

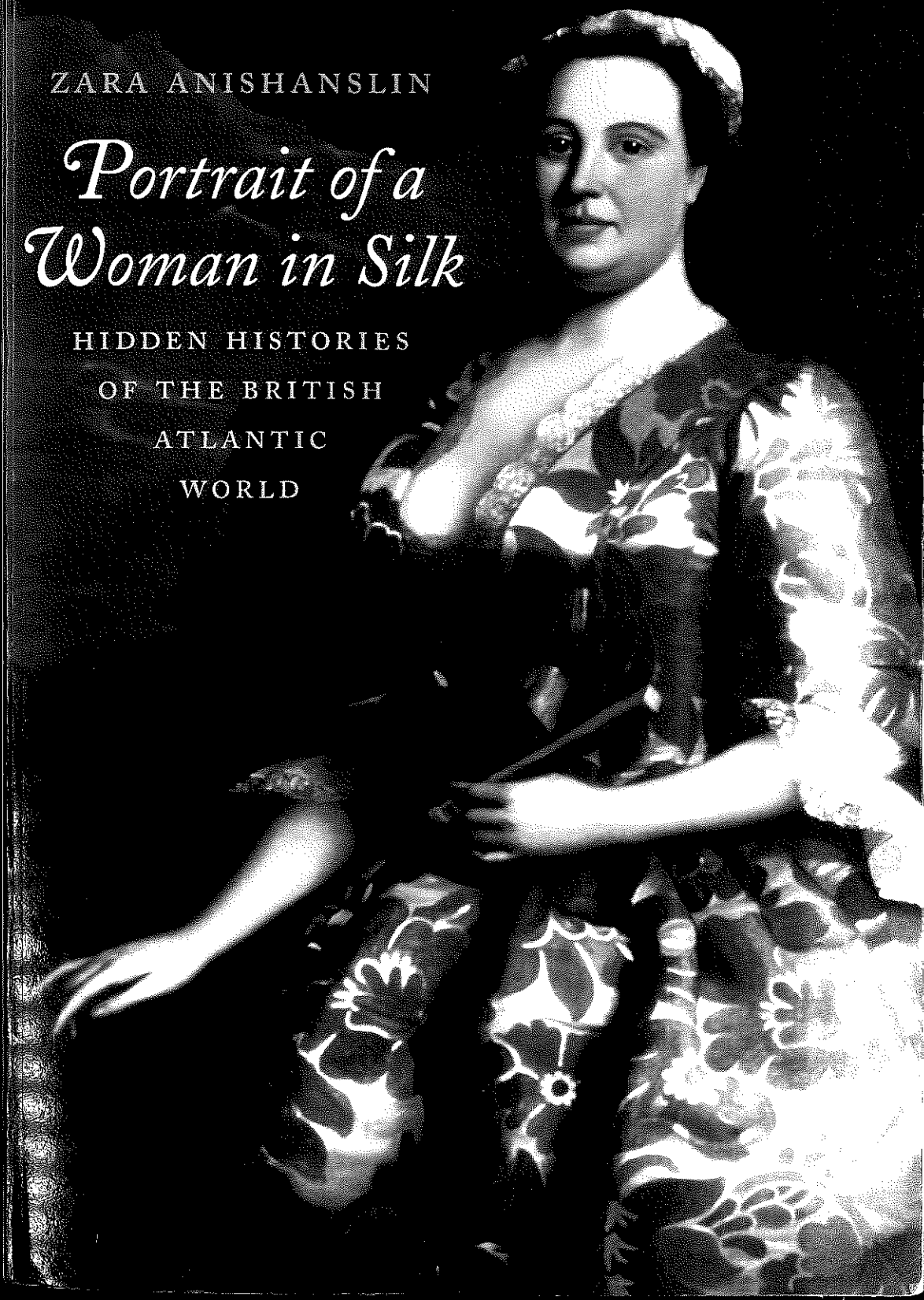
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ZARA ANISHANSLIN

*Portrait of a
Woman in Silk*

HIDDEN HISTORIES
OF THE BRITISH
ATLANTIC
WORLD



PART THREE

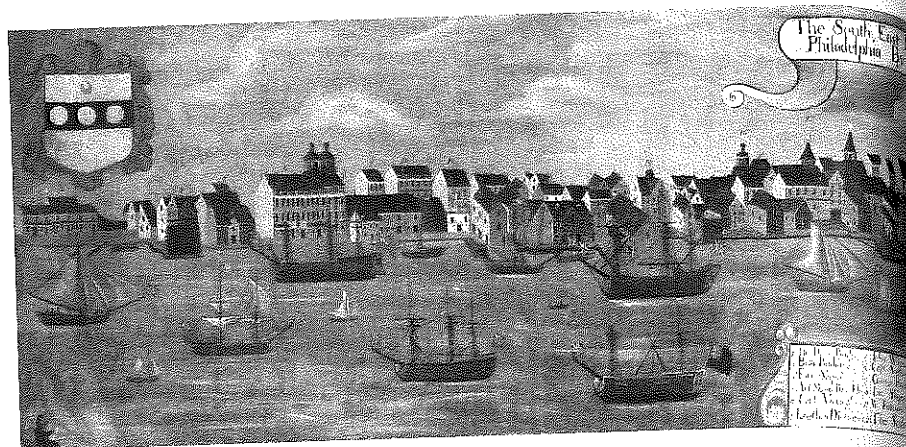
“Mrs. Mayoress”

Anne Shippen Willing, Wearer

8. Anne Shippen Willing, 1710–1791

Joseph Shippen (1679–1741), a Philadelphia father of four, was not pleased that his wife, Abigail (1677–1716), was away visiting her family in the couple's native town of Boston. Calling her his "most Affectionate Companion" in June 1711, he wrote, "I much miss thy Company." Any romance this warmed in Abigail likely cooled slightly as she read on. Joseph went on to note that though he missed her, "yet I can truly Say that it is not upon my owne Acco[un]t." Rather, it was "for thy dear babes Sake." Among the less sentimental things that troubled him about her absence was the task of clothing the "dear babes," which had fallen to him. He complained to his absent wife that he knew "no body that will set a Stitch for the Children; neither do I know what thou will want to have done," and although he had heard "thee talk of frocks for Nanny," he was unsure what to do about them. Finally, he admitted in exasperation that "Thou knows what the Children wants more than I."¹

"Nanny" was at the time the youngest of their children. Born only the year before, she undoubtedly was in need of the frocks that so bewildered her father. Not only was she a constantly growing baby but she was one described by her father as "full fatt."² Whether "full fatt" Nanny ever got her new summer frock in 1711 is uncertain. Grown to adulthood and ensconced as matron of her own wealthy household, however, Nanny—having fulfilled the promise of her infancy and grown into a plump, buxom woman—came into a ready supply of frocks. One of them was a dress made of silk damask designed by Anna Maria Garthwaite and woven by Simon Julins in London, for "Nanny" was a nickname for the Shippens' daughter Anne, who grew up



Peter Cooper, *The South East Prospect of the City of Philadelphia*, c. 1720. The Library Company of Philadelphia, Inv. #603.

to be the Anne Shippen Willing who wore Spitalfields silk woven by Simon Julins for her 1746 portrait.

Born in Philadelphia in 1710, Anne Shippen lived a privileged life from the start. Her early life was one defined by family wealth and sociopolitical power. The Shippens were one of the most powerful families in colonial Pennsylvania, made wealthy through successive generations of transatlantic mercantile trade and substantial provincial land ownership. Shippens had lived in Philadelphia since the 1690s, when Anne Shippen's paternal grandfather, merchant Edward Shippen (1639–1712), arrived there. Edward emigrated to America from his native Yorkshire in 1668. He initially settled in Boston. The English Shippens were Anglicans, and Edward's older brother William was, like Anna Maria Garthwaite's father, an Anglican cleric. Soon after his arrival in Boston, however, Edward married a Quaker, Elizabeth Lybrand (1643–88), and became one himself.³

Quakers were one of the more radical Protestant religious sects in the late seventeenth-century English Atlantic. Their belief in an inward light that revealed divinity, and a propensity to challenge both secular and religious authority, all but guaranteed that they would find little welcome in the Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony. And indeed they did not. Following the arrival of the first Quakers in the colony in the 1650s, Quakers were fined, beaten, imprisoned, whipped, mutilated, banished, and even put to death. In 1658, only a decade before Edward Shippen arrived in Boston, the Massachusetts legislature mandated that Quakers could be banished from the colony under pain



of death. A few years later, this legislative attack on Quakers gained particular notoriety when Mary Dyer—a former Puritan who supported Anne Hutchinson and shared her banishment from the colony—was one of a group of Quakers hanged on Boston Commons for returning from banishment. A “missive” by King Charles II helped to end the death penalty for Quakers entering the colony, but in 1670, when Edward Shippen married his Quaker bride and converted himself, Quakers still faced persecution. Shippen himself was publically whipped twice. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that despite his success as a Boston merchant and a growing acceptance of Quakers in late seventeenth-century Massachusetts, Shippen left Boston for his fellow Quaker William Penn's more hospitable colony to the south in the early 1690s.⁴

There Shippen enjoyed spectacular success. He was a close enough confidante of William Penn's that when the Penns moved to their country home outside Philadelphia, Pennsbury Manor, in 1700, Shippen's seventeen-year old daughter Ann joined their household. Shippen held a succession of political offices, including that of first mayor of Philadelphia under its 1701 charter and chief justice of the Supreme Court.⁵ His life reminds us that early eighteenth-century Quakers did not shy away from worldly possessions. Instead, Shippen embraced his worldly success, holding slaves, owning silver and fashionable japanned furniture, and building one of the two most imposing private homes in the city.⁶ His house on Second Street near Dock Creek was much remarked upon. Surrounded by magnificent gardens on a hill, it

was so admired it was singled out and labeled in maps like Peter Cooper's *The South East Prospect of the City of Philadelphia* (c. 1720).⁷

Shippen made his mark on the city in part because of his friendship with Penn and in part because he capitalized on the possibilities to be found in its beginnings. When Shippen arrived in Philadelphia in the early 1690s, it was still a new settlement populated by less than two thousand people. Founded by Penn only the decade before, in 1681, it was a place where an enterprising Quaker merchant like Shippen might enhance his fortunes. Still in many ways a frontier town, it consisted of a few hundred houses, a few places of worship, a market, taverns and a few brewhouses, and warehouses, shops, and wharves crowded along the banks of the Delaware River. When Shippen arrived, residents had not long ago been living in caves dug near the river.⁸

Philadelphia was a carefully conceived city based on a utopian plan Penn had published in London in 1683.⁹ Yet the reality of the early city was a far cry from Penn's ideal. His plan was inspired by his own dual experiences as a country gentleman and former resident of London. Penn believed country living and labor to be superior to city living and commerce, and he wished to use the cityscape to protect his colonial city from urban disasters to which Europe's crowded cities were susceptible, like the plague and Great Fire he remembered sweeping through London's twisted, timbered maze of a cityscape in 1665 and 1666. To avoid the moral and physical ills he saw in urban living, Penn's vision laid out a city that stretched methodically and spaciouly between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers, a neat urban grid with wide, straight avenues, punctuated by gardens and orchards, centered on a square, and surrounded by a greenbelt of gentlemen's country estates. Although its squares and grid remained intact as the city developed, Philadelphia never quite became the wholesome, green town of Penn's vision. Instead, although it grew rapidly, it did so in crowded fashion, with unplanned alleys cut into the original blocks clustered around the Delaware, the river that was its main connection to Atlantic commerce and trade.

Still, although it did not manifest its growth in utopian fashion, grow it did. As an early settler put it around the time Edward Shippen moved there, "this far-distant portion of the world" once "consisted of nothing but wildernesses, and it only within a short time has begun to be made ready for the use of Christian men, it is truly matter for amazement how quickly, by the blessing of God, it advances and from day to day grows perceptibly."¹⁰

By 1704, when Edward Shippen's son and daughter-in-law, Joseph and Abigail Shippen, also moved to Philadelphia from Boston, visitors were "astonished" that although "Philadelphia is a city twenty-two years old," its "growth and fame is to be preferred to most English-American cities," particularly "with regard to her size, splendid edifices, daily construction of new houses and ships, the regularity of the streets," and "the abundance of provisions."¹¹

This rapid, early growth was the result of a combination of factors. The "wilderness" of Pennsylvania, or "Penn's Woods," surrounding Philadelphia was in actuality no wilderness. Swedish settlers lived there before Penn's colonists arrived. More importantly, it had long been inhabited by Leni Lenape Indians with whom Penn had the good sense to try to negotiate peaceful relationships, despite sharing the discriminatory cultural biases against Native Americans common to his time. This would begin to change after the 1737 Walking Purchase and decline in dramatic fashion in the mid-eighteenth century. For its first few decades of settlement, however, Pennsylvania successfully avoided the type of prolonged, bloody altercations between European settlers and Native Americans that characterized early relations between indigenous and colonizing people in places like Massachusetts and Virginia.¹²

Moreover, "Penn's Woods" encompassed some of British North America's most fertile farmland, a fact that would provide Philadelphia's merchants a rich agricultural hinterland to furnish provisions like grain they exported to the West Indies and parlayed into far-reaching Atlantic commerce with Europe and Africa. Philadelphia's trade grew in fits and starts, interrupted by larger Atlantic realities of economic crises like the depression that engulfed the post-South Sea Bubble collapse of the British economy in the 1720s and the disruptions in shipping and trade occasioned by conflicts like the War of Jenkins's Ear (1739-48) and King George's War (1744-48). Despite such setbacks, by the mid-eighteenth century, Philadelphia was one of the most important commercial port cities of British North America. Visitors observed that Philadelphia's merchants like Willing exported "fruit, flour, corn, tobacco, honey, skins, various kinds of costly furs, flax," and "fine cut lumber" among other things, and imported "spices, sugar, tea, coffee, rice, rum . . . molasses, fine china vessels, Dutch and English clothes, leather, linen, stuffs, silks, damask, velvet. etc." so that there "is actually everything to be had in Pennsylvania that may be obtained in Europe."¹³

In addition to better than usual relations with local Native Americans, fertile land, and an active commercial life, Philadelphia owed its early growth to William Penn's unusually tolerant religious policies. Not only Quakers but Presbyterians, Anglicans, German Pietists, Catholics, and Jews were welcome in the city. Freedom of conscience and the right to build churches and schools was granted to all who lived in the colony. As a visitor put it in 1704, marveling at how Philadelphia was a city "whose growth and fame is to be preferred to most English-American cities," the "strongest reason why there is such an influx of people from other provinces" is "due to the liberty which all strangers enjoy in commerce, belief and settlement, as each one understands it."¹⁴ Among the ramifications of this policy was that Pennsylvania was an English colony that was not overwhelmingly English. On the contrary, both Philadelphia and Pennsylvania shared an ethnic as well as religious diversity found few other places in British North America. As early as 1685, the first German settlement—Germantown—was laid out "a distance of two hours' walk," or about seven miles, from Philadelphia.¹⁵ As one traveler to Philadelphia remarked in 1744, "I dined at a tavern with a very mixed company of different nations and religions. There were Scots, English, Dutch, Germans, and Irish; there were Roman Catholics, Churchmen, Presbyterians, Quakers, Newlightmen, Methodists, Seventhdaymen, Moravians, Anabaptists, and one Jew."¹⁶ In addition, although this observer did not mention them, people of both Native American and African descent also formed a visible presence in the city.

Such was the Philadelphia in which Anne Shippen was born in 1710, into a family with strong ties to the factors that defined its early history: its Quaker roots, commercial life, and demographic diversity. Anne's father, Joseph, was a merchant like his father the mayor. Also like his father, he achieved success in Philadelphia; his house is another one viewed as important enough to warrant a numbered label in Cooper's map. Although he was raised as a Quaker, Joseph and his wife, Abigail, who came from a family of French Huguenot descent, do not seem to have been practicing Quakers once they married.¹⁷ As Joseph's letter to Abigail in Boston in 1711 indicated, strong family ties remained between the Philadelphia and Boston branches of the family—ties their children kept up in their adulthood.¹⁸ Abigail Shippen died in Philadelphia in 1716, when Anne was six years old. When her mother died, Anne was the Shippens' only surviving daughter. Two years before, their older daughter, Elizabeth, had died, as did another baby daughter, also poignantly named Elizabeth.

After his remarriage to widow Rose Plumley seven years after his first wife's death, Joseph Shippen moved to Germantown. There he lived—as William Penn would have approved—more like a country gentleman than an urban merchant.¹⁹ Germantown must have seemed a bucolic place compared to Philadelphia's crowded riverside settlement, as it had "good black fertile soil, and many fresh wholesome springs of water, many oak, walnut, and chestnut trees, and also good pasturage for cattle."²⁰ By the 1720s, when Joseph Shippen moved there, Germantown—originally settled by Germans under religious leader Francis Daniel Pastorius—was also a place where wealthy Anglo Philadelphians built country homes. Quaker James Logan (1674–1751), for example, who had close ties to the Shippens—Joseph's oldest son, Edward, was Logan's junior partner—moved to the area in 1728 and built the elegant country seat he called Stenton.²¹ Having lived in both Philadelphia and Germantown by the time she was a teenager, Anne Shippen experienced both urban and rural life.

Like Anna Maria Garthwaite, the geography of Anne Shippen's childhood and teenage years—her spatial experience—is one of the few things known about her youth. Her education, for example, remains a matter of mystery. The Shippens were certainly a well-educated family. Anne's younger brother, William, was a physician, and her older brother, Edward, was described when an "old Gentleman" as someone who could "in a minute" relate "ten different stories, interlarding each narrative with choice scraps of Latin, Greek, & French."²² Although no letters by his sister survive, she likely was educated too. Quaker families educated their women: Joseph Shippen's sister Ann Shippen Story left her signature as evidence of her ownership and indexical study of the Bible in *A Concordance to the Holy Scriptures*.²³ Although a lapsed Quaker, there is no reason to imagine that Joseph Shippen would have abandoned his family's practice of educating its daughters.

Although letters or other writings by Anne Shippen Willing have not come to light, there is evidence that she was not only educated and literate but competent in business matters as well. Her signature, clear and well formed, shows practiced penmanship. Her competence can be inferred from the fact that her husband made her co-executor of his sizable and confusing estate.²⁴ And after her husband's death, she administered bonds between merchants.²⁵ Further proof of her literacy and head for business is that a London contact corresponded with her about shares she and her brothers received from the Pennsylvania Company, rather than simply writing to the men involved.²⁶

We can also read backward from her children's literacy and erudition into her own. Her daughter Elizabeth Willing Powel, for example, was a woman described by the highly discriminating Marquis de Chastellux as distinguished for "her taste for conversation and the truly European manner in which she uses her wit and knowledge."²⁷ It is telling that this daughter, whose own intellect was remarked upon, noted that "certain it is that the Groundwork of Education with both Sexes rests on the Mother."²⁸ Moreover, married as she was to a merchant who took regular trips back to England, and widowed as she was at an early age, Anne Willing likely had an especially active hand in her children's education. Common wisdom held that "when the *Mother* is the only *Parent*, then her Authority increases, and she is then solely to be regarded," while the "Principal Care of the *Mother*" was seen as "to Educate her Children well."²⁹ Her family's Quaker background might have influenced her willingness to lead in this respect. Quaker women had a reputation for being outspoken as well as educated; by the 1730s, British prescriptive literature written to "fix in the Mind general Rules for Conduct in all Circumstances of the Life of Women" singled out Quakers as an example to be avoided, as they allowed their overeducated women too much freedom to speak in church.³⁰ Although they were raised Anglican, Willing's own daughters shared Quaker habits of speaking in public, as they were not shy about sharing their views on topics like politics.³¹

Willing spent her childhood in the company of her sister who was seven years older and died when Anne was four; her younger brother, William, who became an important physician; and two older brothers, Edward and Joseph, who both became successful merchants like their father and grandfather. These facts aside, little else is known. It is not known whether she was raised a Quaker, for example, as later family lore claimed. It is possible that she was; probably she was not baptized in any other faith while an infant, for when she was an adult woman, she was baptized with one of her infants in Philadelphia's Anglican Christ Church.³² If she and her siblings were raised as Quakers, none of them remained so; her brother William, for example, was one of the founders of the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia. Her generation of the Shippens, so successful and powerful in their own right, nevertheless offered an example of declension among Philadelphia Quakers. As the eighteenth century wore on, powerful Quaker political factions in Philadelphia gradually lost power as more of the original Quaker vanguard's descendants abandoned the faith for more mainstream Protestant sects.

One reason the third generation of Philadelphia Shippens may have abandoned their grandfather's Quaker faith was that, like their father, none of them married a Quaker. In 1730, when she was twenty years old, Anne Shippen married an ambitious young Anglican. Charles Willing was only eighteen when he arrived in Philadelphia from Bristol, England, in 1728. Like his bride, Willing came from a family of merchants. His father, Thomas Willing, was a mercer, and so specialized in dealing in textiles.³³ Along with his father and brother, also named Thomas Willing, Charles was eager to break into the colonial mercantile trade business. He did so with gusto, first in partnership with his wife's brother Joseph. Willing eventually built a business engaged in far-reaching trade. He traded in rum from the Caribbean, lemons from Portugal, grain from the Mid-Atlantic colonies, textiles and dry goods from Britain, and enslaved people from Africa. Willing became one of Philadelphia's wealthiest merchants and the founder of one of its most storied mercantile firms. He embodied what observers noted was the commercial spirit of a colonial city in which men's "chief employ, indeed, is traffic and mercantile business," as they "apply themselves strenuously to business."³⁴ Willing's mercantile business became a dynastic one spanning multiple generations when his oldest son, Thomas, went into partnership with him. After Charles Willing died mid-century, Thomas in turn took his father's former apprentice, Robert Morris, on as partner, forming the business of Willing & Morris that became legendary as "financiers" of the American Revolution.³⁵

Around the time Charles and Anne Willing married in 1730, a colonial poet published a piece in a local almanac describing Philadelphia in glowing terms as "the *Athens* of Mankind." The poet bestowed this moniker on Philadelphia as the center of a westward course of empire for multiple reasons: the city's trade—how "*Europe's* Wealth flows in with every Tide"—its "regularly fair" cityscape, and its "Seers" and "hopeful Youth" bringing "Liberal Arts" to "Perfection."³⁶ In 1730, Philadelphia was not quite the envy of Europe the poet predicted, but in the 1740s and 1750s, the city made great transformative strides. Philadelphians consolidated their commercial trade, expanded their architecture and cityscape, paved their streets, and established institutions meant to foster civic cohesion and responsibility, sociability, and learning.³⁷ In mid-century, it became the largest port city in colonial North America, a jewel in the crown of Britain's Atlantic Empire. The Willings and Shippens played a role in all of these endeavors.

Like the other men in her family, Anne's husband was socially and politically prominent. His own wealth no doubt helped to propel him into such sociopolitical success. But his wife's family and connections were crucial to his success—one or more colonial-born Shippens was active in every social and political institution in which Willing, the transplant from Bristol, achieved success. He served as mayor multiple times, was justice of the Common Council and City Court and captain of the volunteer militia, helped to establish Pennsylvania Hospital and the forerunner to the University of Pennsylvania, served as a vestryman at Christ Church multiple times, and was a founding subscription member of the Library Company. The family was at the pinnacle of Philadelphia's social scene and served as founding members of Philadelphia's dancing assemblies. They also contributed to the city's architectural infrastructure by owning and building multiple properties, including a city townhouse, a country house on the Delaware River, multiple business properties, and a wharf.³⁸

Despite the many social and household duties that consumed her time, Anne Shippen Willing's life was largely defined by her duties as a mother. In the twenty-four years they were married, the Willings had eleven children. Ten of these children survived to adulthood; only one died while still an infant. Their first child, their son Thomas, was born in 1731, not long after their wedding. He was followed by a girl, Anne, in 1733, then another girl, Dorothy, in 1735; a son, Charles, in 1738; Mary in 1740; Elizabeth in 1742; Richard in 1744; Abigail in 1747; the short-lived Joseph in 1749; James in 1751; and the baby of the family, Margaret, in 1753. The Willings steadily produced a new child about every two years, in a predictable procreative cycle that points to a pattern of Anne Shippen Willing nursing each of her babies—rather than using a wet nurse—until he or she was a little over a year old. Such a steadily increasing, healthy brood drove Charles Willing's efforts to achieve business success. Soon after the birth of Richard in 1744, around the time the Garthwaite-designed damask fabric worn in Anne's 1746 portrait was completed, Charles Willing wrote to a business associate in Boston that "Mrs. Charles Willing has lately brot me another Fine Boy; and I still flatter myself by my Endeavours Fortune will be as propitious to me In an Increase in Fortune, as it has been in mouths."³⁹

Anne Shippen Willing also spent time supervising those who labored for the family. This wealthy mother of eleven, assuredly, did not cook, clean, clothe, and raise her children alone. Nor did she maintain their multiple

homes and properties alone. One of the tasks that fell to her was supervising the enslaved people who helped tend her progeny and property. The Willings were always among the largest slaveholders in the city, and they also were among the most active slave traders in Philadelphia. In the 1730s, there was a lapse of duties on slave imports.⁴⁰ This lapse led to a growth in slave importations, and Charles Willing capitalized on the shift, becoming one of the few Philadelphia merchants who regularly engaged in the slave trade. In 1747, for example, he was one of only four local merchants who advertised newly imported slaves for sale. In 1750, the white Willings shared their household with four enslaved people: a man, a woman, a girl, and a boy. Although their exact living and sleeping arrangements remain a matter of conjecture, some of these enslaved people undoubtedly slept in the kitchen or other outbuildings behind the family's townhouse. But it is also likely that one or more slept inside the house to provide immediate labor should it be needed in the night—as would have been likely with so many children.⁴¹

Given Charles Willing's many civic and commercial duties there is little doubt that his wife was largely responsible for supervising the daily household labor of the enslaved people who shared their property as well as for raising the Willing brood. Her feelings about slavery are undocumented and nearly impossible to infer as, if her children's widely disparate attitudes are any indication, they could have landed anywhere on a wide spectrum. One of her daughters—Elizabeth Willing Powel—left substantial sums toward abolitionist causes in her will; another, Mary Willing Byrd, supervised hundreds of slaves on her Virginia plantation, Westover, and freed only a few in her will. After her husband died and her children were grown, Willing did keep at least one enslaved laborer in her household, as in 1772 she offered a twenty-shilling reward for the return of a runaway slave—a seventeen-year-old boy described as "knock kneed," "marked with the smallpox," and wearing "long homespun trousers."⁴²

When Charles Willing died unexpectedly of a fever in 1754, the Willings' youngest child was still a toddler. Their oldest, Thomas, was in his early twenties. Although she was only forty-four when her husband died, Anne never remarried. Like many widows, her unmarried state seems eventually to have led her into an economic decline of sorts, though her children made advantageous marriages and for the most part prospered. She spent her last years in a small house on Pine Street with her unmarried daughter Abigail. She lived to the ripe old age of eighty-one. Born near the beginning

of the century, she died in the last decade of the 1700s. The Philadelphia in which she died was very different from the Philadelphia in which she was born.

Like Simon Julins, her life spanned the better part of a century. Like him, she lived through a variety of events, some of them tumultuous. When she was born in 1710, Philadelphia was only a few decades old with a few hundred buildings near a frontier of Britain's empire in North America, populated by a few thousand people. When she died in 1791, Philadelphia was the bustling capital of the new United States, a city outstripped in population by New York City but otherwise at the forefront of the early republic's commercial, cultural, and political life. Willing embodied the full chronology of the city's shifts. Her grandfather Edward Shippen was the first mayor of Philadelphia under the 1701 Charter; her daughter Elizabeth's husband, Samuel Powel (1738–93), was mayor when America declared its independence from Britain, and mayor when independence was won. Her brother, husband, and son served as mayors in between.

Although she did not leave much of a historical record herself, Anne Shippen Willing left her mark through her children, in part through their number alone. When the painter of her last portrait—Matthew Pratt—began his professional career in Philadelphia in 1768, he singled out a few important names as those responsible for guaranteeing his “full employ for 2 years.” Among them were “my old and good friend, the Revd Thomas Barton of Lancaster, who came purposely to introduce me, to Governor Hamilton, Governor Johnson, Mr. Jno. Dickinson, Mr. Saml Powell, and all the Willing family.”⁴³ Even among the political, religious, and commercial elite of Philadelphia, “all the Willing family” proved invaluable clients—in part from sheer size. Notably among these elite, the women of the “Willing family” were the only women singled out as important customers. There was a family in which the women as well as the men were seen as prominent patrons for a painter like Pratt.

Not surprisingly, Willing was one of the great matriarchs not just of Philadelphia but of early America. Her dynastic role reminds us of how important familial alliances—including inter-regional as well as local ones—were to consolidating colonial power and identity in British North America. Some of her children made advantageous local marriages, like that of her daughter Anne to Tench Francis, or her daughter Elizabeth to Samuel Powel. But others married further afield. They created widespread geographies of

family networks beyond the Mid-Atlantic. Her son Charles married a Barbados Carrington, and her daughter Mary married Virginian William Byrd III of Westover. Willing's family—created through her labor producing children—reminds us that intermarriage created cultural ties across colonial regional divides, and that colonial women were crucial to fashioning and maintaining such connections.

In addition to being geographically dispersed, her family also embodied the full breadth of American politics. During the Revolution, she had grandsons fighting for the British and the Patriots, while her Shippen relatives included both a physician with the Continental Army and her great-niece Margaret—better known as “Peggy”—who was Mrs. Benedict Arnold. A few years before the American colonies declared independence, Anne Shippen Willing had her portrait painted by Charles Willson Peale. Eight years later, the same artist designed an effigy of a two-faced Benedict Arnold, seated in a cart with the devil behind him, which was paraded through the streets of Philadelphia before being hung and burned. It must have been an odd experience for Willing to consider that the same man who not long before had painted her portrait also designed this notorious effigy of her great-niece's husband. Portrait and effigy—both were objects that reflected the disparate politics encompassed in the family of Anne Shippen Willing.⁴⁴

In a variety of iterations, wealthy merchant families like the Shippens and the Willings exerted enormous influence on urban society, economics, and politics in eighteenth-century Philadelphia. Throughout the eighty-one years of Willing's life her merchant family wielded a steady power.⁴⁵ Willing and generations of women in her family helped to consolidate this merchant power. They did so both as women defined by their female roles as mothers, daughters, and wives to powerful men, and within their own right as social and political actors.⁴⁶

In colonial mercantile families like the Willings, acts of consumption were not just matters of individual personal choice. They also could advertise the family's trade connections and available goods. Anne Shippen Willing's work in creating the portrait at the heart of this book did just that. Through her acts of consumption and display—her labors buying, being fitted for, wearing, and posing—she chronicled her family's dynastic and commercial endeavors. As the wife of a merchant who imported the types of textile she wears in her portrait, her story shifts our interpretive focus not only from producers to consumers and wearers but to distributors as well.

Eighteenth-century citizens of the Atlantic World used their material world, including their own bodies and what they wore on them, to announce who they were.⁴⁷ Clothing and portraits were two of the most visible modes through which eighteenth-century men and women communicated their socioeconomic, familial, and personal identities via their own bodies. Both are objects that hold special promise for exploring historical issues of self-fashioning and cultural formation. In addition to being leading importers of Spitalfields silk before the Revolution, colonial Americans also were singular in commissioning portraits more than any other type of painting. The popularity of this type of silk and this type of painting among colonists makes a strong case for why, when we look at this single portrait of a colonial woman wearing Spitalfields silk, we learn about much more than this woman alone. Popular objects are both product and producer of shared aesthetics and imagined community. Portraits and silk, in this case, helped to create a common visual language of empire.

Portraits and silk also help us to recreate something personal about the sparsely documented Anne Shippen Willing. Because of her portraits, we know that Willing had a marked penchant for flowered silk. Although she left no letters, diaries, or account books describing her taste in fabric, she did leave portraits behind that do just that. Together they span forty years of her life. Yet they each share one element in common—in each of them she wears floral patterned silk.

As they did in Britain, portraits in colonial America, and in particular the clothing worn in them, expressed the sitter's class status and participation in a consumer market.⁴⁸ But portraits and clothing signified more than competitive preening. In colonial portraiture, clothing is often less than "real." Instead, artists used sources ranging from mezzotints and fashion dolls to studio props to paint clothing for their subjects. Portrait artists sometimes painted only the sitter's face from life and employed "drapery painters" to finish the portrait. Or, alternately, painters sometimes pre-painted a clothed, posed figure onto a canvas—again, often copied from a print source—and filled in a particular client's head. Such practices would have been particularly helpful to colonial artists who were itinerant, as they could carry pre-painted samples of their work to display in new towns, showing prospective clients where their individualized heads would go above impressively rendered fashionable garb.⁴⁹

Regardless of how true a representation their clothing is of the sitter's actual wardrobe, what people chose to wear in portraits tells us something

very real about the past. What people wore can show us the type of clothes—and in more rare cases, the exact items of clothing or accessories—the sitter would have owned or worn. Even if the clothes are, as was common, fantastical or representational rather than real, they still tell us important information about the sort of clothing the sitter or artist admired.

We have little documentation of the negotiations that decided what eighteenth-century people wore in portraits. We do have one rare piece of such evidence from the decade before Robert Feke painted Anne Shippen Willing's portrait, when British artist William Hoare painted the portrait of Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, or Job ben Solomon, in London. Diallo, a well-educated, wealthy Muslim African taken into slavery in West Africa as he returned home from his own slave-trading journey, was enslaved in Maryland in the early 1730s. Diallo became a cause célèbre in Britain after Oxford scholars translated a letter in Arabic he tried to send from the American colonies to his father in Africa. The plight of this educated, pious, refined slave roused the sympathies of Britons, who raised the money to free him and return him home to Africa. Before sending him home, they hired Hoare to paint his portrait. Hoare painted the face of Diallo—or Job, as they called him—and then "ask'd what Dress would be most proper to draw him in; and upon Job's desiring to be drawn in his own Country Dress, told him he could not draw it, unless he had seen it, or had it described to him by one who had."⁵⁰

In the end, Hoare painted Diallo in white robes and turban evocative both of Muslim prayer robes and the more generalized exotic of turquerie, or Turkish-style garments, with a red Qur'an suspended from his neck by a cord. Posed within an oval spandrel and wearing religious garb, Diallo is captured as an exotic yet deeply religious figure, an exotic counterpart to the clerics in robes Robert Feke painted in oval spandrels in Newport, Rhode Island, the following decade. Although the power dynamics between a recently freed slave far from home and the benefactors who commissioned his portrait must be taken into account, this unusually well-documented exchange between painter and subject, and how these negotiations played out in the final costume choice, nevertheless offer insight into how costume choice was negotiated, at times imaginatively manufactured, and always laden with meaning.⁵¹

But the unusual thing about Feke's 1746 portrait of Anne Shippen Willing is that, contrary to common industry practices like those documented

for Diallo's portrait, the silk dress she wears is indisputably a real one. Feke and Willing might very well have negotiated what her painted image should wear in her portrait, but what they ended up using was actual clothing rather than an imagined costume. The dress she wears—already odd for being a real garment—is doubly unusual as it is made of flowered, or patterned, rather than plain fabric. Portraits of people wearing flowered or patterned silks were uncommon during Willing's lifetime, particularly in the colonies.⁵² As discussed previously, colonists who wore flowered silk in portraits tended to be men wearing banyans. Willing was one of the very few American women painted wearing damask in a portrait. Despite his great skill rendering textiles, Feke did not paint any other woman wearing flowered silk. Similarly, although also a virtuoso at painting fabrics, John Singleton Copley painted very few colonial women in flowered silk. One exception was Jemima Winslow in her 1773 double portrait with her husband, Isaac. The fate of Winslow's painted fabric offers one explanation behind the rarity of depicting patterned fabrics. Such patterns dated a portrait, rendering it instantly unfashionable—even old-fashioned—when textile fashions changed. When the Loyalist Winslows fled America during the Revolution, they brought Copley's portrait with them. Living in London after the Revolution, Winslow hired a painter to change her flowered silk into a plain green dress to make it more up to date.⁵³

Even women like Winslow who preferred flowered fabrics enough to capture them in portraits later chose to paint over them to suit the whims of changing fashion. Coupled with the rarity with which colonial artists—even the most accomplished ones like Copley—bothered to paint women in patterned fabrics, such common practice makes the fact that Willing wears flowered silk in not simply one but all of her surviving portraits that much more remarkable.

Who chose clothing shown in portraits—whether it was painter, sitter, sitter's family, commissioner of the job, or some combination—is often difficult to determine. The painter William Hoare's conversation with his subject Diallo offers a very rare glimpse into how such a negotiated process might have played out. Without any documentation about why Willing wore the dress she did in her portrait by Feke, it might be argued that in Willing's case, someone else dictated the costume she wore in her portraits. One common line of argument might be that the artists chose to paint her this way. But the fact that colonial artists rarely painted their female subjects

in patterned gowns—and yet three different artists over the course of forty years did so in her case—makes the idea that this was the artists' choice highly unlikely.

Another common argument might be that her husband chose which dress she would wear for her portrait.⁵⁴ Perhaps for the Feke portrait he did play a hand in the decision. But this possibility loses credence when the Feke portrait is placed in the context of her last two portraits. She was a widow when she sat for those paintings. This emphatically negates the possibility that it was a husband who chose her gowns. In her 1772 portrait by Peale, she was sixty-two years old and had been a widow for nearly twenty years. She sits in an interior space in a high-backed green armchair. Hands folded on her lap, she tilts her head slightly, gazing at the viewer with a slight smile, characteristic of what was described as her "sweet and gentle disposition."⁵⁵

In the Peale portrait, a fine lace cap covers her graying hair and a simple silver stickpin fastens her wide lace fichu over her chest.⁵⁶ She wears a square-necked, flowered silk dress with lace-edged cuffs and a black lace shawl draped over her arms. In her final portrait, painted in 1786 by her neighbor Matthew Pratt, she sits in the same green armchair and wears much the same clothing. In the Pratt portrait, she also wears a silk dress of dark rose-colored silk figured with white and grey flowers, with white cuffs and a white fichu, a white cap, and a black lace shawl made of imported bobbin lace.⁵⁷ She cuts a similar figure in both portraits. The silk for the dresses—even the dresses themselves—may be the same, although their different treatment under the two artists' hands makes it difficult to tell for certain.

Anne Shippen Willing posed for at least three portraits wearing flowered silk, a choice that was certainly hers for two of the three and—given this habit—probably for the first as well. From her infancy through old age, Willing's clothing choices owed more to women than to men. None of her personal correspondence has come to light and there is little documentation about her. Willing emerges from the objects she used, the places she lived, the clothing she wore, and, in particular, the portraits she left behind. In a time when most Americans did not have the luxury of even a single portrait, Willing left record of four.⁵⁸ What she chose to wear in those portraits, though a small choice in some ways, is a revealing one. The affection for flowered silk documented in her portraits tells us that she shared the widespread affection for the botanical that shaped landscapes, fashion, and



Matthew Pratt, *Portrait of Anne Shippen (Mrs. Charles) Willing*, 1786, Philadelphia, oil on canvas. On display at the Powel House. Courtesy of the Philadelphia Society for the Preservation of Landmarks.

science around the British Atlantic. But her portraits also tell us something about women's agency in driving the consumer choices that shaped the eighteenth-century British imperial marketplace.⁵⁹

In the first two parts of this book we explored ways in which women on both sides of the Atlantic produced textiles in the eighteenth-century British Atlantic World. In this third section, we shift our focus to issues of distribution, consumption, and display. Here again, we find women more deeply embedded in the story than we might expect. In much the same way women producers were more common in London's silk industry than traditional archival sources like guild records indicate, these portraits and their silks allow us to see colonial women as influential imperial consumers and creators of American culture. The story of textile distribution in Britain's North American colonies often begins with merchants. Although it is true that many of the textiles like calicos and silks used in America arrived through male merchants, not all merchants were men, and men alone did not buy fabrics for women nor often impose their taste on women. Who bought fabric and who chose fabric could be two entirely different transactions.⁶⁰

As one Bostonian wrote to his sister in 1757 from London, he had "looked out for a Silk" for her and "met with one agreeable to your Directions."

an "extremely handsome" Spitalfields flowered silk that he would have made into a dress for her. He would not do so, he made clear, until she approved and sent proper measurements.⁶¹ The following year, Benjamin Franklin, also in London, wrote to his wife in Philadelphia that he had bought her "a better gown of flowered tissue; 16 yards of Mrs. Stevenson's fancy, cost 9 guineas and I think it a great beauty."⁶² Although Franklin found the silk "a great beauty," it was his landlady's "fancy" that led him to the purchase. Colonial men sought the advice and approval of women before purchasing silk. The men's names might proliferate as buyers in merchants' account books, but behind those inscriptions in pen were conversations—often unrecorded—between men and women. That colonial men bought London silk for women seems to have been a factor of their greater tendency to travel there on business or for education more than anything else. American women were not often sent abroad on business or for schooling. Once married, they were often kept tied to the colonies by the realities of pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare. Tending to what Anne Willing's brother-in-law called her "endless innumerable family" shaped the daily patterns of her life and kept her close to home.⁶³ Although flowered silk seems to have been her personal choice, her constant childbearing and child-raising labors made it almost certain that, for the damask she wore in her 1746 portrait, the initial moment of purchase was not her act.

Anna Maria Garthwaite designed this silk damask for Simon Julins in 1743. Willing gave birth to her seventh child, a son named Richard, in 1744. Although her husband made regular trips back and forth to England, there is no evidence that she traveled with him. Around 1743 and 1744, Willing was either heavily pregnant or nursing an infant. This makes it unlikely that she traveled to England around the time she might have chosen and purchased the damask herself. Instead, it was probably her husband, her London based brother-in-law, her mercer father-in-law, or one of their business associates who purchased the silk. Yet this does not mean that she did not make her wishes about that purchase known. Indeed, despite the everyday realities of childbearing and -rearing that kept colonial woman at home more often than men, consumption of clothing, like the commissioning of portraits or the furnishing of homes, was more shared than divided between men and women of the colonial mercantile elite.⁶⁴ Eighteenth-century women worked alone or with men—not simply at their behest—to create messages of dynastic power through their material world, using objects like the Feke

portrait and Garthwaite's silk to advertise and enhance their commercial, political, and socioeconomic standing. But if we look beyond the moment of purchase to explore the full lifecycle of the objects women wore, used, gifted, and displayed, we see that women in merchant families used material culture not only to further their family's position but also to celebrate emotional ties. We also see how such material culture, in turn, fostered an object-based *sensus communis* around the British Empire. We begin, fittingly enough, on a merchant's riverside wharf.

9. "As I Am an American"

Performing Colonial Merchant Power

One spring night in 1749, a "handsome assembly" of Philadelphia elites donned their silks and velvets and met in a merchant's warehouse on the Delaware River. They gathered with the convivial purpose of attending a newly established colonial institution, the Philadelphia Dancing Assembly. The new governor of Pennsylvania, James Hamilton, was to lead the first dance.¹ Things did not go quite as expected, however. The first few ladies Hamilton asked to be his partner snubbed him outright. Richard Peters, who reported the night's incidents in a letter to London, speculated that the first declined the governor "because he had not been to Visit her" and the next few "out of modesty I suppose."² What was undoubtedly a highly awkward scene was diffused when "Mrs. Willing now Mrs. Mayoress" in "a most Genteel Manner" offered herself as his partner. Hamilton, seeing "this Instance of her good Nature . . . jumped at the Occasion and they danced the first Minuet."³

In his letter, Peters took care to assure his correspondent, Thomas Penn, that "No one took notice" of what he called this "little Digression." This "little Digression," however, used up more than half his letter.⁴ Peters's concern to communicate the event, and just as swiftly reassure Penn of its unimportance, instead trumpets its importance. As Peters and everyone at the wharfside ball knew, the women's refusal to dance with Hamilton—member of the Provincial Council, close friend to the Penns, and governor of Pennsylvania—was no mere social snub. Instead, it sent a