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**“THERE IS GRAITE ODDS BETWEEN A MANS BEING AT HOME AND A BROAD”:  
DEBORAH READ FRANKLIN AND THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY HOME**

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## ABSTRACT

From 1764 to her death in 1774, Deborah Franklin lived in “their” new house without husband Benjamin. The correspondence between them reveals several ambiguously gendered constructions of that house—ideologically, materially, and architecturally. She was “homeless” legally and conceptually. *Her* household variously consisted of her mother, her adopted son, her daughter, relatives, guests, borders, and servants—she permanently assumed the role of head of the household. *His* household consisted of his landlady, Widow Margaret Stevenson, and her daughter Polly—he could not assume his role as head of household. Moreover, as Deborah wrote her husband about turning the house into a fortress during a raid on it during Stamp Act crisis, he wrote her about the household goods; as she talked about politics, he discussed familial matters. Their permeable, even ambiguous, masculine and feminine roles reconstructed the meaning—and thereby symbolized the gendered complexity—of the eighteenth-century home.

## BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

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Over the forty-four year marriage between Benjamin and Deborah Franklin, his work frequently took him away from home, but many of those separations were episodic and brief. More important were the long separations during his official trips to England. The first, lasting from 1757 to 1763, separated the couple for five years. Then on November 8, 1764, Benjamin Franklin, the “ever loving Husband” of Deborah departed Philadelphia for England a second time. Upon arriving on the Isle of Wight, he wrote, “You know whom I love and honour. Say all the proper Things for me to every body.”<sup>1</sup> Thus began their longest and final separation, a separation in which she increasingly assumed the public persona (that is, the male persona) of the Franklin household. His homecoming in 1775 was very different from the first: Deborah died nearly six months before his return to the colonies—it was, in fact, her death that prompted that return.<sup>2</sup> Luckily for historians, they carried on a steady, often complex, correspondence throughout the years before he returned to the city.

Deborah Franklin wrote neither a diary nor an autobiography; her voice comes to us mainly through her letters to her husband. Although their correspondence spanned ten years, for the purpose of this paper, I concentrate on two years: 1765 and 1766, the years during which she completed work on their new house. Several biographies of Benjamin Franklin briefly touch upon the letters between the two, noting that he “inundated” his wife with questions, bombarded her with “no end of advice,” and “deluged” her with detailed instructions and material goods. Deborah dutifully answered his questions, willingly took his advice, skillfully followed his instructions, and placed the goods as best she could given she was alone, overwhelmed and insecure.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation places Deborah in a passive relationship to her husband, and the

almost mythological presence of his loud and powerful voice overshadows her presence. More significantly, most biographers gloss over the symbolic significance of the structure and ignore the role gender played in the process of house and household building. While these letters form the structural foundation for examining the ambiguously gendered nature of eighteenth-century houses and households, I erect the framework with material culture analysis, architectural history and theory, and gender studies.

As Bernard Herman reminds us, family taste “was often companionate and corporate. In the quest for gendered identities expressed in the material culture of the home . . . we tend to forget the conjugal practice of everyday life.” It is through these exchanges that we glimpse a normal give and take between husband and wife, even a typical tension in the hierarchical relationship of the eighteenth-century family. In the seemingly quotidian details we hear Deborah’s voice. Yet moving from the mundane to a more nuanced reading of the Franklins’ “material conversations”<sup>4</sup> reveals several literal and figurative constructions embodied in their home: its place in eighteenth-century consumer culture as the couple discussed finishing and furnishing their new house in Philadelphia, and, more significantly, its ambiguously gendered meaning—both ideologically and physically.

Despite the ideal image of an elite eighteenth-century family as a “unit . . . where husband, wife, and children . . . formed the basic unit of social and economic action,” the reality was that not only did Deborah oversee the completion of the house inside and out, she lived the rest of her life in “his” house without him.<sup>5</sup> Even though Franklin gave his wife power of attorney during his absence, it was an ambiguous legal position at best. She could act—that is behave like, or even pretend to be--as *feme sole* to the extent that she had the right to “to ask, demand, sue for, levy, recover and receive, all such Sum and Sums of Money, Debts, Rents,

Goods, Wares, Dues, Accounts” in her husband’s name.<sup>6</sup> But as *feme covert* her performative powers were limited; she was legally “homeless” (that is, she could not own the home she never shared with her husband) and conceptually (in the ideal structure of the home).

*Her* household variously consisted of her mother, her adopted son, her daughter, relatives, guests, borders, and servants—she permanently assumed the role of head of this complicated household. *His* household consisted of his landlady, Widow Margaret Stevenson, and her daughter Polly as well as friends, relatives and guests who visited him on Craven Street in London. Although labeled “the patriarch of Craven Street,”<sup>7</sup> he was not the male head of household; he was a renter, a lodger. Moreover, as Deborah wrote her husband about turning the house into an armed fortress during the Stamp Act crisis, he wrote her about the household goods; as she talked about politics, he discussed domesticity.<sup>8</sup> “Inhabited space” (what we call architecture) is the site “of hierarchical . . . arrangements . . . underlying all the arbitrary provisions of a culture;”<sup>9</sup> through their sometimes unique living arrangements, husband and wife moved along a continuum of gender identities and cultural assumptions. Although both sometimes appeared to be uncomfortable with this movement, their masculine and feminine roles symbolized the gendered complexity of the eighteenth-century house, a complexity suggested by Deborah’s unwittingly tongue-in-cheek comment to her husband about the difference between living overseas and living in Philadelphia.

### **The Franklin House: “The Material Culture of Gender, the Gender of Material Culture”**

The title of this section is also the title of a book edited by Katharine Martinez and Kenneth L. Ames. They argue, “Gendering is the process by which identities are pieced together by active subjects from the materials . . . at hand.”<sup>10</sup> That gendering process can be seen

through the Franklin house. In theory, early American households consisted of a male head, a wife, their children, and servants or slaves. In exchange for legal, economic, and military protection, the household's "dependents" submitted to male authority. According to eighteenth-century prescriptive literature, the "patriarchal household" was hierarchical and deferential.<sup>11</sup> The husband, the supreme authority, ruled the household, controlled the family's finances, and supervised domestic affairs. He also represented the household in the community. Such fatherly exemplars commanded authority, not only within their own families where "everyone mov[ed] in a known sphere," but also in the community, where "good order" was maintained. Men, educated and thus rational and clear-headed, were "well form'd for government" within the house and within the community.<sup>12</sup>

A married woman had no independent existence or identity; as *feme covert* she was legally subsumed into her husband and she had no rights, no separate identity. Wives submitted to their husbands' mundane and monumental decisions. However, because men felt neither comfortable with nor confident about the day-to-day activities of domestic affairs, they left those responsibilities to their wives. Women supervised the "lived" activities of the household. A woman became "notable" by running her "empire" skillfully and smoothly. Her role was to be economical (even though most women had no knowledge of family finances and their husband's business), to work hard, and to promote the welfare of the family. Her pride and her recognition came in fulfilling those responsibilities.

As a young man, Benjamin Franklin expressed similar beliefs about married women's roles in three different venues. In 1727, he wrote his sister that, "I have been thinking what would be a suitable present for me to make, and for you to receive, as I hear you are grown a celebrated beauty. I had almost determined on a tea table, but when I considered that the

character of a good housewife was far preferable to that of being only a pretty gentlewoman, I concluded to send you a spinning wheel.”<sup>13</sup> Three years later and a month after he and Deborah embarked on a common-law marriage, he published, *Rules and Maxims for Promoting Matrimonial Happiness Address'd to all Widows, Wives, and Spinsters*.<sup>14</sup> He advised wives to “Never endeavour to deceive or impose on [their husbands’] Understanding: nor give him *Uneasiness*,” to “Dispute not with him, be the Occasion what it will; but much rather deny yourself the trivial Satisfaction of having your own Will,” and to “have a due Regard to his Income and Circumstances in all your Expences and Desires.” On July 10, 1732, he published his satirical “Anthony Afterwit.” Afterwit, a tradesman with a spendthrift wife, complained that she “being entertain’d with Tea by the Good Women she visited, we could do no less than the like when they visited us; and so we got a Tea Table with all its Appurtenances of China and Silver. Then my Spouse unfortunately overwork’d herself in washing the House, so that we could do no longer without a Maid.” To get the family out of this bind, Afterwit sold his wife’s entire equipage when she was off on a social visit.<sup>15</sup>

In these selections, Franklin wavered between praising the frugality and criticizing the extravagance of all women. But “in neither capacity could [women] comfortably fit into a theory extolling the achievements of autonomous males.”<sup>16</sup> This may have been a personal predilection, but it also reflected the burgeoning influence of the market economy. Decades later Franklin aspired to become a gentleman. Not only did he embrace the tea table and all it symbolized, but he strove to prove (and enforce) his rank by the house he lived in and the consumer goods on display in that house; he expected Deborah to aid that goal happily, judiciously, and precisely—but he never entirely abandoned his dislike of the autonomous profligate wife.



Fulfilling their domestic responsibilities may have given women a large measure of pride, but they could also fill women with anxiety, as they did Deborah thirty years later as she strove to rise to Benjamin's new-found status-conscious expectations. For example, responding to several pointed questions Benjamin posed her, Deborah described the glazed doors on the buffet in his room, she counted the number of panes in those doors (there were eight in each), and told him although the "railes" had not been put up, it was "promised soon to be dun." She began to feel overwhelmed by the tasks and perhaps by her desire to please him, for she anguished that, "every bodey is a fraid they shall doe wrong so every thing is left undun[.]"<sup>17</sup> She, of course, did not have the luxury of being paralyzed by fear, of leaving tasks undone until his return. In that struggle to accomplish all those tasks, Deborah likely gained confidence gained in her own abilities.

In reality, many households did not adhere to the ideal structure; wives were not completely powerless, and the seemingly normative male authority appears too rigid and too simplistic, especially as the unstable era of the American Revolution made clear. Women could advise their husbands, they could even assume male roles when status allowed it and times demanded it; men could be neither tyrannical nor abusive in wielding their power, and they willingly ceded masculine responsibilities and authority to their wives as necessary.<sup>18</sup> It is within these "contrasting images of autonomy and subordination," within these ambiguous or flexible gender roles, that the Franklins complicated the household structure.

We can only imagine that Deborah and Benjamin lived contentedly as husband and wife for most of their years together, but there is no evidence one way or the other to prove it. We only enter into their relationship when Benjamin was away. Admittedly, urban Philadelphian households took a "wide range" of complex forms, and female-headed households were "a

normal occurrence.”<sup>19</sup> However, the Franklins conducted the concluding years of their marriage across continents and through a written give and take between Philadelphia and London—which made it a decidedly untraditional marriage as well as a difficult relationship to pursue. From the start, those letters revealed the way they constructed their relationship, at least on the surface. Every letter Benjamin wrote to Deborah began with “my dear child.” This phrase seemed to signal the paternalistic, hierarchical relationship between husband and wife. Yet, Deborah began every letter to Benjamin with the exact phrase—suggesting two different interpretations: First that the companionate marriage of the early republic had an earlier beginning and that this marriage, even long distance was an affectionate one; and second, that Deborah refused to let her husband infantilize her and in an act of defiance appropriated the phrase and turned it on him. Most likely, both Franklins had found a balance between love and authority that the ambiguously gendered eighteenth-century marriage allowed.<sup>20</sup>

After renting and living in numerous locations over the course of three decades, the Franklins began building their own house in the spring of 1763. Unfortunately all the architectural plans for it have disappeared, but we know that Benjamin hired Robert Smith, “one of the foremost carpenter-architects in the colonies,” and his old friend Samuel Rhoads to oversee the project. By the time Benjamin left for England in late 1764, the framework (the foundation, roof, exterior brick walls, floors, and plastered interior walls) had been erected and, not mentioning the role Deborah would play in its completion, he left £550 with the builders to finish the house. According to Susan Stabile, reflecting wider cultural assumptions, eighteenth-century architectural theory gendered domestic structures; “men and women represented the two spheres of architecture: exterior and interior, public and private,”<sup>21</sup> strength and weakness, mind and body, masculine and feminine. The exterior “reinforced local distinctions . . . , the interior

engaged social relationships that transcended place and were defined in the competitive culture of Atlantic cosmopolitanism.”<sup>22</sup> That Benjamin confidently walked away once the basic structure of the house was built reflects this bias; the give and take between the Franklins over furnishing the house challenged those cultural assumptions. According to Dell Upton, “it is never possible to speak of ‘the’ experience of” a house for “some members have more control over the house than others, some do more work there than others, and all experience it differently according to their places in the domestic community.”<sup>23</sup> As the Franklins demonstrate, often legal ownership of the house mattered less than the lived experience therein; the actual control of the house acknowledged, represented, and challenged seemingly prescribed unequal relationships.

When the house—located on the south side of High Street (now Market Street) between Third and Fourth Streets--was completed in the summer of 1766, insurance records described this typical American Georgian 10-room house as:

3 Storys high . . . [with] 3 Rooms on a floor[.] . . . East Room [the dining room] below wainscuted, with with fret Cornish all Round, four pedemets with fret Bedmolds A Rich Chimney piece, fluted Cullums and half pilasters with intabliture--the other Rooms and passage below wainscuted pedestal high, with fret and dintal Cornish throughout[;] one of sd. Rooms has a Chimney peice with tabernacle fr[a]m[e] pediment &c. All the Second Story wainscoted pedestal high, fret dintal and plain duple Cornish through the whole, a Chimney peice in one of the Rooms with tabernacle frame pediment &c. Chimney Brests Surbass [surbase] Scerting and Single Cornish throughout the third Story--Garet plasterd, a way out on Roof--two Storys of Stairs Rampd. Brackited and Wainscuted[.] . . . [P]ainted inside and out--Modilion Eaves--a Large painhouse [penthouse] . . . [and an] all New--kitchen in Celler.<sup>24</sup>

The land on which the house stood was in part Deborah’s inheritance from her mother, and it remained her responsibility to oversee its completion—and until she could, she would remain impatiently in the rented house. “Yisterday I Spook to Nabor Headock but he ses there is no

such Thing as painting till next March . . . so I muste indever to make my selef as esey as I can but I did raly think I shold a bin allmoste ready to a mouefed [moved] as soon as this wather has brook up.”<sup>25</sup> Four years earlier (during Benjamin’s first trip to England) she made it clear that she was not a patient woman; Deborah, perhaps tired of living in houses picked out by Benjamin, conceivably demonstrating her own desires for upward mobility, and definitely showing signs of a nascent independence, moved “her household” to a new house she rented from Adam Eckert. These same motivations likely spurred her frustration in 1765.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout February 1765, the two exchanged letters about the house. A useful way to understand the building at the center of their transatlantic conversation is as reflection of the choices they made which in turn communicated “a sense of self and their environment.” She wrote about where she was going to put fireplaces, the curious mantel he sent (which she critically nicknamed “the beste”), laying hearths, the plasterer finishing lathing the staircase and laying the kitchen floor, and getting the rooms ready for the painter (she was going to use the fireplaces to warm up the rooms). She regretted that the work was progressing so slowly even though “I have not one ower my one att this time.” She appeared to be claiming that the delays were not the fault of a hard-working “notable” housewife such as herself. She did not want Benjamin to believe she was not up to the task. He wrote about the consumer goods he sent: blankets, bed ticks, new china, and mohair cloth for curtains in the blue room, explaining that “the fashion is to make one Curtain only for each Window. Hooks are sent to fix the Rails by at Top, so that they may be taken down on Occasion.” Then he added, “I almost Wish I had left Directions not to paint the House till my Return. But I suppose tis done before this time.” She directed the heavy work and oversaw the workers; he made suggestions about interior decorating and stewed in frustration over his lack of control.<sup>27</sup>

Apparently the weather warmed enough because in April Deborah informed her husband—after noting that he had been absent five months—that she had been able to get some things into the house and “yisterday sume of the Sashes was hung and if I wold alow my selef I Cold find falte but I donte.”<sup>28</sup> This cryptic phrase suggests that she wanted to more forcefully exert masculine control over the basic construction of the house but dared not—either because women should not criticize men or because Franklin did not always appreciate her temper. Again regretting that he was not there to oversee the move while simultaneously free to flex his authoritarian masculine muscles and patronizingly demonstrate his superior education, Benjamin wrote

**I could have wished** [emphasis added] to have been present at the Finishing of the Kitchen, as it is a mere Machine, and being new to you, I think you will scarce know how to work it. The several Contrivances to carry off Steam and Smell and Smoke not being fully explain'd to you. The Oven I suppose was put up by the written Directions in my former Letter. . . . **I cannot but complain in my Mind** [emphasis added] of Mr. Smith that the House is so long unfit for you to get into, the Fences not put up, nor the other necessary Articles got ready. The Well I expected would have been dug in the Winter, or early in the Spring; but I hear nothing of it. You should have garden'd long before the Date of your last, but it seems the Rubbish was not removed.<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, when she responded in part to his frustration that he could only challenge Mr. Smith through his imagination and in part to ease his mind, she reverted to ideologically prescribed gender roles by acting the demure female and commenting on what Susan Stabile termed the masculine aspects of his house, the exterior: “I am very glad that you doe approve of my purchous and when it shall pleas God to restore you to your one house I think you will be verely much plesd at the look of it as it dos make a fine Squair and an equil spaise on each sid your house and at this time your man Gorge is a leveling of it and it look much better then when I firste Come into it.”<sup>30</sup> In a bold move, Deborah had purchased a town lot adjacent to the house without Benjamin’s sanction. She understood the visual importance of the symmetrical

placement of the house on its lot. She also understood she might have transgressed in her independence.

In August Benjamin sent Deborah a long and varied set of instructions, many of them disguised as questions, about the house. In the specificity of them, there is a sense that he was trying to exert control over a process of house and household building from which he was being excluded. It is also evident that he recognized that she was making decisions on her alone and he resented it. After asking for the measurements of the windows, “for which you would have me bring Curtains,” he pointedly added “unless you chuse to have the Curtains made there.” To reassert his presence in the house, he asked, “Have you mov'd every thing, and put all Papers and Books in **my** [emphasis added] Room, and do you keep it lock't?” Besides wanting her to draw a picture of the lot she bought (so he could know its size), he also inquired who “it joins upon.” He understood that placement of the house in the neighborhood was crucial. He most especially demanded to know who the tenant was [he lived in a small house at the Market Street end of the lot Deborah recently acquired] and what rent he paid. He advised her that she could wait to oil the floors until he returned, he admonished her to “take great Care of your Fires,” and he challenged her to make sure “the Vaults” are made because she does not have Cellar Room enough.” In closing, he wistfully added, “I wish you would give me a particular Account of every Room, who and what is in it, 'twould make me seem a little at home.”<sup>31</sup>

Maybe he was worried as well about the expenses she incurred. Under normal circumstances, husbands and wives collaborated on purchases for the household. Billy G. Smith argues that laboring men's wills reveal the great confidence they had in their wives' ability to manage the household alone. This should not come as a surprise because even while both were alive, these wives bore primary responsibility for economic affairs household as well as helping

run the business—as Deborah Franklin did when she was merely the wife of a printer and postmaster.<sup>32</sup> But wealth and elite status complicated matters. The “easy access” to consumer goods—especially in the “empire of goods” of the burgeoning eighteenth-century market economy—gave women increasing chances to challenge the authority of the male head of household and to threaten what were perceived as “appropriate power relations in the community.”<sup>33</sup> An absent male would radically alter those relationships even further, and the Franklin household was hardly “normal.” Deborah spoke the common language of goods as skillfully as he.

In a letter written over the space of a week, Deborah responded at length to her husband. While she described everything in detail, there is evidence of her piqué at his questions—which she seemed to take as challenges to her ability to see that everything got done properly, evidence of her exerting control over the household, and evidence of an unusual (even unfeminine) irreverent attitude toward the interior decorations.

The third floor contained their daughter Sally’s room (it had a bed, a bureau, a table, a glass case, books, and pictures), the unfinished Blue (Music) Room (it had a harmonica, a harpsichord, gilt sconces, a card table, a china tea set she bought sense he “went from home,” a “very hansom” mahogany table for the tea pot, ornamental china, “worked Chairs,” and wallpaper that had “loste much of the blume by paisteing of it up”), and Ann Hardy’s room (she was a visitor from England), which Deborah could not describe because “it is keep locked.”

On the second floor was Deborah’s bedroom, in which she slept with her maid (she had a bed without curtains, a chest of drawers, a table, a bookcase, “old” walnut chairs, and some family pictures), the “front room,” a small guest bedroom with a bed (that he had sent from England), and a mahogany table and stand, and Benajmin’s bedroom. After informing him that

she let their son have “more of your Books then what you laid ought,” she then told him that she put all his papers “into boxes barrels and bages” in the room “I cale yours.” Again, Deborah is creating her identity as an independent householder—this time in charge of meting out Benjamin’s material possessions. There is also a sense here that she did not treat his papers as sacredly as he would have liked, and she chose which room would be his. In this room she also put a desk, a large chest, his harmonica and music, all the materials for his electrical experiments, his cloths, and pictures, pictures she claimed she did not hang for fearing that it “would not be write.”

Most important, however, were the rooms on the first floor. In the “Northroome,” which was not yet complete, she put a table and chairs, a bookcase, some pictures, and a small carpet on the floor. The dining room was well appointed with a “verey hansum” side board with two new matching tables, and a dozen chairs. Exerting again her independence and reflecting her sense of “gentle” rank, she sold the old tables because “they did not sute the room by aney meens.” “The little Suthroom” (the parlor) contained a “pritey” card table and chairs, chairs she brought from the parlor of the old house, ornamental china, a new carpet she “bought cheep.” It also had a worn “Scotch Carpet,” and Benjamin’s “time pees” standing in one Corner. Apparently people told her the room was “all wrong.” Wrong because she displayed chairs from the old house, wrong because the carpet was cheap looking, wrong because she placed the furniture carelessly? Deborah cared not about their criticism, and simply replied that “we shall have all things as thay shold be when you cume home.” Until then she seemed quite satisfied with the room as “all these things air be cume quite indifrent to me att this time.”



As to his other questions, she wrote that she had used all the chimneys and they worked fine, “the same man lives in house that did when I bought it but I donte know his name,” and the penthouse is not yet completed. Then she appeared to challenge him by saying,

I fair you have not reseved all my letters[. I told you] mr. Rhodes thought it beste not to dig a volte . . [and] I did write to you in the Spring and since for your orders[.] I hope the Smith will put railles on the house to morro[.] I due take all the Caire of the fiers in my power . . the men keep fier in two rooms while they worked and I did little else but tend them least any acksidente shold happen[.]<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps it was not that he did not receive the letters (which was possible), but that he had not read them closely enough or that she perceived he was questioning her decisions or her silence on some issues he thought important but she did not.

When Deborah wrote, “our Gardin is to be is a fenesing of[f] but I have two Cartes a bringing durte to rais it as the desente muste Come from the wall to go to the street. I paid to Mr. Smith laste week £39 as I did to Mr. Ervin the Carter. I am to pay this day 6 pounds . . . for the seder postes and fenes, she continued her tactic of willingly (but vicariously) including her husband in the on-going saga of the building process and assuming masculine responsibilities over the house. And she continued to assert herself by informing him she had planned to “to write for sume more of the Read Stuef for two Cushins,” but instead she found the material in Philadelphia and bought it for “£7 10s. 0d,” which was apparently as “cheep as I Cold get it in Ingland,” suggesting, of course, that his buying sprees might be no longer necessary. Although she appeared to include her husband in deciding what to do with the cushions she would make when she wrote, “if we please [they are] for bouth rooms upstairs,” she immediately cut off that possibility by asserting, “I shall put them down staires.<sup>35</sup> For Deborah, as for generally all genteel women, shopping was is not a frivolous pursuit of a leisured class but “a form of [gendered] employment.” As Amanda Vickery writes, it “was most effectively performed by

women” whose “routine decision making” and that public performance helped create the leisured class.<sup>36</sup> Not only is “the act of purchase is a performative moment that can reveal the unstable relations of merchant, customer, and consumer good,”<sup>37</sup> it can also reveal the unstable relations of husband and wife.

Over the two years during which Deborah oversaw the construction of the Franklin house, she constructed a new identity for herself. In assuming traditional male roles and responsibilities, she became a strong head of household comfortable with making and enforcing decisions not just about the material goods of the interior—which “naturally” would have been a woman’s sphere, but also about the external structure and the surrounding grounds. She chided, challenged, and overrode her husband’s wishes. While eighteenth-century gender roles were permeable, Deborah moved too far long the continuum into a role typically associated with the other sex. By so powerfully asserting her voice, she created some discomfort within the Franklin household—and it was only the beginning.

### **The Franklin Household: Gendered Spaces<sup>38</sup>**

Along with the gendered construction of the house, came the gendered construction of the household. According to Robert Blair St. George,

women effectively vied with men for control over the household itself. The image of the ‘house-body’ and its accompanying language play a central role in demonstrating that patriarchal mandate was never absolute. . . . The house-body was a gendered body. The productive acreage that surrounded the house consisted of male spatial domains [fields, barns]. Yet within the house women ruled . . . [and] the question of how to naturalize the house as a hierarchic body that contained women as subordinate members had no easy answer.<sup>39</sup>

Deborah initially created a unique household, and one wonders how much Benjamin struggled to ensure that she was “contained” as his subordinate. As she wrote, “Mr. [John] Foxcrofte Came to town this day[.] . . . I had got some of our things in the new house and beads in the upper

roomes [so] he lodges in the room fasing the market street and has his writeing thair all so.”

Several months later she explained that when she first began moving into the new house, “which was in may . . . , I stayd in Mr. Foxcroftes house till he Come that is we dressed vitels and slept thair and mufed by degrees to our one house.”<sup>40</sup> Did “our one house” refer to hers and Benjamin’s or hers and Mr. Foxcroft’s? It is likely she meant the former and that, in fact, Foxcroft temporarily became a boarder in her house (although it is not clear he paid rent for the room upstairs). This put her in the same ambiguous position as Benjamin’s landlady in London. Historian Naomi Tadmor argues that some landladies “had a partly servile position in relation to her paying guests, all the more so as they are clearly her social superiors.” This was not true in the case of Margaret Stevenson; she was “a landlady [who] retain[ed] the position or moral authority, typical of the mistress and householder.” As such, was “her duty to maintain the good order and reputation of *her* establishment.” Clearly, the eighteenth-century household was “flexible and permeable;” relationships were frequently instrumental rather than sentimental.<sup>41</sup>

Before the Franklins built their new Georgian-style house, gender boundaries appeared more flexible. Deborah ran a shop out of their houses, Benjamin had his post office in the house, and Deborah assisted Benjamin in running his print shop. All these economic activities brought her into the political sphere where she developed networking skills. Thus, the Franklin home “stood at a crossroads of eighteenth-century gendered interpretations of space.”<sup>42</sup> But there is no evidence of that economic activity in the new house. As Bernard Herman argues, the eighteenth-century urban town house, organized “around avenues of movement,” became the site “where symbolic action and presentation of self were essential elements of everyday life.” Middle- and upper-class families like the Franklins had the luxury of dedicating certain rooms to private and

public activities; each member of the household had their own space within the house and various rooms served dedicated purposes.<sup>43</sup>

As historians have argued, by doing so, eighteenth-century houses created multiple gendered spaces within homes. Areas such drawing rooms, libraries, and dining rooms served as alternatives to public spaces of taverns, coffeehouses, and clubs and allowed men to interact politically and intellectually with male peers in their own houses. The dining table was the site of social, cultural, and economic exchange, and dinners were primarily masculine affairs. If women were included, they left the table before men did, and often the hostess was the only woman present. At the same time, spaces for women edged them from the house's political economic, and intellectual center; women congregated in the homosocial realm of the bedroom. There were some mixed sex spaces, such as the parlor for teas, that accommodated a smaller, more intimate public—but it was a public that devalued women.<sup>44</sup> According to Jessica Kross, “Women without men used far less of the great house than women with men or men alone. There is no record of all-female gatherings for meals in dining rooms or for large discussions in a parlor.”<sup>45</sup>

Here too the Franklins complicated this pattern. Deborah was not a widow but she essentially lived as one. As all widows did, she occupied an ambiguously gendered space and had an ambiguously gendered relationship to the material and social culture of the household. Widows were expected to play the part of male and female, mother and father, masculine and feminine. In reality, Deborah was not a widow; as a married woman living alone, those spaces and relationships were even more ambiguous and complicated as she (sometimes inadvertently and sometimes openly) challenged the gendered construction of the house/hold.

The most radical regendering of the house came on the night of September 16, 1765, when her house took on an overtly political—and military—significance. Angry responses to the Stamp Act occurred throughout the colonies, but many in Philadelphia blamed Benjamin for supporting the Act, and mobs threatened to retaliate. From Deborah's description of the situation, one can feel the tension and perhaps even fear she felt, but also more palpably the strength, control, and bravery she exerted.<sup>46</sup> For nine days people kept warning her of the danger she and her family faced. Fearing for her daughter Sally's safety, she sent her to relatives in Burlington, New Jersey. Then "on munday laste" tensions reached the boiling point when the mob threatened to pull down the newly-built house. But she did not face them alone. "Cusin [Josiah] Davenport Come and told me . . . it was his Duty to be with me. I sed I was plesed to reseve Civility from aney bodey so he staid with me sum time[.]" She seemed to have control of the situation, however, for she ordered Davenport to "fech a gun or two as we had none. I maid one room into a Magazin. I ordered sum sorts of defense up Stairs such as I Cold manaig my self." It is not clear which one of the elegantly furnished, wainscoted, and decorated rooms became an armed fortress, but clearly all of the second story (and maybe third story) private bedrooms became more than domestic spaces. Later that evening, more than twenty relatives and neighbors helped guard the house. Despite their offers to stay the night with her, she sent them away.

As her supporters left, they urged her to leave with them, but she refused, adamantly asserting, "I had not given aney ofense to aney person att all nor would I be maid unesey by aney bodey nor wold I stir or show the leste uneseynis but if aney one Came to disturbe me I wold show a proper resenetement and I shold be very much afrunted." As she recalled the events, she felt compelled to reiterate to her husband that she would "not stir as I rely donte think it wold be

right in me to stir or show the leste uneseyness at all.” Refusing to be intimidated and putting on a brave face to the outside world, she proved she could protect her household. She assumed the male protector role. When Benjamin’s reply came several months later, it was notably brief; he wrote simply, “I honour much the Spirit and Courage you show'd, and the prudent Preparations you made in that [Time] of Danger.” Then he added this intriguing comment: “The [Woman?] deserves a good [House] that [is?] determined to defend it.” Feminist scholars of architecture suggest that the house constructed the dichotomy between private and public far less than we have previously understood, but in Benjamin’s mind had Deborah finally demonstrated enough courage, enough masculine qualities, to begin defining the house as hers?<sup>47</sup>

The image of armed women protecting themselves was not new, but the “female soldier” lived at the margins—either on the frontier or in captivity; she was not a genteel lady living in the heart of a city in a newly constructed house designed to prove her family’s status to others.<sup>48</sup> Historians have argued that because men’s houses symbolized their authority and their manhood, those structures “became target of popular anger . . . by attempting to enforce what the people considered to be illegitimate laws” lived in by those who “had proven themselves to be unmanly” or selfish “effeminate fops” by acquiring luxury goods. “[D]efacing the most visible symbol of their [political] manhood,” the mob demonstrated their disrespect for revolutionary leaders.<sup>49</sup> However, the crowd was also attacking a visible representation an emerging consumer culture that shut them out. The “lower sort” vented their anger on a house clearly designed to exhibit the Franklins’ wealth and power. When defending the house, Deborah was not just protecting her household--her private domain, she also was defending her and her husband’s status and visibly securing their role as well-established members of the bourgeois public sphere.

That Deborah simultaneously inhabited a female world was evident when Benjamin thanked “the good Ladies you mention for their friendly Wishes.” His “best Respects” went to more than thirteen women who had been visiting with Deborah.<sup>50</sup> That was to be expected. Yet beyond the unusual circumstances of the Stamp Act brouhaha, Deborah regularly assumed the masculine role of entertaining in the public spaces. For example, she wrote Benjamin that Billey and his wife . . . Spente yisterday at our house as did Mr. Williams Brothers. We was att diner. I sed I had not aney thing but vitels for I Cold not get anything for a deserte but who knows but I may treet you with sum thing from Ingland.” Luckily at that point, the mail came, and with whatever arrived from England, she “had the pleshuer of treeting quite grand-indeed, and our little Companey as cheerful and hapey as aney in the world.”<sup>51</sup> Several months later, Benjamin wrote, apparently in response to Deborah informing him that she and a group of his old friends had drunk to his health, “I am much oblig’d to my good old Friends that did me the Honour to remember me in the unfinish’d Kitchin. I hope soon to drink with them in the Parlour.”<sup>52</sup> He appeared to miss the male camaraderie of the parlor and maybe even resented Deborah’s usurpation of male sociability. Like it or not, in their homes and through their letters, women helped the private space of the family emerge into a realm of broader public sociability, and in the process played a crucial role in the creation of a new identity and cultural development.<sup>53</sup>

Still from the outside looking in—and seemingly a little peeved at Deborah’s independence, he wrote, “it gives me Pleasure that so many of Friends honour’d our new Dining Room with their Company. You tell me only of a Fault they found with the House, that it was too little; and not a Word of any thing they lik’d in it. Nor how the Kitchin Chimneys perform; so I suppose you spare me some Mortification, which is kind.”<sup>54</sup> The Franklins formed a part of a new bourgeois public sphere, a sphere that was “the creation of an imagined public space, a

powerful, critical voice known as public opinion.<sup>55</sup> Disagreeing with her expenditure of their social capital, he cringed under that gaze and. Perhaps that explains why he ended the letter with, “I wonder you put up the Oven without Mr. Roberts’s Advice, as I think you told me he had my old Letter of Directions.” Did she invite criticism because she did not follow his order? Was he blameless here?

As Daphne Spain argues, houses reflect ideals and realities about relationships between women and men within the family and in society. “The space outside the home becomes the arena in which social relations (i.e., status) are produced, while the space inside the home becomes that in which social relations are reproduced.” Domestic architecture mediates social relations, specifically those between women and men. Houses are the spatial context within which the social order is reproduced.<sup>56</sup> If that is so, Deborah Franklin turned that order upside down.

But she also partook of what has been described as a more traditionally female ritual. On November 3, 1765, she wrote her husband that she received the tea he sent, and with it she “had the pleshuer to treet your old friend John Robertes[,] his Son the Doctor from mereyland[,] thair wifes and Dafter[, and] your verey good friend Mrs. Howel and Dafter to the Number of 13.” A smaller social gathering coalesced when “good Mr. Rhodes and his son Thomas Franklin and wife dranke tee with us and we had the beste Buckwhate Kakes that ever I maid. They sed I had ought dun my one ought doings. Our good Mr. Mockridg has sente sume of the beste of the flower that I ever saw and we had them hot thay desired thair love to you.” Several months later she wrote that she received “the butyfull Candel stickes,” the set of “Chaney quite whole[,] and the fine tee Pot . . . for which I give you maney thankes and if I live tell your Birthday I think to fill it with punch and treet sum of your friends.”<sup>57</sup>



As did Benjamin Franklin, men throughout the British Empire recognized the tea table as “the critical institution in the assertion of women’s presence in the emerging public sphere.” David Shields argues that “women’s embrace of tea must be understood as a reaction to the masculine infatuation with coffee and all that it implied [especially the masculine world of the coffeehouse.” Those who felt anxiety about the consolidation of women’s power dismissed the ritual of tea drinking--and its female devotees--as frivolous, even wasteful. Nevertheless, Benjamin clearly changed his mind once *he* aspired to become a gentleman, for not only did he applaud Deborah’s efforts at entertaining his friends and family, he aided those social gatherings by sending her the latest and expensive *accoutrements* from London. While we see the development of a female public sphere, we also recognize a male concern that his friends do not again find fault with his household. A woman’s ability to entertain in style reflected her status within the household; her ability to entertain in style reflected his status within the community.<sup>58</sup>

In Deborah Franklin’s case, her ability to entertain in style—not only in serving tea in the parlor but also in “treating quite grand” in the dining room reflected the gendered nature of the household and her competing masculine and feminine roles as ornament and as head of household.

## **Conclusion**

Not many women built their own houses--or even participated in that process to the extent Deborah Franklin did; the one notable exception, Susanna Wright, interestingly enough was Deborah's good friend. If only correspondence between those women existed! Even if women did not build their own houses, "they understood architectural form" and the construction

of gender around those forms.<sup>59</sup> The Franklins constructed their house and their permeable gendered identities several decades before the ideology of “republican motherhood” valorized women’s roles in the family and the household and women moved from the margins to center stage in the early nineteenth-century home. Deborah Franklin's letters, replicating the disorder of the building process itself, sheds light on her relationship to the public and personal spaces of the house and the household. As she told her stories, she constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed those relationships. She left her indelible mark on each room she oversaw the lathing, plastering, painting and wainscoting of, on each room she decorated, on each room she used, and on each room she described in depth. Those marks reveal that Deborah learned to navigate the sometimes calm, sometimes stormy waters of gender in the eighteenth century. She learned—in fact, was forced to learn—new skills generally undertaken by men. She was, by turns, both an active participant and a passive recipient of shifting gender norms. She both resisted and embraced newly created identities around the literal and figurative construction of the Franklin house.

## END NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Deborah Franklin, 9 December 1764, in Leonard W. Labaree, et al. (eds), *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, hereafter cited as *PBF*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959-), 11:517.

<sup>2</sup> In 1763 Benjamin “came back to the warmest welcome,” and in letters to England he boasted of the “flow of well-wishers coming to his house ‘from morning to night.’” Claude-Anne Lopez and Eugenia W. Herbert, *The Private Franklin: The Man and his Family* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), 96, 174.

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<sup>3</sup> The cited words or phrases come respective from Sheila Skemp, "Family Partnerships: The Working Wife, Honoring Deborah Franklin," in Larry Tise (ed), *Benjamin Franklin and Women* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 19-36, here 31-2; Lopez and Herbert, *The Private Franklin*, 124-130, here 124; David Freeman Hawke, *Franklin* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976): 198-9. See also Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 98; H. W. Brands, *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 341; Claudia-Anne Lopez, Claude-Anne Lopez, *Benjamin Franklin's "Good House": The Story of Franklin Court* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1981), 25-9; and Jennifer Reed Fry, "'Extraordinary Freedom and Great Humility': A Reinterpretation of Deborah Franklin," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 127 (2003), 167–96, here 185. The most recent discussion of the letters is Edward Cahill's "Benjamin Franklin's Interiors," *Early American Studies*, 6 (2008), 27-58, especially 47-53. It is an excellent analysis, but it is an analysis that focuses on Benjamin's struggle to maintain *his* image as a virtuous republican citizen while displaying all the trappings of wealth and luxury, an ideological tension of the revolutionary and early national periods. Cahill even admits that Franklin formally appropriated Deborah's voice in his autobiography, 43.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard L. Herman, "Tabletop Conversations: Material Culture and Everyday Life in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World," in John Styles and Amanda Vickery (eds.), *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 37-59, here 48, 50-52.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard L. Herman, *Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 38. In numerous letters to

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DF to BF, 7 April 1765 and ? August 1765, *PBF*, 12:101, 224. Perhaps she well understood her legal position for she never called it her house, although she did call it “our” house on occasion.

The Franklins were not alone in their transatlantic construction of their house; Philadelphians Henry and Ann Hill engaged in a similar project with his sister who lived in London—but the key difference was that the married couple were together on one side of the ocean; see Amy Henderson, “A Family Affair: The Design and Decoration of 32 South Fourth Street, Philadelphia,” in Styles and Vickery (eds.), *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture*, 267-291.

<sup>6</sup> See Linda Sturtz, *Within her Power: Propertied Women in Colonial Virginia* (New York: Routledge, 2002), especially chapter 3, “‘As Though I My Self was Pr[e]sent’: Women with Power of Attorney,” 71-88.

<sup>7</sup> Lopez and Herbert, *The Private Franklin*, 149; and Lopez, *Benjamin Franklin’s “Good House,”* 34. For a description of Franklin’s suite of rooms in Stephenson’s house and discussion of the “intimacy between the two households,” see Herman, *Town House*, 237-8. In much the way Deborah described the house in Philadelphia as “his,” Margaret Stevenson’s house at 36 Craven Street is now a museum and it is called “The Benjamin Franklin House,”

<http://www.benjaminfranklinhouse.org/site/sections/default.htm>

<sup>8</sup> DF to BF, 22 September 1765, *PBF*, 12:271; and BF to DF, 9 November 1765, *PBF*, 12:360. See also Fry, “A Reinterpretation of Deborah Franklin,” 190.

<sup>9</sup> Helen Hills, “Theorizing the Relationships Between Architecture and Gender in Early Modern Europe,” in Helen Hills (ed.), *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd, 2003), 3-22, here 8.

<sup>10</sup> Katharine Martinez and Kenneth L. Ames (eds), *The Material Culture of Gender, The Gender of Material Culture* (Winterthur: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997), 2.

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<sup>11</sup> The secondary literature discussing the eighteenth-century household is vast. For this and the following paragraph, I've drawn on Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship, and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 20-25; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (New York: Little, Brown and Co, 1980), 3-9, 34-39, 61-65; Karin Wulf, *Not all Wives: Women of Colonial Philadelphia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 25-38, 85-97, 115-17; and Mary Beth Sievens, *Stray Wives: Marital Conflict in Early National New England* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 17-18.

<sup>12</sup> Women did become heads of households when their husbands died, and this greatly complicated the ideal structure of the family. Carole Shammas, *A History of Household Government in America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 32, argues that English women were more likely to head households than were colonial American women. For an in-depth discussion of this subject and the sources for the direct quotes, see Vivian Bruce Conger, *The Widows' Might: Widowhood and Gender in Early British America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> BF to Jane Franklin, 6 January 1727, *PBF*, 1:100-101.

<sup>14</sup> *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 8 October 1730.

<sup>15</sup> *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 10 July 1732. David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 114-15, calls this one of Franklin's "finer early satires." He also noted, "Franklin was astute enough in his satire not to attempt to turn ladies of quality away from their favorite pastime. The target of his ridicule was women of the middling sort, the would-be gentlewomen who violated the codes of prudence and frugality that regulated middle-class morality."

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<sup>16</sup> Ruth H. Bloch, *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture, 1650-1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 114. Bloch explored the connections between “intellectual history and the social of history of women by examining [Franklin’s] . . . biographical connections to members of the opposite sex,” 102. She is not alone, for almost every historian who mentions Deborah Franklin does so in and through the context of Benjamin Franklin’s writings. Although they reach very different conclusions about Deborah Franklin, the two exceptions are Skemp, "Family Partnerships: The Working Wife, Honoring Deborah Franklin," and Fry, "A Reinterpretation of Deborah Franklin." I similarly turn the tables and examine the social and cultural history of women by looking at Deborah Franklin’s biographical connections to the household.

<sup>17</sup> DF to BF, [6-13? October 1765], *PBF*, 12:299.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of permeable gender roles see, for example, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982); Conger, *The Widows’ Might*; Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Vintage, 1997); Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*; Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Rosemarie Zagari, *A Woman’s Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution* (New York: Harlan Davidson, 1995); and Bloch, *Gender and Morality*.

<sup>19</sup> Wulf, *Not all Wives*, 85-90.

<sup>20</sup> Sievens, *Stray Wives*, 13-19; Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 81, describes Deborah Franklin as having a “fierce temper,” a

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temper Franklin likely tolerate because assertive women were active in the family business, were good housewives, and looked after their husband's interests.

<sup>21</sup> Susan M. Stabile, *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 26-32.

<sup>22</sup> Hills, "Theorizing the Relationships Between Architecture and Gender," in Hills (ed.), *Architecture and the Politics of Gender*, 4; see also Herman, *Town House*, 39.

<sup>23</sup> Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998), 24-25. He locates the concrete gendering of the home--the distinction between male and female spaces in and control of the house and household--in the nineteenth century, 41-43.

<sup>24</sup> The Gunning Bedford Insurance Survey of Franklin House, August 5, 1766, *PBF*, 13:379. For a discussion of eighteenth-century American homes, see Victoria Kloss Ball, *Architecture and Interior Design: Europe and America from the Colonial Era to Today* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1980), 178-241.

<sup>25</sup> DF to BF, 8 January 1765, *PBF*, 12:14.

<sup>26</sup> Lopez and Herbert, *The Private Franklin*, 116-17; Lopez, *Benjamin Franklin's "Good House,"* 24-5; and Hannah Benner Roach, "Benjamin Franklin Slept Here," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 84 (1960): 127-74, see especially 166-8.

<sup>27</sup> Herman, *Town House*, 21; DF to BF, 10 February 1765, and 17 February 1765, *PBF*, 12: 44-6; BF to DF, 14 February 1765, *PBF*, 12:62.

<sup>28</sup> DF to BF, 7 April 1765, *PBF*, 12:101-2.

<sup>29</sup> BF to DF, 4 June 1765 6, *PBF*, 12:167.

<sup>30</sup> DF to BF, ? August 1765, *PBF*, 12:224.

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<sup>31</sup> BF to DF, August 1765, *PBF*, 12:250-51. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a vault is an enclosed space used as a cellar or storeroom for provisions.

<sup>32</sup> Billy G. Smith, *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 185

<sup>33</sup> Mary Beth Sievens, "Female Consumerism and Household Authority in Early National New England," *Early American Studies* 4, no. 2 (2006): 354-5, 362, 370. The phrase "empire of goods" is T. H. Breen's, "An Empire of Goods: The Anglicization of Colonial America, 1690-1776," *The Journal of British Studies*, 25 (1986), 467-499.

<sup>34</sup> DF to BF, 6-13 October 1765, *PBF*, 12:293-9.

<sup>35</sup> DF to BF, 20-25 April 1767, *PBF*, 14:138. Deborah was indeed being frugal, but she was not alone. According to Richard L. Bushman, "Shopping and Advertising in Colonial America" in Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter Alberts, eds., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1944), 223-51, especially 248-9, deferential and savvy shopkeepers advertised that they had the cheapest prices because "genteel customers were considered to be sharp buyers, aware of the the best values and demanding the lowest price." See also Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

<sup>36</sup> Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale Nota Bene, 2003), 162-168; Vickery argues that men had control over extraordinary expenses and that their shopping was "occasional and impulsive, or expensive and dynastic." Maxine Berg, *Luxury & Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 243-245, contends that Vickery portrayed male shoppers incorrectly—



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that, in fact, men were actively involved shopping, not just for special purchases, but for the mundane and that they, in fact, took pride in purchasing domestic goods. Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, "Collaborative Consumption and the Politics of Choice in Early American Port Cities," in Styles and Vickery (eds.), *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture* 125-149, especially 141-2, falls in between Vickery and Berg in suggesting that the gendered nature of shopping varied according to place and time in the colonies. Benjamin Franklin certainly took pride in domestic shopping, but often he purchased luxury goods with which to display his status in the community of which he was an absent member.

<sup>37</sup> Ann Smart Martin, "Ribbons of Desire: Gendered Stories in the World of Goods," in Styles and Vickery (eds.), *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture*, 179-200, especially 181.

<sup>38</sup> I take the title of this section from Daphe Spain's *Gendered Spaces* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

<sup>39</sup> Robert Blair St. George, *Conversing by Signs in Colonial New England Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 173-180.

<sup>40</sup> DF to BF, 7 April 1765, *PBF*, 12:101; DF to BF, ? August 1764, *PBF*, 12:224.

<sup>41</sup> Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England*, 50; Naomi Tadmor, "The Concept of the Household-Family in Eighteenth-Century England," *Past and Present*, 151 (1996), 111-140, see especially 120-25.

<sup>42</sup> Fry, "A Reinterpretation of Deborah Franklin," 139, 176; Hills, "Theorizing the Relationships between Architecture and Gender," in Hills (ed.), *Architecture and the Politics of Gender*, 7.

<sup>43</sup> Gunderson, *To be Useful to the World*, 135; Herman, *Town House*, 41-2.

<sup>44</sup> Jessica Kross, "Mansions, Men, Women and the Creation of Multiple Publics in Eighteenth-Century British North America," *Journal of Social History* 33 (1999): 385-408, here 385-387,

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390, 395-398; Herman, *Town House*, 71-72; and Barbara G. Carson, *Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behavior, and patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington* (Washington, DC: The American Institute of Architects Press 1990), 118-119.

<sup>45</sup>.Kross, "Mansions, Men, Women and the Creation of Multiple Publics," 399.

<sup>46</sup> This and the following paragraph draw on DF to BF, 22 September 1765, *PBF*, 12:270-74; and BF to DF, 9 November 1765, *PBF*, 12:360. The story is a familiar one, but one that has not been analyzed in terms of the gendered construction of the household; see, for example, Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 111-113; Lopez and Herbert, *The Private Franklin*, 127-8; Skemp, "Family Partnerships: The Working Wife, Honoring Deborah Franklin," 30-31; Joan R. Gunderson, *To be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America, 1740-1790* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 150-51.

<sup>47</sup> Hilde Heynen, "Modernity and Domesticity: Tensions and Contradictions," in Hilde Heynen and Gulsum Baydar (eds.), *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 1-29, here 2.

<sup>48</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "'Daughters of Liberty': Religious Women in Revolutionary New England," in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (eds.), *Women in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capital Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1989), 211, 243, here 228-36.

<sup>49</sup> Anne S. Lombard, *Making Manhood: Growing up Male in Colonial New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 162. See St. George, *Conversing by Signs*, Chapter 3, "Attacking Houses," 206-295.

<sup>50</sup> BF to DF, 4 June 1765, 12:166.

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<sup>51</sup> DF to BF, 12 April 1765, *PBF*, 12:102.

<sup>52</sup> BF to DF, 4 June 1765, *PBF*, 12:166.

<sup>53</sup> Carolyn Steedman, "A Woman Writing a Letter," in Rebecca Earle (ed.), *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers 1600-1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 1999), 111-133, here 115-116, 121.

<sup>54</sup> BF to DF, 13 July 1765, *PBF*, 12:210-11.

<sup>55</sup> T. H. Breen, "The Meaning of Things: Interpreting the Consumer Economy in the Eighteenth Century," in John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds), *Consumption and the Worlds of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993), 249-260, see especially 257.

<sup>56</sup> Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, 7.

<sup>57</sup> DF to BF, 3 November 1765, *PBF*, 12:350-51; DF to BF, 12 January 1766, *PBF*, 13:30-31, 35.

<sup>58</sup> Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters*, 104-106, 113-14; Herman, *Town House*, 73.

<sup>59</sup> Stabile, *Memory's Daughters*, 31.