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Transposition(s) and Confrontation(s) in the British
Isles, in France and Northern America (1688-1815)

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L'Académie des sciences et beaux arts des Etats-Unis de l'Amérique*

Le Chevalier Alexandre-Marie Quesnay de Beaurepaire (1752-1820) is one of those eighteenth-century figures who cycle in and out of focus. As grandson of François Quesnay, he is mentioned in works dedicated to the famous physician-Physiocrat ennobled by Louis XV in 1752.¹ As *émigré* captain of Virginia's Gloucester Country militia (April 1777-[February?] 1778), commander of the Mathurins district militia (Paris, 13-22 July 1789), hero of a Versailles riot (September 1789), and captain of the 8th division of the 1st Nièvres at the Battle of Jemappes (November 1792), he figures occasionally in accounts of the American and French Revolutions.² Even his quirky poetry (1793-1794) has been anthologized.³ What keeps his name intermittently before the public, however, are the art schools he opened in Philadelphia (1779-1784), New York City (1784-1785) and, especially, Richmond, Virginia (1785-1786), a school intended to be the hub of an academic universe.⁴ Quesnay describes that universe in *Mémoire, status et prospectus, concernant l'Académie des sciences et beaux arts des États-Unis d'Amérique* (1788).⁵ Although his project impressed few of his contemporaries, its concept captivated nineteenth- and twentieth-century American historians of education. Even so late as 1952, Léonie Villard could describe it as “une des initiatives les plus hardies et les plus originales [...] [Quesnay] voulut créer aux Etats-Unis un centre franco-américain d'étude méthodique et intelligemment dirigée des arts, des sciences et des lettres”.⁶ No praise, however, can equal that of Quesnay's translator Rosewell Page: “Quesnay undertook a scheme so brilliant and so wonderful that I thank God for the privilege of disclosing it”.⁷ While this degree of enthusiasm is not universal, it is usual enough that reservations have been offered with circuitous tact: Herbert Adams pronounced it “not altogether chimerical”; for

* I thank Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Archivist Courtney Tkacz [VMFA] and the Maryland Historical Society Research Librarian for facilitating this research.

¹ *Mémoires de la Société archéologique de Rambouillet* 14 (1900): 203-28.

² Quesnay to his brother, Jean-Marc Quesnay to Beauvoir, 21 Apr. 1777, *Rambouillet* 14: 204; *Rambouillet* 14: 204-206, 225; R. B. Rose, “How to Make a Revolution: the Paris Districts in 1789”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University library of Manchester* (U.K.) 59 (1977): 426-57; Quesnay de Beaurepaire, *Rapport adressé à MM. les honorables membres du Comité civil du district des Mathurins* (Paris: Laporte, 1789); Emile Coüard-Luys, “Une émeute populaire à Versailles le 13 septembre 1789, d'après des documents inédits analysés”, *Mémoires de la Société des sciences morales des lettres et des arts de Seine-et-Oise* 16 (1889): 6-39.

³ Guy Thuillier, *Anthologie des auteurs nivernais de 1789 à 1800* (Nevers: Fonds-Patrimoniaux, ca. 1980), 165-69.

⁴ *Pennsylvania Packet*, 10 Nov. 1779-13 Feb. 1783 (“Performing Arts in American Colonial Newspapers, 1690-1783, Text Database and Index”, ed. by Mary Jane Corry, Kate Van Winkle Keller, and Robert M. Keller), <<https://www.cdss.org/elibrary/PacanNew/Index/QUESNAY.htm>> [accessed 23 January 2017]; John G. Roberts, “The American Career of Quesnay de Beaurepaire”, *French Review* 21 (1947): 463-70; David Karel, “Quesnay de Beaurepaire, Alexandre-Marie”, *Dictionnaire des artistes de langue française en Amérique du Nord* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1992), 668; Samuel Mordecai, *Richmond in By-Gone Days*, 2nd ed. (1860; reprint Richmond: Dietz Press, 1946), 201-10; Richard Heyward Gaines, “Richmond's First Academy, Projected by M. Quesnay de Beaurepaire in 1786”, *Proceedings of the Virginia Historical Society*, 1891 (Richmond, VA: The Society, 1892), 167-75.

⁵ *Mémoire, status et prospectus, concernant l'Académie des sciences et beaux arts des Etats-Unis de l'Amérique, établie à Richemond, capitale de la Virginie, présenté au Roi par le Chevalier de Beaurepaire* [hereinafter, *Mémoire*] (Paris: Cailleau, 1788). Quesnay presented it to Louis XVI and the royal family on 29 Oct. 1788 (*Gazette de France*, no.88, 31 Oct. 1788, p.385). Original spelling is maintained throughout.

⁶ Léonie Villard, *La France et les États-Unis: échanges et rencontres, 1524-1800* (Lyon: Éditions de Lyon, 1952), 342.

⁷ Rosewell Page, “The Academy of the Sciences and Fine Arts of the United States of America, established at Richmond, Virginia”, *Medical College of Virginia Bulletin*, no.25 (9 May 1928), 3, courtesy of VMFA; Rosewell Page, *The Academy of the Arts and Sciences of the United States of America at Richmond, Virginia, by Quesnay de Beaurepaire*, in *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Library Board to the Virginia State Library*, 1920-1921 (Richmond: Davis Bottom, 1922), 11-50 (separately paginated).

Sidney Sherwood, it was “not a cracked brain scheme”. Only Neil Shawen has dared to verge on irony: Quesnay, he writes, “left no semiprecious stone unturned”.⁸

Three strands dominate the Quesnay literature: his years in the American colonies; his art schools in Philadelphia, New York and Richmond; and the possibility that he influenced Thomas Jefferson’s approach to higher education. All are based on the first synopsis of the *Mémoire*, offered by Herbert B. Adams in 1888.⁹ Like Rolland G. Paulston, most readers believe this work to be a “complete record of [Quesnay’s] activities up to 1788”.¹⁰ It is not. Early writers may be excused their lapses. Copies of the *Mémoire* were difficult to find: Samuel Mordecai described it as “exceedingly rare”; Adams would note that “had it not been for one copy [found] among the drift-wood of the Revolutionary period [...], it is doubtful whether the project for a French academy in Richmond would have found its present place in the educational history of Virginia”.¹¹ Even Page’s translation has not been widely circulated. Search engines and digital libraries have rendered these and other sources accessible, however, and so it is possible to offer a more informed evaluation of not only the *Mémoire* but its author.

Although his birth year is commonly assumed to be 1755, parish records document the birth of Alexandre-Marie Quesnay on 22 November 1752, on his father’s Nièvre estate, Saint-Germain-en-Viry.¹² He attended the Collège de Nevers, entering at the requisite minimum of eight or nine (i.e., in 1760 or 1761), and thus would have had two or three years under the Jesuits before they were replaced by non-monastic clerics in 1763. Although Quesnay could have stopped with the *trivium* (grammar, dialectic, rhetoric), the courses he offered in Philadelphia, New York and Richmond imply that he had completed the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy/cosmology). Like other Nevers students, he would have left the Collège at sixteen.¹³ He was twenty-one when he joined his eldest brother Jean-Marc de Beauvoir in the Corps de Gendarmes de la Garde du Roi, and twenty-four in 1776 when both were expelled, in accordance with a “reform” that limited appointments to those who could prove they were at least fourth-generation nobles.¹⁴ Of course, neither could: their grandfather had been ennobled only in 1752, and theirs was only the third generation. Jean-Marc returned to Nièvre to manage his *seigneurie*. Alexandre-Marie set sail for America, “entraîné par l’espoir brillant de [se] signaler dans la carrière des armes”.¹⁵

⁸ Herbert B. Adams, *Thomas Jefferson and the University of Virginia* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1888), 21-30; Sidney Sherwood, *The University of the State of New York, History of Higher Education in the State of New York* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 98; Neil McDowell Shawen, “Thomas Jefferson and a ‘National’ University: The Hidden Agenda for Virginia”, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (hereinafter *VMHB*) 92 (1984): 314.

⁹ Adams (n.8, above).

¹⁰ Rolland G. Paulston, “French Influence in American Institutions of Higher Learning, 1784-1825”, *History of Education Quarterly* 8 (1968): 235.

¹¹ Mordecai, *By-Gone Days*, 201; Adams, *Jefferson*, 28.

¹² “Extrait du registre de naissances de la commune de St-Germain en Viry, pour l’année mil sept cent cinquante-deux”, *Rambouillet* 14: 158; for examples of the later date, see John G. Roberts, “François Quesnay’s Heir”, *VMHB* 50 (1942), 143-50, and Georges Dulac, “Quesnay, François (1694-1774)”, in *Dictionnaire des journalistes, 1600-1789*, ed. by Jean Sgard, 2 vols (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999), II, no. 661.

¹³ On the Collège (later, Lycée) de Nevers, see Edmond Duminy, *Le Collège de Nevers, 1521-1860* (Nevers: Vallière, 1907); Jean Bugarel, “Histoire du Lycée de Nevers. Recherches, études, documents”, < museduc.nevers.pagesperso-orange.fr > [accessed 17 Nov. 2018]. Quesnay was undoubtedly tutored in drawing, painting, and English, but there is no information on when or where this occurred.

¹⁴ On this branch of the *gendarmerie*, see Lucien Mouillard, *Les Régiments sous Louis XV*, Book 4 (Maison du Roi), Ch.10, < pfeef.free.fr/Anc_Reg/Unif_Org/Mouillard/mouillard_L4c10.htm > [accessed 17 Nov. 2018]; on the “reform”, see *François Quesnay et la physiocratie*, ed. by Luigi Einaudi, Alfred Sauvy, and Louis Salleron, 2 vols (Paris: Institut national d’études démographiques, 1958), I, 290.

¹⁵ Quesnay, *Mémoire*, 19. Although Quesnay arrived the same year as the future General Lafayette, he did not quit France to serve under him, as some have presumed; see, for example, Shawen, “Jefferson and a ‘National’ University”, 313, and

Quesnay landed on the Virginia coast in April 1777. Within days, he had received two commissions. The first was extended by Colonel John Peyton, who offered a captaincy in the Gloucester County militia and the opportunity to defend American shipping against the British.¹⁶ We can understand why Peyton thought him an attractive recruit: the militia was hungry for men and the colonel could not have known that the “chevalier” preceding Quesnay’s name was the honorific accorded the *cadet* of a noble family, nor that his “military” unit was a ceremonial color guard when its very name implied “soldier”. The second commission is less easily understood: Virginia official John Page asked him to “former une académie”, certainly an odd request to make of a young foreigner.¹⁷ Quesnay did not describe this school when he wrote Beauvoir to say he had landed safely, but one sentence – “La vue de mes dessins m’a été très favorable” – hints at what sparked Page’s interest, while a second suggests the route Page wanted the academy to follow and which Quesnay did in fact follow: “Si j’accepte, vous aurez à m’envoyer des maîtres de France, pour les diverses branches”, he told his brother. Quesnay presents a different story in the *Mémoire*, however: “Je cherchai d’abord à fonder & éveiller le goût des Américains par des instructions particulières: J’eus bientôt des Élèves, & je conçus le projet de fonder une Académie, en Amérique”. Only many pages later does he credit Page as “le premier qui ait donné à l’Auteur l’idée de son Projet d’Académie; il l’a engagé, dès ce moment même, à écrire en Europe, pour se procurer des Professeurs”.¹⁸

In any case, the Academy had to be put on hold. July 1777 found Quesnay defending an American ship harassed by the British. The campaign tarnished his dream of a brilliant military career: three of his men were killed, and he himself could have joined them when a musket ball grazed his head – “A dix lignes de près je perdrais à jamais le goût du pain”, he told his brother. Quesnay was then assigned to recruit fresh troops, but when “Un ancien simple soldat français, méchant aventurier [...] leva plus de recrues que je n’avais pu en lever, et fut alors élu mon major, [s]a conduite fut telle, que je me retirai par respect pour notre nom”.¹⁹

Quesnay’s *Mémoire* offers two explanations for this early withdrawal, neither of which mentions the blow to his pride: “la perte de mes équipages, celle de toutes mes lettres de recommandation, égarées dans les Bureaux du Gouverneur [...] P[atrick] H[enry], auquel je les avais confiées; enfin une maladie longue & cruelle, jointe au défauts de ressources, dans un si grand éloignement, me forcèrent de renoncer au parti des armes”, and “Les événemens de la guerre, les supercheries de quelques aventuriers, la perte de ses Lettres de recommandation ayant ôté à l’Auteur ses plus précieuses ressources, en l’année 1778, il se décida à quitter le service”.²⁰

With the exception of David Karel, historians who address Quesnay’s military service assume that he resigned because of illness and, further, that he spent nearly two years (1778-1779) convalescing on Colonel Peyton’s estate.²¹ Quesnay did live with the Peytons during that period, but rather than trying to recover, he was trying to earn a living. He began by importing commercial goods. Unfortunately, his French associate “Clar” forged a manifest, claimed the shipment, and sold it. Quesnay swore out a warrant, but violence followed – Clar attacking, Quesnay defending, first with

Jennings L. Wagoner, Jr., *Jefferson and Education*, Monticello Monograph Series (Monticello: Thomas Jefferson Foundation, 2004), 46.

¹⁶ Quesnay to Beauvoir, 21 April 1777, *Rambouillet* 14: 204.

¹⁷ John Page, then President of the Council of State under the Crown, was elected governor in 1803. That he was also an ancestor of Rosewell Page prompted his great-grandson to undertake the 1922 translation, “a labor of love [...] in the spare hours of a busy life” (“Academy”, 10).

¹⁸ Quesnay to Beauvoir, 21 April 1777, *Rambouillet* 14: 204; Quesnay, *Mémoire*, 20, 95n.

¹⁹ Quesnay to Beauvoir, 4 July 1778, *ibid.*, 205-206.

²⁰ Quesnay, *Mémoire*, 19, 94.

²¹ Karel, *Dictionnaire des artistes*, 668. Compare Adams, *Jefferson*, 22; Gaines, “Richmond’s First Academy”, 168; Sherwood, *University of New York*, 97; Roberts, “American Career”, 464. Quesnay himself says his illness occurred in Philadelphia (*Mémoire*, 100n).

the flat of his sword, as befitted a noble and, finally, with a thrust. In the end, Clar was jailed. Quesnay requested his release two months later, being unwilling (or unable) to pay the prisoner's jailhouse keep as local practice required. His next foray – manufacturing salt by solar evaporation – was more successful. As he told his brother, with some helpful advice and 15,000 *livres* (\$3,000) advanced by Colonel Peyton, “Je me mis à faire du sel [...]. J’ai assez gagné pour pouvoir rendre la somme et vivre, mais les gains ne furent pas durables”. When a rumored captaincy with the Engineers failed to materialize, Quesnay acted on Page’s proposal and left to open an academy in Philadelphia, then the nation’s capital.²²

Quesnay does not mention this school in the *Mémoire*, a surprising oversight in a proposal for a new educational institution. The weekly notices he placed in the *Philadelphia Packet* between November 1779 through at least February 1783 allow us to trace its trajectory, however. It began humbly enough with Quesnay’s November announcement that “On Tuesday evening next”, he would open “an academy [...] for the instruction of youth in the French languages, &c. ”, assuring the public that classes would be conducted with “regularity and decorum”.²³ Lessons were first restricted to Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday evenings, but by the end of the year, Quesnay was ready for bigger things. In ads running on 4, 8, 13 and 15 January 1780, he announced that he would open an academy on the 16th “for teaching the Art of Fortification, Painting Likenesses, landscapes, flowers, &c.”. He encouraged “gentlemen of public character” and military officers (but not enlisted men) to attend, and welcomed “poor young gentlemen’ recommended by the governor, thus “making everyone sensible that it is very honorable to be industrious and willing to receive education”. He also solicited “every gentleman known by the Public to be a friend to the Art of Painting, also Musicians”, hoping they would share their skills in exchange for French or painting lessons. Special sections of the “Painting Academy” and “Academy of Languages” were set aside for “The Ladies”.²⁴ Quesnay did not mention fees, but he did require his “academicians” to accept three rules:

1. That not a single word shall be spoken against any religion.
2. That respect shall be paid to all Professors and Masters, as long as they shall be in the right, in the opinion of the Academy: and in case any person should be found guilty of any of those offences by a majority of votes of the Academy, the penalty shall be thirteen Guineas, delivered to the Overseers of the Poor. So help us God.
3. As all Professors and Academicians will trust in the Academy all their models, books, paint, &c. great care shall be taken not to carry away from the Academy anything of that kind.

Article 1 recalls the first principle of Freemasonry, which forbids discussion of religion, a potentially disruptive topic in a non-sectarian organisation requiring belief in a Supreme Being. Article 2 conveys the Masonic concept of intra-lodge equality; more subtly, it conveys Quesnay’s sense of honour: respect is due only to those who act rightly, and he himself refuses to profit from dubious behaviour. And if Article 3 may be reduced to “Thou shalt not steal”, it also evokes the French expectation that art teachers provide students with the models and equipment basic to instruction.²⁵

²² Quesnay to Beauvoir, 4 July 1778, *Rambouillet* 14: 205-206; John G. Roberts, “Poet, Patriot and Pedagogue”, *Arts in Virginia*, Winter 1966, 23-24, courtesy of VMFA. Quesnay, formerly so sensitive of his honour, here appears indifferent to *dérogance*; he does omit his commercial ventures from the *Mémoire*, however.

²³ Roberts, “American Career”, 464-66. The first ad ran on 10 Nov.1779; the school opened on the 16th. For this and all following references to the *Pennsylvania Packet*, see n. 4, above.

²⁴ Many French communities were then endorsing the notion that ‘idle’ boys be trained in the applied arts to render them useful to society (Reed Benhamou, *Public and Private Art Education in France, 1648-1793*, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1993, chap. 5-6).

²⁵ Benhamou, *Public and Private*. Whether Quesnay was a Freemason in his youth is unknown; he joined the Société populaire de Brutus-le-Magnanime (Moulins) in 1793 (*Rambouillet* 14: 226).

That Quesnay's Philadelphia academy was successful may be assumed from his additions to its curriculum and staff. Between 19 September and 1 October 1782, he placed four ads notifying the public that "proper Masters will be provided" for courses in French, English, Italian, drawing, dance and fencing, the last two to be taught by Louis D'Orsière, "lately from France", who will "teach all sorts of dances most in fashion in Europe, and principal graces and manners". On 9, 16, 20 and 27 November, he announced that John Barthelemy and Francis Ouvartelle had joined the staff, but without designating their specialties. On the 12th, 19th, and 26th of that month, he announced that he had "laid the plan of the Academy [...] for the six following years" and that "Masters for Geography, Music and Drawing, in all their branches, are shortly expected". He even moved to a larger facility.

"But by autumn 1783", John G. Roberts tells us, "there were indications that numerous *petits-maîtres* in Philadelphia were giving Quesnay keen competition, and it is evident that one of his Academy masters was starting a school of his own".²⁶ Unwilling to compete with those he considered ill-qualified, Quesnay left Philadelphia and its *petits-maîtres* behind. A passage in the *Mémoire* memorializes his discontent:

Les Arts, il est vrai, sont cultivés en Amérique; mais la plupart des Maîtres qui les y enseignent, n'ont quitté leur patrie que par légèreté ou par inconduite, & pour fuir l'indigence attachée à la basse médiocrité; une troupe de Maîtres de Langues, de Musique & de Danse; des Peintres, des Sculpteurs, des Dessinateurs, &c., courent de ville en ville, mais n'y laissent presque jamais, après eux, que des Élèves à qui ils n'ont plus rien à apprendre, à qui souvent ils n'ont rien appris [...].

Note: Si une partie des Américains a mauvaise opinion des Français en général: c'est parce qu'ils les jugent d'après quelques Aventuriers qui sont passés en Amérique.²⁷

Another entry in the *Mémoire* – a letter from Sarah Bache to her father Benjamin Franklin, dated 27 February – implies that Quesnay had hoped the Philadelphia school would evolve into the academy suggested by John Page:

Mon cher et honorable Père, Avec cette Lettre, vous recevrez un projet pour une Académie Française qui doit s'ériger ici; c'est un plan fort étendu, & qui fera honneur au Monsieur qui l'a tracé, aussi bien qu'à l'Amérique: s'il peut être exécuté, il ne dérangera nullement le plan des Collèges, & sera seulement pour compléter l'éducation des jeunes gens, quand ils en seront sortis. Ceux qui sont déjà sous M. *Quesnay* ont fait de grand progrès. [...]

L'argent est l'article qui manque; mais le frère de M. Quesnay [Beauvoir] en vous remettant cette lettre, vous informera de quelle manière vous pourrez lui rendre les services les plus utiles. [...]

Je conçois fort combien vous devez être occupé dans cette crise importante; mais, en mère qui désire donner à mes enfants une éducation utile & polie, sur-tout fière de les avoir formés dans mon pays & sous mes yeux, je vous prie de donner à M. *Quesnay* toute l'aide & l'assistance qui seront en votre pouvoir. [...]²⁸

There is more than one thing odd about this letter: it is in French, it is signed "J. Béache", and its only English-language versions appear in translations by Mordecai, Adams, Richard Gaines and, of course, Page.²⁹ Since other letters from Mrs. Bache to her father are in English and signed "S. Bache", and since the writer praises Quesnay, defends the goals of the proposed Academy and asks for money, it

²⁶ Roberts, "American Career", 466; the staff-member is not identified.

²⁷ Quesnay, *Mémoire*, 35.

²⁸ Quesnay, *Mémoire*, 22n; See "To Benjamin Franklin from Sarah Bache, 27 February 1783", < <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-39-02-0134> > [accessed 20 Dec. 2018]. Quesnay lists "Madame Beache, fille du célèbre *Docteur Franklin*" among the Philadelphians "[qui] ont honoré l'Auteur de leur amitié" (*Mémoire*, 98). Such a letter would have had to irritate Dr. Franklin, a trustee for the Academy of Philadelphia founded in 1749, and not dissimilar from the institution Quesnay proposed ("The Academy: Curriculum and Organization", < https://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/1700s/acad_curric.html > [accessed 20 June 2019]). The *crise* referred to Franklin's negotiation of the Franco-American Treaty of Amity and Commerce.

²⁹ Mordecai, *By-Gone Days*, 205-206; Adams, *Jefferson*, 24-25; Gaines, "Richmond's First Academy", 171; Page, "Academy", 17.

is reasonable to suppose that Quesnay was himself its author and that it was added to the *Mémoire* to impress readers.³⁰

Having failed to establish his ultimate academy in Philadelphia, Quesnay set out for New York. Describing himself as a professor of French, drawing and dance as well as a painter of portraits and miniatures, Quesnay opened his Academy of Polite Arts on 1 October 1784 (the arts in question were “French, Italian and German, painting in a multitude of genres, geography, astronomy, architecture, fortification, surveying, music, equitation, fencing and dance”). On 16 November 1784, readers of the *New York Packet and American Advertiser* learned that the instructors for these courses would be French, and that the school would be financed by public subscriptions. On 3 December, he further reported that the New York academy would have seven administrators and be directed by twelve counsellors, trustees and patrons. Each of these elements are intrinsic to the academy he describes in the *Mémoire*. “Through the winter, spring, and summer [of 1785]”, Roberts tells us, “the *New-York Gazetteer* published announcements of varied activities of the Academy [...]”. New York remained largely unmoved. On 4 July 1785, Quesnay’s scholars gave their last public performance, although perhaps not by design: long banned by the Articles of Confederation, professional theatre returned to the city on 11 August. Left with a diminished audience for its dances and tableaux, the New York Academy closed its doors.³¹ Quesnay returned to Virginia.

Quesnay ignores these setbacks in the *Mémoire*, and instead presents his flight from one Eastern city to another as purposeful activity:

Je parcourus donc les principales Villes de l’Amérique, pour y répandre un peu généralement le goût des beaux Arts, & choisir le local qui conviendrait le mieux à l’Établissement que je projettais. La Virginie était le lieu où j’avais passé les premiers momens de mon séjour en Amérique: j’y avais fait beaucoup, & de très-bons amis; on y songeait à ériger Richmond en Capitale de cet État; ces circonstances me firent trouver, à Richmond, plus de facilité que partout ailleurs.³²

For the most part, Richmond rewarded Quesnay’s efforts. By 24 September 1785, he was offering classes in French, music, drawing and dance, and intending to add geography to the programme.³³ Although in January 1786 he felt the need to chastise its citizens for ignoring all of his classes but dancing,³⁴ within another six months he had the support of “une foule de Citoyens zélés pour le bien public [...], [qui] s’empressèrent de concourir à mes vues, & de participer par leurs talens, leur crédit & leur fortune, à l’honneur de cet Établissement”. In fact, they donated some \$12,000, “le produit d’une Souscription libre”, enough to purchase land for a future campus meant to accommodate not only a classroom building, but also a Catholic chapel, a botanical garden, and, surprisingly, “des Pensionnats de l’un & de l’autre sexe”.³⁵ Ground was broken on 24 June 1786, when Quesnay had “la satisfaction de voir jeter les fondemens de l’Académie avec une solennité sans exemple, en présence

³⁰ Adams accepted the letter’s authenticity, although believing it “doubtless [written] at Quesnay’s request [...] and published [...] for the sake of influencing public opinion in France, where the name of Franklin was greatly revered” (*Jefferson*, 24). The editors of the “Béache” letter “found no trace of the ALS [autographed letter signed] nor of the ‘projet’ it enclosed, and cannot verify that BF received either”, but charitably assumed that “the translation was presumably made by Quesnay de Beaurepaire, who must have asked SB to write this letter on his behalf” (see n. 28, above).

³¹ Karel, “Quesnay de Beaurepaire”, 668; Roberts, “American Career”, 467.

³² Quesnay, *Mémoire*, 21-22. Despite the futurity implied by *songeait à*, Richmond had replaced Williamsburg as the capital of Virginia in 1780.

³³ *Virginia Gazette*, 24 Sept. 1785, in Roberts, “American Career”. A year later, the *Gazette* announced that globes were among a shipment of teaching aids that also included “music books and instruments” and “statuettes in a range of sizes” (*Virginia Gazette*, 15 Nov. 1786, courtesy of VMFA).

³⁴ *Virginia Gazette*, 21 Jan. 1786, in Roberts, “American Career”, 468.

³⁵ Quesnay, *Mémoire*, 20-21, 23, 26-27, 63. On the purchase, see Adele Clark, “Academy Square, Richmond, Virginia”, *Medical College of Virginia Bulletin*, no.25 (9 May 1928), 9-11, courtesy of VMFA. Virginia’s statehouse now stands on the site.

du Consul & des Députés de la Nation Française”. The *Mémoire* lingers over the inscriptions engraved on two plaques: the first in Latin, the second in English, that were buried with the cornerstone “par les Maîtres-Gardiens & Compagnons de la L[oge], No. 31 [sic], le jour de la Fête de S. Jean-Baptiste, [...] de l’Ere Vulgaire 1786”.³⁶

The building was erected, but apparently ill-attended. As Asbury Christian puts it, “The school was not very prosperous, so [Quesnay] moved into a private house and rented the academy to Hallam & Henry for a theatre”. Richard Labunski softens this blunt remark: “To help support the academy’s educational programs and enrich the cultural life of Richmond, Quesnay arranged for the building to also serve as a theater [...], the five thousand inhabitants [...] ha[ving] few opportunities for such enlightened entertainment”.³⁷

Despite these setbacks, Quesnay’s vision of what his academy could, and should, be continued to develop. “Vision”, however, can be defined as both aspiration and something dreamed or seen in the mind. There is much of this in the *Mémoire*, where Quesnay says little about the pedagogical methods and practices that will characterise his academy, but is naively open about why he was so intensely committed to it.

As Quesnay envisioned it, his academy “aura sans doute l’approbation des Savans, des Gens-de-Lettres, des Artistes”. It would have branches in Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York; be “en correspondance avec l’Académie Royale des Sciences, celle de Peinture & de Sculpture de Paris, la Société Royale de Londres, la Société Royale & Impériale de Bruxelles [...] & autres Compagnies savantes de l’Europe”. Faculty selected in Paris from among its skilled practitioners of the arts and sciences would staff

des Écoles où seront enseignées les Langues Étrangères, les Mathématiques, le Dessin, l’Architecture civile et militaire, la Peinture, la Sculpture, la Gravure, la Physique expérimentale, l’Astronomie, la Géographie, la Chymie, la Minéralogie, la Botanique, l’Anatomie, tant humaine que vétérinaire, et tout ce qui appartient à l’Histoire Naturelle. [...] La Musique, les Armes, la Danse, l’Équitation, & d’autres branches d’éducation entreront aussi dans les détails de notre Institution.³⁸

Impressed by Quesnay’s lineage, the prominence of his supporters, and the approbations of the royal censor, the Academy of Sciences, and the Academy of Painting and Sculpture,³⁹ nineteenth- and twentieth historians have praised Quesnay’s programme as the precursor of the modern university system. In his proposal they found, or deduced, multiple subject areas; an implied division of these areas into schools or departments; a main campus and branches under a central administration. Sherwood credits Quesnay with having “conceived a plan for a great academy at Richmond, which should overstep the national boundaries and make science and learning international”, something now

³⁶ Quesnay, *Mémoire*, 23-24n, 24-25; “31” is a misprint for 13 (see “Laying the Corner Stone of Quesnay’s Academy”, *Virginia Gazette, or The American Advertiser*, 28 June 1786, in *VMHB* 11 (1904): 254.

³⁷ W. Asbury Christian, *Richmond: Her Past and Present* (Richmond: L. H. Jenkins, 1912), 29; Richard Labunski, *James Madison and the Struggle for the Bill of Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 67. The building housed Virginia’s Federal Convention as it debated ratification of the United States Constitution (June 1788); it burned to the ground in 1803.

³⁸ Quesnay, *Mémoire*, 29, 32-33, 52. While the Academy of Sciences and that of Painting and Sculpture both recommended adding anatomy professors, they differed in the skill desired, Sciences wanting surgeons skilled in hernia repair, Painting and Sculpture specifying artists skilled in expressing physical movement.

³⁹ On supporters, see lists of *Associés étrangers* (who had options to purchase shares of stock in the enterprise) and *Premiers souscripteurs en Virginie* (*ibid.*, 77-93, 104-106, 115); on anatomy, see recommendation from the endorsing academies (*ibid.*, 9, 16). Jean Rouelle, the sole appointee, was to teach chemistry, mineralogy, natural history and botany; arriving to find the academy closed, he studied Virginia’s mineral waters; published *Complete Treatise on the Mineral Waters of Virginia, their Situation, Natural History, Analysis, Contents, and Use in Medicine* (Philadelphia: Charles Cist, 1792); and returned to France in 1798 with the collection of American plants, animals and minerals required by his contract (*ibid.*, 110-12).

true of many universities.⁴⁰ Paulston writes that Quesnay's was "the first attempt to develop an institution capable of truly post-college higher education in the United States". He is correct as to timing, but his reference to higher education is problematic, this being commonly defined as education beyond secondary level and, more specifically, as education leading to advanced degrees in specific fields.⁴¹

To judge from the letter Quesnay attributed to Sarah Bache, his academy would meet the first part of that definition, since it was apparently formed to "compléter l'éducation des jeunes gens, quand ils en seront sortis". This tells us little, however, since Quesnay does not clarify the ways in which their education was incomplete, what he believed necessary to complete it, nor how it furthered their intellectual, professional or even social goals. Instead, he provides an ambitious list of subjects whose only ground-breaking element is the combination of the sciences and fine arts within a single institution, then as atypical of the United States as it was of France.⁴² Quesnay does say his faculty would be "capables d'y faire des Élèves & des Prosélytes,"⁴³ but in the absence of information about course content, sequencing, objectives, plans of study, or degrees and their requirements, he leaves us free to interpret the course list as a broad education relieved by a few gentlemanly electives, rather than preparation for a profession or even a vocation. This was, in fact, generally assumed by the Virginians who contributed to the land purchase: "This laudable undertaking in establishing a Seminary, founded on the plan of enlarging the education of our youth in the polite personal accomplishments so requisite to all who think polished manners worth the attention of public cultivation".⁴⁴

Quesnay, however, hoped for more. Despite the evidence that in none of his schools were students clamouring for the classes in anatomy, engraving, sculpture, botany, chemistry, mineralogy, natural history, and experimental physics he proposed for the academy he envisioned in the *Mémoire*. In fact, there was considerable gap between his dream and reality. While the financial motive suspected by Thomas Jefferson cannot be discounted,⁴⁵ Quesnay's justifications merge the intensely patriotic and the deeply personal: "J'y voyais [...], la possibilité de me faire connaître, l'avantage, plus précieux encore, de multiplier, dans des circonstances aussi intéressantes que celle de la naissance de cette République, les relations de la France avec elle, & de la lier avec ma Patrie par de nouveaux motifs de reconnaissance, de conformité dans les goûts, & de communication plus intime entre les Individus des deux Nations".⁴⁶

As Quesnay saw it, his academy would allow America to "témoigner son zèle [...] à la France, à qui elle a des obligations particulières, sa vive reconnaissance." To this end, he proposed the cross-Atlantic passage of cargo ships "chargé de Plantes, d'Arbustes, de Minéraux, d'Animaux rares, qui, lancé au pied des murs de l'Académie de Richemond, débarquerait sur les bords du Louvre, & lui apporterait, en *Tribut*, les richesses de tout genre, qu'Elle se serait empressée de recueillir".⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Sherwood, *University of the State of New York*, 97.

⁴¹ Paulston, "French Influence", 234.

⁴² Thomas J. Denham, *Historical Review of Curriculum in American Higher Education: 1636-1900* Educational Resources Information Center [ERIC], 2002), 2-5; L. W. Brockliss, *French Higher Education in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Louis Liard, *Enseignement supérieur en France, 1789-1893*, 2 vols. (Paris: A. Colin, 1888-1894), I, 2-82.

⁴³ Quesnay, *Mémoire*, 28.

⁴⁴ "Laying the Corner Stone", 254-55.

⁴⁵ Thomas Jefferson to André Limozin, 22 Jan. 1788, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. by Julian P. Boyd, Mina R. Bryan and Frederick Aandahl, 44 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), XII, 528.

⁴⁶ Quesnay, *Mémoire*, 20-21.

⁴⁷ Quesnay, *Mémoire*, 30, 32, emphasis added. The Academy of Sciences was especially eager to "procurer [de telles] ressources" for its botanists and mineralogists (*ibid.*, 8-9).

In fact, any and all tangible benefits accrue to France, and Quesnay asks nothing of his home country but a steady supply of instructors. Adams (and, to date, Adams alone) foresaw an unintended consequence:

The academy was to show its active zeal for science by communicating to France and other European countries a knowledge of the natural products of North America. The museums and cabinets of the Old World were to be enriched by specimens of the flora and fauna of a country as yet undiscovered by men of science [...]. Special stress was laid upon the importance of introducing into America French mineralogists and mining engineers. If this latter idea had been realized, the mineral resources of the United States would have been exploited in the interest of European capital.⁴⁸

On the other hand, America did indeed have “des obligations particulières” to France, and if the Academy could help to discharge them, this would benefit not only both countries, but would also satisfy Quesnay’s understandable desire for recognition.

A mesure que j’ai fixé mes regards sur ce tableau, il s’est développé à mes yeux: chaque moment, chaque circonstance, l’a, pour ainsi dire, aggrandi; mon amour-propre, flatté du titre de Fondateur, & exalté par les encouragemens que j’ai reçus de toute part des personnes les plus qualifiées & les plus respectables, j’ai mis mon bonheur, j’ai presque attaché mon existence à celle de l’Académie; & j’ai senti qu’il convenait non-seulement de la porter au plus haut degré d’élévation, mais encore, de lui donner toute l’extension dont elle est susceptible’.

and

Si j’osais parler de moi, après d’aussi grandes considérations, je dirais, que j’ai toujours cherché, dans la sphère étroite où je me suis renfermé, à faire aimer & respecter le nom Français; que je cherche à soutenir le mien, puisque c’est le plus précieux héritage que m’ait laissé mon Ayeul, & que la preuve d’une conduite à l’abri du plus léger reproche, est la confiance dont m’honorent les habitans de la *Virginie* [...].⁴⁹

Quesnay thus acknowledges that his vision approaches obsession. Ejected from the Gendarmes de la Garde du Roi for lacking the last quarter of nobility, he insists upon his descendance from François, his *ayeul*, as he had done in 1778 when he “[se] retirai [de l’armée] par respect pour notre nom” when a common soldier was promoted over him.⁵⁰ On the other hand, Virginians lauded and endorsed him; in Paris, French nobles and notables received him, advised him and promised financial support; the king himself allowed him to present his proposal.⁵¹ It is probable that he was emotionally unable to abandon a project already resulting in psychic reward.

History has been kinder to him than was Jefferson. Since the Revolution robbed Quesnay of the chance to implement his institution, they have closed the chapter with regret and understanding: “circumstances were against it”; “the hour was unfavorable”; the “prospect became darker with the approach of the Revolution in France”.⁵² Richmond, too, has remained unfailingly sympathetic. Between 1915 and 1951, successive groups of Richmond artists worked to revive the academy he

⁴⁸ Adams, *Jefferson*, 21-22; Adams would note that Rouelle had been “elected (significantly enough from a French economic view) mineralogist-in-chief of the Richmond Academy” (*ibid.*, 28).

⁴⁹ Quesnay, *Mémoire*, 26-27, 48-49. Lest the point be missed, a footnote explained that his *Ayeul* was “Le Docteur Quesnay, premier Médecin ordinaire du feu Roi Louis XV”.

⁵⁰ He would suffer a similar fate in July 1789, when he was replaced as commander of the citizens’ militia in the Mathurins district, one of its members having objected to serving under a noble; according to Rose, Quesnay’s “plebian successor observed ‘qu’il n’était plus foutu pour être commandé par de bougres de nobles’” (“How to Make a Revolution”, 446).

⁵¹ To his credit, Quesnay sought only the King’s approbation, not a subvention (John G. Roberts, “An Exchange of Letters between Jefferson and Quesnay de Beaurepaire”, *VMHB* 50 (1942): 134-42 (135n); despite claims to the contrary, there is no evidence that Louis XVI did sanction the project (Blakeley, Virginia Lee Cox. “Would Revive Richmond’s Academy of Arts and Sciences”, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 8 Mar. 1931).

⁵² Philip Alexander Bruce, *History of the University of Virginia: The Lengthened Shadow of One Man*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1920), I, 60; Charles Beatty Alexander, *The University of the State of New York and its French Inspiration* (Albany, 1919), 10; Adams, *Jefferson*, 2.

opened in their city. And even so late as 1957, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* invoked his legacy, referring fondly to “Kenney’s Academy”, spelled – and apparently pronounced – as if it were the *petit-nom* of a favourite son.⁵³

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