to Robert Morris, November 6, 1782 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), vol. VII, p. 20. RM to Mary Morris, August 28, 1789 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*). RM to James Marshall, October 12, 1795 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*) vol. I, p. 548. RM to John Nicholson, December 11th 1797 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. III, p.140. Bushman (1992: 130-131); Frost (1844: 69); Cook (1890: 610). According to John T. Faris (1943) (his source unknown) Morris in some phase of his life had a French gardener and even tried to grow grapes without success. See Faris (1943: 23).

recollected that *there was a luxury in the kitchen, table, parlor and street equipage of Mr. & Mrs. Robert Morris that was to be found nowhere else in America.*¹⁵ He went regularly to the theater, and even quoted plays in his political speeches and private letters. Officially theater was prohibited in Pennsylvania until 1789, when Federalists had gained the clear majority in the Pennsylvania Assembly and repealed the anti-theatrical law.¹⁶

It is clear that Morris enjoyed living in Philadelphia because of its lively atmosphere and the opportunities it offered for society life. For him, living in the countryside far from the bustle of city was never a serious option. From time to time he enjoyed the tranquillity of “Hills,” but he basically had an urban nature. Without *good cheerful society* there was a possibility to *get Hipp’d*, Morris once warned the American general, Horatio Gates.¹⁷ In a certain sense Morris’s urge for luxury items and gentle life could be seen as a part of a larger social phenomenon common in 18th century Europe and America. According to one explanation, people justified their extravagant lifestyles and the purchase of luxuries *as a means of raising themselves to a higher plane*. Many Americans had a strong urge to become something more than they had been at birth, and the ideas of the Enlightenment, with its success-oriented strain encouraged this inclination (Bushman, 1992:

¹⁵ Heiges (1930: 121). Morris used to invite guests to have dinner in his house *from all parts of Europe*. See Mary Morris to Kitty Livingston, July 21, 1783 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), microform supplement (forthcoming), p. 1417, Ridley Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society, Mhi).

¹⁶ Quakers particularly opposed theater because of its dubious religious nature. Interestingly, an Anglican bishop and Morris’s brother-in-law William White, were among the leaders of the committee that opposed theater in Philadelphia. In 1791 Morris became one of the sponsors of a new theater, which opened its doors on February 17, 1794, and Morris was also one of the first subscribers of the first American play performed—*The Contrast* (Meranze, 1996: 114-116; Houchin, 1999: 167-168, 182-183).

¹⁷ RM to Horatio Gates, January 29, 1785 (*New York Public Library*), Emmet Collection.

xviii; Holton, 1999: 83-84; Roche, 1998: 563; Riesman, 1987: 146-147; Handlin, 1982: 79; Lucas, 1984: 195). Wealthy Americans, as a rule tried to imitate the English gentry and be like the “gentlemen farmer,” (Bonwick, 1991: 41; Richard, 1994: 165-166) and Philadelphia merchants in particular were well-known for their conscious tendency toward elitism. After his career as a merchant was over in the early 1790’s, drawing on the gentleman farmer example, Morris saw land speculation as a more respectable alternative to trade (Wood, 1987: 96-99; Nash, 2002: 64).

Morris’s urge to own exotic goods was in no way extraordinary at the time for the 17th and the 18th century Europeans. Generally, luxury goods were mainly procured because of their social meaning; it was one way of ascending into the so-called gentile society, but of course the items were also acquired because of their aesthetic value.¹⁸ In 18th century America owning luxury goods was one of the most defining factor when considering who was a member in upper class and who was not.

IV. Appreciation of learning and arts

Even though Morris is not known as a man of learning, he was familiar with literature and poetry. He was a close friend of one of the most famous American composers of that time, the writer and politician Francis Hopkinson. Morris reviewed some of Hopkinson’s writings himself. A causerie named “The New Roof,” a defense of the ratification of Constitution and a critique of the

¹⁸ Appadurai (1986: 38); Hancock (1995: 280-281, 347); Breen (1993: 43). To a certain degree the ideological atmosphere in the 18th century was favorable to luxury goods. Politically speaking, David Hume held that they ensure motives for obedience to government. See Yarbrough (1998: 72); Porter (2000: 199, 247-248). Later, Americans themselves enjoyed a common fascination with the culture and particularly the artifacts of the Far East. They embraced, among other things, the habit of tea drinking (Goldstein, 1978: 16).

anti-Federalists, was one of them, and it was later published in several newspapers. Hopkinson and Morris also collaborated on the graphic arts appearing on American notes and coins.¹⁹ Sometimes he would use short Latin phrases like *a priori*, *ad Captandum*, *ad referendum* and *Sanctum Sanctorum* and even Spanish phrases like *pausa patientia signor* to liven up his letters.²⁰

¹⁹ RM to Francis Hopkinson, January 21, 1788 and July 3, 1789 (*Maryland Historical Society*), Hopkinson Collection. See Hastings (1926: 397-400); Silverman (1976: 576); Nuxoll (1997: 62-63). Francis Hopkinson, a Congressman from New Jersey, was also a lawyer, signer of the Declaration of Independence, poet and a composer. He also held posts at the Library Company of Philadelphia and the American Philosophical Society. See Silverman (1976: 265). Morris's children were also friends of scenic art. See William Morris to Mary Morris, February 25, 1794 and June 16, 1794 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*). RM's speech at General Assembly of Pennsylvania, March 31, 1786 (*Debates and Proceedings of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania, DPGAP*), p. 61. For example he referred to Shakespeare's Macbeth. RM to John Nicholson, November 21, 1797 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. III, p. 90. He sent a following poem to John Nicholson to offer comfort and a way of living. *A Raven once an acorn took, From Bosom's tallest, Stoutest tree, He his it near a limped Brook, and lived another oak to see. Thus Mellancholy buries hope, which Fear still keeps alive, and bids us with Misfortunes Cope and all Calamity survive.* RM to John Nicholson, February 2, 1798 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. III, p. 184. He also loaned books on law and maps for help in his land dealings. See RM to John Nicholson, January 30, 1799 (*New York Public Library, NN*), Robert Morris Papers. John Swanwick, Morris's partner, was interested in poetry and Gouverneur Morris was a very educated man and knew a great deal of European literature, but their effect on Morris's literary pursuits is hard to estimate. See Marquis de Chastellux to Gouverneur Morris, May 10, 1784 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), microform supplement (forthcoming), pp. 2010, 2012.

²⁰ RM to Francis Hopkinson, August 15, 1789 (*Maryland Historical Society*), Hopkinson Collection vol. 2. RM to John Nicholson, December 21, 1797 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. III, p. 162; January 9, 1798 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. III, p. 209 and March 2, 1798 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. III, p. 264. Gouverneur Morris used often short Latin phrases; for instance Horace was quoted several times. *Ad captandum*: A phrase used adjectively sometimes of meretricious attempts to catch or win popular favor. *Ad*

After decades as head of a commercial house in one of the world's most international cities, and with contacts all over the world, he lived in a milieu in which one could not avoid learning foreign languages and customs at least in some measure. Some of his correspondence, especially with lawyers, was sprinkled with quotes from the authors of ancient Greece and Rome which was apparently one way of familiarizing himself with the origins of Republican ideology.²¹ Historian Carl J. Richard in his study of the effect of the classics on founders has claimed that those who had any formal education were more eager to show their literary knowledge because of the status it brought; in other words, one could not be a true gentleman without being able to demonstrate his intellectual refinement (Richard, 1994: 10, 50). Also, Latin was the "official" language of English universities since the end of the 18th century, and it was not unusual that even uneducated members of the lower classes were somewhat proficient in the language.²² Morris's two sons, Robert and Thomas, both studied in Europe and certainly acted as an additional intermediary between American and European customs.

V. Public benefactor

As evidence that Robert Morris did not lose his touch with life of the common people, we should examine his role as a public benefactor. Morris was a member of several associations connected

referendum: for referring. *Sanctum Sanctorum*: the holiest of all. Some of these phrases were commonly used in English. How familiar Morris really was with the Latin is hard to say based on available sources.

²¹ Charles Lee to RM, August 15, 1782 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), vol. VI, pp. 212-214. RM to Francis Hopkinson, August 15, 1789 (*Maryland Historical Society*), Hopkinson Collection vol. 2.

²² In Philadelphia, however, speaking Latin remained inappropriate in certain circles. Quakers held Latin as *the language of the Beast* because of its association with the Catholic Church (Burke 1991: 32, 41). About the origins of disapproval, see Ormsby-Lennon (1991: 72-112).

to culture and the sciences. Before the Revolutionary War, Morris was a member of organizations and associations that were primarily geared toward social interaction, like the Mount Regale Fishing Company and the Jockey Club. In 1766 he was also chosen as the Warden of the Port of Philadelphia (Brobeck, 1972: 234, 369; Wright, 1996: 542), but it was not until the 1770's and 1780's that his activities began to extend more deeply into "serious" activities. Morris had shares in the Philadelphia Library and participated in the activities of the American Philosophical Society, and, in 1793, Morris was also one of the benefactors of the planned scientific expedition to explore the Trans-Mississippi West. The Michaux expedition, which was named after the French botanist who was supposed to do the tour, was planned by Thomas Jefferson, and several prominent Americans donated sums. Unfortunately, the plans never came to fruition because of the unstable political situation in Europe. However, Morris pledged 80 dollars, which was second only to George Washington's pledge of 100 dollars. Besides scientific interest, Morris also had his own personal reasons, concerning land investments, to support the enterprise.²³

Morris was a trustee of the College of Philadelphia, Franklin College, and Episcopal Academy, a member of the Society Promoting Agriculture, a manager and a donator of the Poor Relief organization, (probably) an originator of St. George's Society for the Assistance of Englishmen in Distress, and a subscriber of the Dancing Assembly Hall.²⁴ He also regularly attended the Society

²³ The American Philosophical Society chose Morris to be a member in August 1786 but he declined because he thought he was not qualified because of lack proper studies, but he later chose to donate money to the organization. See RM to James Hutchinson (*Secretary of the Society*), August 2, 1786 (*American Philosophical Society*), A.P.S. archives.

²⁴ Brobeck (1972: 357, 359); *Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 9, 1772, item 50752. Simpson (1859: 703). Even though Morris took an interest in charity, he realized that the line must be drawn somewhere in helping other people in distress. See RM to Tench Tilghman, February 8, 1785 (*New York Public Library, NN*), Robert Morris Papers. During the 1700's dancing skill had

for Political Inquiries meetings, which were held in Benjamin Franklin's library and had a membership in Philadelphia Agricultural Society. He was also very interested in new inventions. His garden was one of the first places in Philadelphia where one could ride in a hot-air balloon, and despite its public relations potential, it seems likely that he was fascinated by science for its own sake.²⁵ He had one of the first year-around icehouses and hothouses in America,²⁶ and also actively promoted new manufacturing methods. In the 1790's, when the rise of capital markets made it possible to start big construction projects, Morris was nominated and chosen for the Society for Promoting the Improvement of Roads and Inland Navigation, and also became President of the Delaware and Schuylkill and also Schuylkill and Susquehanna canal companies as well. By all means Robert Morris would have been satisfied with the general interests of society because it was *instituted with a view to the improvement of the natural advantages of Pennsylvania and the encouraging useful designs and undertakings for promoting its trade, agriculture, manufactures, and population, by means of good roads and internal*

became an important matter in certain social circles. John Swanwick, one of Morris' closest associates, praised the qualities of dancing compared to gambling and drinking. It is hard to tell, how active a dance Morris was, but he definitely was socially active and arranged large dancing balls. See RM and Mary Morris to Kitty Livingston, January 1, 1784 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), microform supplement (forthcoming), p. 1701. See also Brooks (1991: 63-87). It is also important to note that Dancing Assembly had some political insights; its members shared expansionist views on American future. See Egnal (1988: 74).

²⁵ Francis Hopkinson's letter dated May 12, 1784, as quoted in Hastings (1926: 337).

²⁶ RM to George Washington, June 15, 1784 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), vol. IX, pp. 394-395. George Washington to RM, June 30, 1784 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), microform supplement (forthcoming), p. 2118. Waln (1824: 372). Regarding late excavations at the site where Robert Morris's mansion used to be, see *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 23, 2001 and Benedict (2001).

navigation.²⁷ These positions of trust show: first that Morris was an active and responsible member of his community; second what kind of matters he was interested in; and third that he understood the economic necessities needed to promote economy and the importance of the development of infrastructure (Nuxoll, 2000: 3-21).

Morris's community spirit is also shown in other acts. His socially conscious mind is visible in his membership in the various charity organizations noted above. Despite the financial difficulties in his later life, Morris often tried to help people in distress and promised to donate books and money for charity *when Convenient Circumstances occur*, although he usually had little to say about charity as an institution. He appeared to hold a firm belief that everyone had a chance to make things better in one way or another. From another perspective, however, his participation could be seen as part of a broader social ritual. Like his counterparts in London, Morris's visible role in philanthropic and community projects could have functioned as a means to improve his social status. Once he had acquired a certain level of wealth, it was probable that Morris started to try and prove his gentility by disinterested acts, as well as through his luxurious lifestyle and conspicuous consumption.²⁸ Rhetoric or not, Morris proclaimed that *I am a*

²⁷ Pennsylvania Gazette, February 8, 1792, item 78091. July 4, 1792, item 78365, January 23, 1793, item 78746. July 8, 1794, item 79391. Robert Morris had some experience canal building. During his trip to Virginia he had become acquainted with canal building. See RM to Mary Morris, December 2, 1787 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*). Perkins (1994: 350); Lechner (1992: 73-75). Also he and John Nicholson had shares in the Potomac Company and Georgetown Bridge Company, which had been founded to promote the building of canals and bridges in Washington D.C. See Arbuckle (1975: 129).

²⁸ Taylor (1991: 465-491); Hancock (1995: 371); Ward (1999: 222). A good example of Morris's philanthropy is shown when he, along with Benjamin Franklin supported a boarding school business introduced to Philadelphia by an English woman. No further evidence exists on how this joint venture developed. See *Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 16, 1775 quoted in Lopez (2000: 79).

*Friend to everything which tends to instruct and enlighten mankind.*²⁹ He even saw himself as a *patriot Mind seeking the great good of the Whole on enlightened Principles.*³⁰

VI. Health regime

Robert Morris's mere appearance tells us that he loved good food, and the written sources strengthen this impression.³¹ For example, at one point he expressed his deep regret that taverns did not have any oysters (most likely because of the war). Still, Morris tried to fulfill his aesthetic and culinary desires as far as possible.³² As a Senator living in New York, he was very particular with respect to the quality of food, and the Morris's dining table was famous for being full of many different luxurious dishes. Most critical appraisals of him said that when the other Senators spoke about politics *Morris directly spoke of Wine & Oysters.*³³ Either way, it was a fact that he had taste and some authority in knowledge of wines and good food.³⁴ A good indication of his reputation was by the name he was referred to by Indians with he negotiated—"the great Eater with a big Belly" (Wilkinson, 1953: 257).

²⁹ RM to Nicholas King, January 14, 1797 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. II, p. 225.

³⁰ RM to Alexander Hamilton, August 28, 1782 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), vol. VI, p. 271.

³¹ RM to Mary Morris, December 2, 1787 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*).

³² RM to John Hancock, January 23, 1777 (*Letters of Delegates to Congress, LDC*), vol. VI, p. 137.

³³ Diary of William Maclay, June 11, 1789, p. 74, February 22, 1790, p. 207 (*Documentary History of the First Federal Congress*), vol. IX. The Diary of William Maclay and other notes on Senate Debates, DHFFC. RM to Mary Morris, August 28, 1789 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*) and September 6, 1789 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*).

³⁴ RM to Slandish Forde, July 26, 1798, RFP. RM to John Ayres, May 23, 1796 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. II, p. 8.

Morris's lifestyle was not, however, merely based on gluttony. He also attached a great value to more healthy activities such as getting fresh air by long walks, exercise, drinking water, bathing and general recreation. Besides these he highly valued the advice of physicians with regard to *the preservation of Health*, even though his confidence in their professional skills deteriorated after they failed to control the yellow fever epidemic in 1793. Morris's stance on the origin of yellow fever is not known. His political allies, including his business partner Thomas Willing, generally saw the disease as a foreign import, while many Republicans saw that it as being of local origin. It killed approximately ten percent of Philadelphia's total population (about 5,000 people) and drove most of the citizens out of town, including Robert Morris's family. Morris himself, however, stayed in Philadelphia.³⁵ Even during his imprisonment he continued to look after his physical condition and appearance, and did not lapse into depression or bitterness.³⁶

³⁵ RM to Tench Tilghman, March 25, 1786 (*New York Public Library, NN*), Robert Morris Papers. RM to Mary Morris, December 27, 1787 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*). RM to J. Richard Jr., May 19, 1796 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. I, pp. 839-840. RM to John Nicholson, September 24, 1797 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. II, p. 581 and September 29, 1797 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. II, p. 596. RM to Joseph Higbee, January 9, 1798, Private Collection. The recreational activities were mainly introduced in the Delaware valley by Quakers. Also for example John Locke and Benjamin Franklin stressed the importance of daily exercise. See Fischer (1989: 553-554); Lopez (2000: 20). Regarding physicians and yellow fever, see Rorabaugh (1979: 136). Regarding yellow fever and Morris, see RM to John Constable, November 27, 1793, Private collection. See also Pernick (1972: 566); Gould (2000: 160-161); Taylor (2001).

³⁶ William Wood, an actor and playwright, who spent a little while in Prune's Street prison wrote that Morris's *person was neat, and his dress, although a little old-fashioned, adjusted with much care*. Quoted in Arbuckle (1975: 199). According to Gould (2000) people in the eighteenth century saw physical, psychological and moral health as linked. People were afraid to show their feelings because they believed it could deteriorate their physical health. Also disease and madness were seen as clear results of uncontrolled passions. See Miller (1996: 133-134). Robert Morris fits Gould's analysis

The question of Robert Morris's life-style and Republican ideology is problematic because of some inconsistencies. The gap between appropriate gentility and extravagant luxuries was thin and not easily determined by Morris's contemporaries especially among Quakers, Puritans and some other minor Protestant denominations. Generally speaking, Morris was seen as a representative of Republicanism³⁷ and its values, but with this point some different views are visible. Republican ideology, which called for a rejection of the vices of the old world aristocracy, and feared that luxuries could weaken morality, was to some extent in direct contradiction to Morris's luxurious lifestyle. In this case, the liberalism of the "self-made man" overcame the ideal. It is noteworthy that at the end of the American Revolution, the dogma of Republican ideology and private wealth were seen as interchangeable (Doerflinger, 1983: 214; Bushman, 1992: 193; Brewer, 1997: 82).³⁸ A very telling detail underscoring the elitism of many leading patriots is evident in the desperate attempts to acquire luxury goods in the middle of the horrors of the Revolutionary War. For example, in a letter to Morris requesting Madeira wine, John Hancock wrote, *I care not price*.³⁹ Also, Morris himself expressed his opinions about the poor quality of wines brought to America.⁴⁰ It seems that even during the

well; most of the time he tried to keep himself in good spirits no matter what difficulties he was facing.

³⁷ Republicanism as a political ideology at the end of 18th century in America cherished the following maxims: integrity, pure morals, serving society, public welfare and equality. See Bonwick (1991: 52).

³⁸ Regarding Republican ideology and revolution, see Matson & Onuf (1985: 496-531); Greene (1992: 143-173). It is noteworthy that at the beginning of the 18th century several European economists tried to rehabilitate the luxurious lifestyle. They argued that luxuries were fundamental in promoting economy in general. Whether Morris saw consumption from this point of view is not known, see Roche (1998: 564-569).

³⁹ John Hancock to RM, October 5, 1777 (*Letters of Delegates to Congress, LDC*), vol. VIII, p. 55. Madeira wine was the most popular wine in America but there were differences in its quality. See Rorabaugh (1979: 101-102).

⁴⁰ RM to Monsieur Bertier, August 28, 1778 (*Letters of Delegates to Congress*,

exceptional times “the better sort” wanted to differentiate their consumption habits from those of the common people. This communication would seem to indicate that upper class Americans in the Northern States had a sort of distribution network for luxury goods even during the Revolutionary War.

VII. Financial woes

His determined mind to settle his debts came not only from his exceptional personal urge to fulfill the agreements, but also from the nature of financial proceedings at that time. Because the creditor and debtor were individuals, not banks and corporations, the financial contracts were very personal in nature. In addition to losing one’s financial position, there was a danger of losing more because most often the creditor was a relative or a member of a debtor’s inner circle (Perkins, 1994: 74). Besides losing his financial reputation, Morris also might have feared sacrificing his masculinity within his peer group. According to Toby L. Ditz who surveys the *history of male subjectivity and the formation of gender conventions* among Philadelphia merchants in the eighteenth century, one of the most important conventions of merchants was to safeguard their reputation in other men’s eyes. Thus, from Ditz’s perspective, Morris’s unswerving optimism and determination to straighten things out could be seen as typical gendered behavior within this specific historic milieu. (Ditz, 1994: 51-54, 57, 61, 69, 80; Norton, 1987: 3-39).

Finally, in December 1797, Morris understood that in spite of his constant endeavors his financial situation remained dire. Even though the thought of imprisonment terrified him, the only way for him to achieve peace of mind was to surrender and to accept a room in debtor’s prison. He realized that his reliability

among business circles was already gone.⁴¹ On the whole he saw revenge as *an ignorable passion*.⁴² Instead of focusing on revenge against his creditors however, he tried to eliminate his debts and even planned to start doing business by bills of exchange *to help out the means of his subsistence*, but naturally the mercantile community was quite suspicious of accepting Morris back into its business circle. After his release in August of 1801, he did not become active in business other than as a counselor to his sons. In 1802 and 1803, he thought about the possibility of participating in a cotton business, and setting up a plantation with his sons in Georgia or eastern Florida, but despite the advantageous conditions, the plans came to nothing. He lived a modest life supported financially by his friends like Gouverneur Morris.⁴³

VIII. Relationship with wife and children

According to Helena M. Wall, the structure of families and the nature of family life were heavily dependent on regional and denominational variables in eighteenth century America (Wall, 1990: viii-ix). The family was the household base unit in eighteenth century Philadelphia, and at the time, having a family

⁴¹ RM to John Nicholson, December 8, 1796 and December 11, 1797 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. III, p. 138; December 18, 1797 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. III, p. 156; January 9, 1798 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. III, p. 240; January 31, 1798 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. III, p. 234 and February 5, 1798 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. III, p. 236. RM to Alexander Hamilton, January 17, 1798 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. III, p. 220. In December 1797 many of the notes made in 1795 fell due. See Arbuckle (1975: 190).

⁴² RM to John Nicholson, July 17, 1799 (*New York Public Library, NN*), Robert Morris Papers.

⁴³ RM to Thomas Morris, August 7, 1801 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*) and January 9, 1802 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*); June 9, 1802 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*); December 20, 1803 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*); January 31, 1805 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*).

was one of the things needed to become a full member of society. The roles between husband and wife were clear. Men handled financial matters, and women were responsible for the day to day running of the home, whether assisted by servants or not (Shain, 1994: 97-98; Bushman, 1992: 72).

Morris was also family man. Morris had an affectionate relationship with his wife, Mary Morris, who he referred to as “his Dear Molly.” She was not only a housewife, but also a loyal companion who thirsted for knowledge and had a patriotic mind with an interest in political matters. In Robert Morris’s own words, *your life is the dearest object in this World*.⁴⁴ Even though their marriage was at least partially based on practicalities (Mary White came from an eminent family), their letters during their marriage reveal deep feelings. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the role of the husband was changing in American society, and this shift was also visible in Morris’s marriage. Although the man was still the absolute head of the family, women’s authority in the domestic sphere was increasing (Wolf, 1994: 77-78). Among other things, Morris kept his wife as his *safeguard against intemperance*.⁴⁵ When Morris was in the Senate in New York, while he openly shared delicate political matters with his wife, in their letters, however, they never spoke anything about women’s rights, ethical questions or children’s upbringing.⁴⁶ They seemed to have a very

⁴⁴ RM to Mary Morris, January 9, 1788 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*).

⁴⁵ RM to Horatio Gates, June 12, 1788 (*New York Public Library*), Emmett Collection.

⁴⁶ Mary Morris to RM, December 30, 1776 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*). Mary Morris to Mrs. Jay, July 29, 1781 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*). Mary Morris to Kitty Livingston, November 29, 1784 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), microform supplement (forthcoming), p. 2387. Mary Morris to RM, December 13, 1787 (*Documentary history of the ratification of the constitution*), vol. II, p. 602. RM to Mary Morris, August 28, 1789 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*); September 6th 1789 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*); September 9, 1789 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*) & May 23, 1790 (*Henry E. Huntington*

happy and stable marriage without any major scandals; Robert Morris seemed to enjoy the time spent with his family and the children loved their *Pappa*.⁴⁷ Morris openly expressed his love for his children. For example, when he was not at home he asked his wife *to kiss my dear children for me*.⁴⁸

Notwithstanding the fact that he and his half-brother may have been born out of wedlock, and that he had had premarital relationships and even produced an illegitimate daughter in 1763, marriage, as a dominant socio-cultural institution, was important to him. Morris never publicly referred to his illegitimate child Polly Croxall as his daughter, and it seems that she never visited Robert Morris's home in Philadelphia. Still, he tried to help the Croxalls financially, and gave advice to her husband Charles Croxall, who unfortunately proved to be a bad businessman. Morris did not, however, want to abandon his daughter, and promised to continue backing her financially. That being said, it is worth noting that Morris did not consider Mr. Croxall as a part of his family. It is possible that Morris considered his family as just those who lived within the same household, which was a common way of thinking, at least in Virginia.⁴⁹

Library, CSmH). About their loving relationship see for example RM to Mary Morris, December 2, 1787 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*) and April 26, 1788 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*). They were married since March 1769.

⁴⁷ RM to Ralph Foster, August 8, 1783 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), vol. VIII, p. 406. Mary Morris to Kitty Livingston, July 21, 1783 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), microform supplement (forthcoming), p. 1417, Ridley Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society, Mhi). RM to Samuel Bean, June 1, 1795 (Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM), vol. I, p. 334. Mary Morris to RM, December 20, 1776 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*).

⁴⁸ RM to Mary Morris, December 2, 1787 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*).

⁴⁹ West (1997: 98-99). Regarding Morris's illegitimate daughter, see Nuxoll (1995: 3-21). See for example RM to Charles Croxall, May 8, 1782 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), vol. V, pp. 129-130 and RM to Tench Tilghman, October 26, 1784 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*),

Despite his background, Morris tried to live a moral life and, in some cases, was willing to judge the behavior of others. For example, Morris strictly condemned the behavior of a former employee who had abandoned his family for the sake of a prostitute.⁵⁰ From his point of view, it was natural that if some *intercourse inconsistent with Chastity and Virtue* had taken place, the only honorable action to fix the damage was marriage.⁵¹ However, he fundamentally thought that marriage should be based on mutual agreement between two people, and he did not want to interfere in his children's choice of mates. However, Morris cautioned that when choosing a life-companion it would be best if the choice was based on character, rather than things of secondary importance like wealth or fame, only in this way could a *structure of happiness* be achieved.⁵²

As noted earlier, his relationship toward his children was much more complicated. A typical mindset of the time was that paternal affection had to be earned, especially by sons, through self-discipline and dutiful behavior (Smith, 1986: 87). Even though it was evident that Robert Morris wanted all the best for his

microform supplement (forthcoming), p. 2350. Tired of backing up Croxall's debts Morris from time to time, threatened to stop his aid. *I cannot in Justice to my Family go further length to serve a man so incapable as he is... and ...he has already deceived me, I have done and must leave him to his Fate.* See RM to Tench Tilghman, January 15, 1785 and February 21st 1785 (*New York Public Library, NN*), Robert Morris Papers. See RM to Tench Tilghman, January 19, 1786 (*New York Public Library, NN*), Robert Morris Papers. About family in Virginia, see Fischer (1989: 275-276).

⁵⁰ RM to Thomas Morris, July 12, 1796 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. II, p. 50.

⁵¹ RM to Laurent Concler, June 15, 1795 (*Society Collection, SC*).

⁵² RM to Maria Morris, June 26, 1789 (*Society Collection, SC*). RM to Thomas Morris, March 20, 1799 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*). Samuel Richardson, printer and author of popular books *Pamela* and *Clarissa* in the 1740's, had introduced the concept of marriage based on consent to the Anglo-American world. See Reinier (1996: 13-14).

offspring and was at times a very affectionate father,⁵³ his methods of upbringing were sometimes quite harsh, even if unexceptional at the time. Because he himself had a strong sense of duty and a sober judgment especially in business matters, he also expected these qualities from his children. But as a father, Morris should be placed on the liberal side of the family when compared to those where religious morality was the predominant guideline. In his case, good behavior was linked more closely to achievements and caring social behavior rather than following strict religious rules of conduct. His two elder sons, Robert and Thomas aside from some minor difficulties became trustworthy citizens and good business agents.⁵⁴ The other two sons, William and Charles caused nearly constantly trouble for their father. Charles could not find his calling, and when his father declined to pay for his lifestyle, their relationship took a turn for the worse. Even though they met each other occasionally, and Morris even arranged an apprenticeship for him with a mercantile house in Philadelphia and later with his own house, they were nevertheless quite distant with one another. Finally, father Morris lost his patience and decided *to break him of bad & idle habits*, but this largely had no effect. The outcome was an almost total breakdown in relations between father and son. In 1799, Charles had been working at Frigate Constellation but he was uncomfortable there so he soon quit. After this outcome, his father decided not to support him financially anymore.⁵⁵ One of

⁵³ RM to Mary Morris, January 13, 1788 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*). TM to Thomas Morris, April 26, 1788 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*). RM to William Morris, October 23, 1799 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*).

⁵⁴ RM to Patrick Colquhoun, December 22, 1794 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. I, pp 1-3.

⁵⁵ RM to Maria Morris, June 26, 1789 (*Society Collection, SC*). RM to Thomas Russell, March 4, 1796, p. 735. RM to Thomas Morris (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. II, p. 226; January 29, 1797 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. II, p. 246 and April 25, 1797 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. II, p. 306. RM to Robert Morris Jr., April 30, 1797 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris,*

the biggest conflicts occurred when his son William decided to live a playboy lifestyle in Europe, and failed to take care of his father's businesses. Morris was furious because he had to settle his son's private matters in the midst of undertaking his own enormous land deals. Afterwards, Morris even threatened to disown William because of *his misconduct* and *it was even uncertain whether he and I should ever have further intercourse*, though this might have been only rhetoric to calm down the angry father of the other party. This incident clearly made their relationship worse; afterward, William refused to write about any of his activities in Europe, and his father considered stopping payment on his son's drafts.⁵⁶

There was no doubt however, that Robert Morris loved his children and grandchildren and wanted the best for them. In the midst of his financial difficulties he was not so worried about his own fate, but of what impact his actions would have on his family members.⁵⁷ Besides the economic problems, Morris was also confronted with a death in his own family. It was a heavy blow for Morris that only eight months after his imprisonment, his son William died of sickness. It was typical of the times that Morris did not grieve overwhelmingly and tried to keep his feelings under

PLBRM), vol. II, p. 308. RM to Thomas Morris, September 7, 1799 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*).

⁵⁶ RM to Laurent Concler, June 15, 1795 (Society Collection, SC). RM to James Marshall, January 16, 1796 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. I, p. 686; March 4, 1796 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. I, p. 732 and August 13, 1796 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. II, p. 76. RM to William Morris, August 13, 1796 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. II, p. 76. RM to James Monroe, August 13, 1796 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. II, p. 77. RM to James Marshall, February 10, 1797 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. II, p.265. See Nuxoll (1995: 4).

⁵⁷ RM to John Nicholson, February 8, 1798 (*Private letterbook of Robert Morris, PLBRM*), vol. III, p. 182. RM to Thomas Morris, March 20, 1799 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*) and January 31, 1805 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*).

control.⁵⁸ The actions of Morris's children were likewise not extraordinary. After the Revolutionary war, as David Waldstreicher notes in his study (1997: 78), it was especially hard for young men to find their place and identity in society. The Morris family lived in a transitional time where the function of family was undergoing a broad social change in the American colonies. The family was no longer simply a firm economical unit, but was also a sphere of recreation and protection, within which children had their own rights. A smooth transition from childhood to adulthood had become a more complex process, and events in the Morris family clearly support this argument. Even more than before, young men were seeking their independence.⁵⁹

One factor, which could have had an effect on Morris, and help explain why he was so worried about his children, was the case of his half-brother Thomas Morris. After their father's death Robert Morris promised to take care of his half brother and later tried in many ways, but without success, to keep him out of trouble. Thomas's flighty lifestyle finally ended in his death after a *delirious fever* in January 1778 which was largely brought on by his heavy drinking.⁶⁰ His brother's destiny was evidently a very shocking event that influenced his attitude toward his children and toward life in general.⁶¹

⁵⁸ RM to John Nicholson, October 10, 1798, GC. RM to Thomas Morris, October 10, 1798 (*Henry E. Huntington Library, CSmH*). Regarding emotional self-control in the eighteenth-century, see Richard (1994: 183). Stoicism as a philosophical trend was popular during the eighteenth century.

⁵⁹ Demos (1986: 30-35, 99); Wolf (1994: 134). Nevertheless Morris's relationships with his children was healthier than Benjamin Rush's for example who was kind of a familial despot despite of his otherwise enlightened visions of society based on equality. See Davis (1975: 274).

⁶⁰ About his death, see Pliarne, Penet, Dacosta, Ferres & Co to RM, February 10, 1778 (*Levis Collection, LC*).

⁶¹ Regarding Morris's reactions to his brother's death. See for example RM to Richard Peters, January 25, 1778 (*Pennsylvania Historical Society, PHi*), Wayne Papers. RM to William Lee, May 22, 1778 (*Virginia Historical Society, ViHi*).

The family was a very important institution to Thomas Jefferson, as it was to Morris. It was one of the prerequisites to achieving happiness in life that one had good human relationships, a loving spouse and children.⁶² All this is in contrast to Benjamin Franklin, a Founding Father who enjoyed female company in a more liberal sense (Middlekauff, 1996: 115). Morris complained on several occasions how his public duties prevented him from enjoying the joys of a stable family life. These sentiments were common among the Founders, who roundly praised the virtues of marriage (West, 1997: 93-94). Morris married at a mature age, which was typical for merchants who, in their younger years were virtually nomadic (Hancock, 1995: 245). There is only fragmentary evidence of how active his social life had been in his earlier years. One of the few traces can be found in two letters from Samuel Bean, a commercial agent in Kingston, Jamaica. The informal tone of the letters and some warm descriptions of their friendship indicate that Robert Morris and Samuel Bean were good friends. Those letters indicate that Morris had had some kind of adventures with women during his business trips as a young merchant.⁶³

Overall, the American leaders mainly thought that women had different duties in life when compared to men. Alexander Hamilton saw women as a reservoir of labor, Jefferson

⁶² Koch (1975: 34). As a matter of fact Morris's family helped Jefferson's daughter in one way or another while she was studying in Philadelphia. See Thomas Jefferson to RM, April 26, 1784 (The papers of Robert Morris, PRM), vol. IX, p. 286.

⁶³ Samuel Bean to RM, May 3, 1761 (*Levis Collection, LC*); October 18, 1761 (*Levis Collection, LC*). Samuel Bean wrote very formal letters to RM in 1781 and 1782 and inquired about the possibility of meeting. Bean had recently come over from England to New York. There is no evidence that they ever met each other again. Morris tactfully refused to continue correspondence because in the midst of the Revolution, they found themselves on opposite sides. See Samuel Bean to RM, November 19, 1781 (*Levis Collection, LC*); RM to Samuel Bean, December 15, 1781 (*Confidential correspondence of Robert Morris, CCRM*), p. 38, and Samuel Bean to RM, May 26, 1782 (*The papers of Robert Morris, PRM*), vol. V, pp. 265-266.

conservatively thought that women's place was at home and they were merely "objects of our pleasure," Arthur Lee had an almost aggressively misogynistic attitude, and John Adams thought that women were better in domestic duties because nature has indicated it (West, 1997: 86; Kennedy, 1999: 61). In general, the Founders thought that women's liberty was best secured when they were involved mainly in domestic activities and did not participate in social matters. At that time, the equality of the sexes was based on the presumption that there were clear differences between men and women. The concept of gender equality, had a different meaning at the end of the 18th century than it has in the current discourse of social thought. With the exception of Abigail Adams and a few others, women themselves were quiet concerning their position in the society. By and large, despite the fact that during the Revolution women became more interested in political affairs and social matters, the Revolution did not do much to change the status of women in the American society. Aside from the experiment in New Jersey which allowed women to vote until 1807, the political system did in no way embrace universal suffrage. However, some changes occurred during this period: independent women's property rights were extended, as were their hereditary rights; also divorce law was reformed in some States.⁶⁴

There is no clear answer as to how typical or exceptional Robert Morris was as a family man in eighteenth century Philadelphia or in the United States. In certain things he maintained the traditional patriarchal family structure. Strict guidance over his children and their future was one of the "old" features in his thinking, but then again his expression of his feelings towards his wife and children was untypical of that time, despite the fact that a certain kind of unsentimentality between

⁶⁴ Crane (1987: 255-258); West (1997: 75-77, 82, 87-88, 104). The opposite view also exists among scholars. Linda K. Gerber and Mary Beth Norton have stressed that the Revolutionary period was an important turning point concerning the role of women.

family members was quickly becoming outmoded.

IX. Robert Morris and the *Republic of Men*

Mark E. Kann had used the concept the *republic of men* in his recent work concerning the American founders and their gendered role in the Revolutionary period. Even though Kann does not deal particularly with Robert Morris, it is interesting to see how well the characteristics of the *republic men* mesh with his own character. The similarities, while not categorically applicable, can in general be applied to Morris. First, as a father, Morris was no longer an old world patriarch, but rather an affectionate and egalitarian head of the family. Because of the rapidly changing physical and ideological atmosphere, Morris could not guide his children with an unquestioned iron fist. Second, Morris often tried to imitate the upper-class code of honor in his political and business dealings, desiring legitimate male heirs to perpetuate his family, and promoting civic order through philanthropy and public service. Thirdly, men in the republic tried to drape themselves with aristocratic gentility, as they frequently tried to obtain books to teach themselves genteel speech and conduct, purchased homes and objects that testified to their refined status and participated in public leadership and service. All of these features closely suit the case of Robert Morris. *Worthy men*, a phrase used by Morris, were needed to guide people ruling the disorderly passions and counteract the democratic distemper of aliens, egotists, isolates, mobs, factions, and demagogues. In this setting, Morris and other leading Founders saw inequality in society as a self-evident fact of life (Kann, 1998).

Robert Morris can be seen as a part of the general consumerism movement that became possible because of the more open commerce characteristic of the 18th and 19th centuries. It must be remembered that this kind of fondness of spending money on things that were not necessarily essential for living was not just a post-revolutionary tendency. Still, Morris as a private citizen

never forgot his altruistic role. The countless projects he participated in during the 1790's such as canal buildings road improvements, manufacturing, scientific production and even land speculation can and should be seen not as self interested, but as actions that benefited the community as a whole.

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從富商羅伯·莫瑞斯的事業與家庭 看十八世紀美國費城上層社會的生活方式

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摘 要

羅伯·莫瑞斯 (Robert Morris, 1734-1806) 是一個成功的商人，生於英國，後來成為美國建國者之一。但是，他並未受到太多的注意，像其他建國者如富蘭克林、傑佛遜或是漢彌頓般成為國家偶像。顯而易見的原因是，莫瑞斯既不是具有英雄特質的演說家，沒有寫過重要的書或小冊子，亦沒有在軍事戰役中扮演重要角色。不過，莫瑞斯確實是美國建國革命時期的重要政治領袖之一。有關莫瑞斯在政治領域的活動已有相當多的研究，但是，他的個人生活，包括他的生活方式，還沒有美國史家研究過。本論文試圖透過對莫瑞斯的生活和個性的分析，來瞭解美國費城 (Philadelphia) 富商社群的生活方式。我並非要過度推廣莫瑞斯的個案，而是希望從對他的研究一窺十八世紀費城上層社會生活的某些面向。

關鍵詞：羅伯·莫瑞斯、美國生活方式、費城