

Just Write

**Gloucester County Library System
Logan Township Branch
Writers Group
Selections
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Freeholder Director, **Robert M. Damming** | Freeholder Library Liaison, **Lyman Barnes**



Table of Contents

Dance of Spring by Nancie Merritt

Perfect Day by Nancie Merritt

Peanut Butter and Jelly by Marian M. Fay

Last Day of School by Marian M. Fay

Yikes! by Jane Harre

The Toll in the Distance by John Witkowski

John Hatton, "King of the Tories," Part 2 by Ben Carlton

Writers Groups in 18th Century Philadelphia by
A. Muhammad Ma'ruf

Dance of Spring

By Nancie Merritt

Spring has arrived in her long swirling, twirling gown,
Her golden, long tresses shoot rays of warm sunlight onto the land,
She whirls 'round and 'round, with winter's debris thrown high off the ground.
New beginnings with all the promise of life seem so close at hand.

But, wait, she retreats, like a shy maiden, pulling her cloak tightly,
She covers her eyes and cold winds follow her lead,
Each day there are tentative steps, but decisions she makes nightly.
Will she bring warmth or will she bring gloom with harsh weather to heed?

Daily she brings forth her dance, teasing and taunting at every turn,
A step forward, a turn back, to the side, we are dizzy with the movement she shows.
We are cold, we are wet and it is for warmth and beauty we yearn.
We can hope, we can wait, but when she will succumb, only she knows.

Eventually, she will lift her arms and dance wildly, with all the abandon we so desire,
A riot of color and joy will emerge; the flowers will bloom beyond reason,
Our patience rewarded, our spirits will soar exceedingly higher,
With her final bow, we will give our applause for the long-awaited season.

Perfect Day

By Nancie Merritt

Motor on, all clear, our tethers we release.
Gliding gently away from the dock our excitement begins to increase.
Passing houses, marinas and more on our way to the Bay,
We anticipate the full promise of the day.

Another sailing adventure has begun,
Passing the slow wake buoy our spirits are off on a run.
Soon sails go up, with the wind to decide,
Which of the courses she will provide.

That glorious moment arrives at last,
Engine off, we bask in the sound of the wind rushing past.
And, sweet music of water trickling along,
Gulls soaring and praising the day with their song.

The warmth of the sun, the blue of the sky,
All combine to lift our spirit up high,
Then higher.
Two boats, it's a race, but shush, it's a secret.
The canvas we adjust so if we can lead, we can keep it.

Sails in, sails out, so the rest of the day goes,
Chase the breeze as it hastens or slows.
Relax in a lull, tense up with a faster motion.
Whatever the pace, it's all good on the Bay, our make-believe ocean.

Peanut Butter and Jelly
By Marian M. Fay
June 2014

Peanut butter and jelly and a mug of tea in hand
Savoring the flavor of the strawberry jam
As it oozes and drops sticky sweet on my plate
I lap it up greedily, for my cravings to sate

The peanut butter seems to have spread
From the bread to my fingers and to my arm
So I licked that off too, it's part of the charm
Of eating peanut butter and jelly with a mug of tea
It's quite satisfying really, at least for me.

Last Day of School
By Marian M. Fay
June 2014

The last day of the school year finally came and went
All the rooms packed up in plastic and tearful goodbyes offered
As off to their homes the children were sent

No fanfare at home, just birdsong and gentle breezes
A quiet house, a tasty lunch, and then start cleaning up the pieces
Of the evidence of the family's habitation as I had inclination

Tidy this corner then that one and wash a few dishes
Sitting, resting, and reading
Ah, those are my riches!

YIKES!

Jane Harre

A lovely walk on the fogged in beach, the sea and sky so gray together that only memory could separate them.

A stop here or there—to note the children playing in the water and sand—God’s generous playground full of endless possibilities. A castle? A swimming pool. A house with patted smooth stairs. A grandfather standing delighted guard over the little ones skipping in and out of the water’s edge.

Walk on. A young, slim, dark-haired mother, sitting near as the children of a little older set dig deep, deep in the sand with wide imaginations, but not so wide as the palette of sand God provides!

A stop, a talk, a sitting spell, Mom immediately brings God into the conversation—happy for me. Lots of topics to share, happiness for her to say that with Grandma’s just-now purchase of a nearby shore house, the family can again be water/beach folks.

Time flies; the children run into the water, Mom watches with calm pleasure. I soak it up, speak of books and authors who have marked a path for me, lit the lamps along the way.

Time to move on. Walk a little farther, barefoot in the sea-edge, pants rolled up a bit, sneakers tied together and flopped over a shoulder—sheer joy!

One man swims alone although there are two chairs. The beach barely inhabited as the sun hides well.

Pick a turn-around, start back looking, looking, filling the tank with the glory of creation—powerful sea made by the power of the Word, spoken.

Sudden stop! The sea has lightly filled someone’s digging hole with enough sand to make a trap. I’m in it. One leg up to the knee. I am not

young, not agile. The beach is deserted around me, visibility is short. Will I be able to pull my leg out without help? Will the other leg sink? A heave and I am free—sandy and wet I walk on. A small crisis, not too serious. I could have crawled a bit. In my pocket was my cellphone.

Back along the water. No use to think of watching for another hole—the one that got me was invisible—smoothly hidden.

Life is full of hidden holes ready to suck us in, frighten us, cause us to panic and thrash about. We have some strength to escape; if we choose. We have some resources. But the God who spoke the sea and the sand into existence is near at hand, watching like the mother, guarding like the Granddad. No misstep is unseen by Him, no child lost to His view, His loving care. Ask and His help is instant. Really, no need to ask. His watchful love, like the grandfather's, like the mom's is ever-ready, aware of the dangers in ways the child can't recognize for childishness. He is prepared to rescue us at all times, in every danger, simply because He loves us.

The Toll in the Distance

Try that a again
Do you sense the distant toll
Has the toll been measured
That tolling bell has a message.

The message is for you and me
The media too often measures
In words and ink, the return pages
Representing the filling sink.

The depth of the wail, the chilled bone
Such loss that the weight alone
Pushes men to the brink
For the toll has been paid do you think.

Were you called by that bell
To provide aide to those in need
Or is it the distance that lessens
The drum beat to the well.

The Blood has been shattered
For it was put on a tree
Now for us brethren
Its outward we be.

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John Hatton, “King of the Tories”
Part 2
By Ben Carlton

In November of 1770, the ship, *Prince of Wales*, Captain Crawford at the helm, arrived from Liverpool, and dropped anchor in Delaware Bay. Several pilot boats were busily unloading goods without the formality of a customs declaration, when I decided to investigate along with my then 14-year-old and only son, John Hatton, Jr., accompanied by Ned, my Mulatto servant. As we rowed toward one of the pilot boats, we were warned by the crew to stand off or they would sink us. Declaring they would surely “murder” us, they manned the sides of their boat, aiming swivel guns mounted on the gunwales, muskets, and blunderbusses at our little party. We promptly backed off, and spying another pilot boat nearby engaged in the same illicit activity, we approached and boarded her declaring the boat and her contraband goods legally seized by virtue of my office as Customs Collector. Whereupon the pilot and eight crewmembers set upon us and proceeded to beat us in a most inhuman manner, striking us repeatedly with their swords and axes. Outnumbered, we were subdued and taken to shore where we were unceremoniously landed, bruised and battered. Adding insult to injury, the ruffians stole from us three pistols, my rifle-barreled pistol, four Spanish dollars, two hangers, and my shoe buckles.

Incredibly, it was Ned and I who were promptly arrested – not the smugglers – and charged by the local magistrates with attempted theft of the pilot boat and its cargo, and for wounding a sailor named Smith. (Smith, the ringleader, had received a gash to the right side of his head and face in the said affray.) I was permitted to post bond and was released, but my Negro was kept in gaol, the Justices of the Peace refusing to release him.

The next day a wagonload of contraband taken from the *Prince of Wales* was driven directly past the door to my house in Cold Spring, no doubt destined for the Philadelphia markets. The men guarding the wagon, with pistols in their hands, challenged me to stop them, if I dared.

I then dispatched my son to Philadelphia to investigate the whereabouts of the illicit goods. John, Jr., found one of the boats moored to the dock at Philadelphia's busy waterfront. Alas, he was discovered near their boat and set upon and bludgeoned by several sailors armed with clubs. Tearing off the bandages to his arm and head (covering wounds he had suffered in our previous encounter with the smugglers), they stripped him, poured hot tar into his wounds, and applied a coat of tar and feathers over his body. They next fastened a rope about his middle and dragged him through the streets where a jeering, merciless crowd of citizens beat him with sticks. After placing him in the pillory for a time, they then proceeded to duck him in the river until he nearly drowned. Tiring of the sport, they finally rowed him to the Jersey side of the river and dumped him there, more dead than alive. He was taken

to a tavern at Cooper's Ferry [i.e., Camden] to recuperate. Even after it was apparent that he would recover from his shocking wounds, it was still feared he would lose his arm or the use of it.

I had already filed charges against the brigands who on November 8 had attacked us and retaken the pilot boat we had legally seized. I also filed suit on behalf of my son against the villains who abused and nearly killed him in Philadelphia, but Governor Franklin, of course, had no jurisdiction in Pennsylvania, and regardless, no one was willing to testify against the smugglers for fear of losing his life. However, the Governor did issue a proclamation ordering the arrest of Smith, also, a man named

Hughes, and the seven sailors who had attacked us in Delaware Bay, offering a general pardon to anyone who would provide information concerning the assault and robbery.

I arrived at Cape May from Burlington on Nov. 23, still suffering from wounds received in the fracas over the pilot boat, to deliver the Governor's proclamation. The next day I tried to bail my man, Ned, who was still close-confined and very ill, with cuts to his head from whence pieces of bone had been dislodged. The magistrates absolutely refused to release him. However, one of my assailants, Hughes, had been briefly confined in the gaol and released.

I returned home in the dead of night to find my poor wife, Elizabeth, nearly expiring from fright and concern over me and our son, well knowing the danger we were in. Even our servants were trembling with fear. Also, Hughes and his friends had threatened our neighbors with destruction should any of them venture near our abode to lend us sympathy or support.

The next night I was obliged to leave my house in order to find someone to bail my servant. While on the road I was assaulted by a man wielding a large stick like a club, striking me several blows on the arm. Reaching down from my mount I struck my attacker, whom I did not recognize in the darkness, on the head with my whip handle, stunning him, and rode on.

Finally, on Nov. 28, I was able to post bail for my Negro, having paid £200 security for his release.

(To be continued in the next issue of *Just Write*)

Writers Groups in 18th century Philadelphia

A. Muhammad Ma`ruf.

The name Benjamin Franklin is well known among most Americans. However it is not very well known that he was one of a small group of young men who met on Sundays in "the Woods near Skuykill", as writers with activities and goals very similar to those of our writers group. These meetings of some friends of Benjamin Franklin ((1706-1790) may have been the earliest of American citizens' writers groups. Many writers groups are now known to be active in Philadelphia, in various parts of New Jersey, and elsewhere in the US. I came across Franklin's description of the characters and drama of the writers group that he belonged to in his youth, unexpectedly.

The description in Franklin's own words:

...My chief acquaintances at this time were Charles Osborne, Joseph Watson, and James Ralph, all lovers of reading... Watson was a pious, sensible young man, of great integrity; the others rather more lax in their principles of religion, particularly Ralph, who, as well as Collins, had been unsettled by me, for which they both made me suffer. Osborne was sensible, candid, frank; sincere and affectionate to his friends; but, in literary matters, too fond of criticising. Ralph was ingenious, genteel in his manners, and extremely eloquent; I think I never knew a prettier talker. Both of them great admirers of poetry, and began to try their hands in little pieces. Many pleasant walks we four had together on Sundays into the

woods, near Schuylkill, where we read to one another, and conferr'd on what we read.

Ralph was inclin'd to pursue the study of poetry, not doubting but he might become eminent in it, and make his fortune by it, alleging that the best poets must, when they first began to write, make as many faults as he did. Osborne dissuaded him, assur'd him he had no genius for poetry, and advis'd him to think of nothing beyond the business he was bred to; that, in the mercantile way, tho' he had no stock, he might, by his diligence and punctuality, recommend himself to employment as a factor, and in time acquire wherewith to trade on his own account. I approv'd the amusing one's self with poetry now and then, so far as to improve one's language, but no farther.

On this it was propos'd that we should each of us, at our next meeting, produce a piece of our own composing, in order to improve by our mutual observations, criticisms, and corrections.ⁱⁱ As language and expression were what we had in view, we excluded all considerations of invention by agreeing that the task should be a version of the eighteenth Psalm, which describes the descent of a Deity. When the time of our meeting drew nigh, Ralph called on me first, and let me know his piece was ready. I told him I had been busy, and, having little inclination, had done nothing. He then show'd me his piece for my opinion, and I much approv'd it, as it appear'd to me to have great merit. "Now," says he, "Osborne never will allow the least merit in anything of mine, but makes 1000 criticisms out of mere envy. He is not so jealous of you; I wish, therefore, you would take this piece, and produce it as yours; I will pretend not to have had time, and so produce nothing. We shall then see what he will say to it." It was agreed,

and I immediately transcrib'd it, that it might appear in my own hand.

We met; Watson's performance was read; there were some beauties in it, but many defects. Osborne's was read; it was much better; Ralph did it justice; remarked some faults, but applauded the beauties. He himself had nothing to produce. I was backward; seemed desirous of being excused; had not had sufficient time to correct, etc.; but no excuse could be admitted; produce I must. It was read and repeated; Watson and Osborne gave up the contest, and join'd in applauding it. Ralph only made some criticisms, and propos'd some amendments; but I defended my text. Osborne was against Ralph, and told him he was no better a critic than poet, so he dropt the argument. As they two went home together, Osborne expressed himself still more strongly in favor of what he thought my production; having restrain'd himself before, as he said, lest I should think it flattery. "But who would have imagin'd," said he, "that Franklin had been capable of such a performance; such painting, such force, such fire! He has even improv'd the original. In his common conversation he seems to have no choice of words; he hesitates and blunders; and yet, good God! how he writes!" When we next met, Ralph discoveredⁱⁱⁱ the trick we had plaid him, and Osborne was a little laught at.

This transaction fixed Ralph in his resolution of becoming a poet. I did all I could to dissuade him from it, but he continued scribbling verses.. He became, however, a pretty good prose writer. More of him hereafter. But, as I may not have occasion again

to mention the other two, I shall just remark here, that Watson died in my arms a few years after, much lamented, being the best of our set. Osborne went

to the West Indies, where he became an eminent lawyer and made money, but died young.

The meetings took place when Franklin and his friends were in their late teens. Not much is known about Franklin's writers group colleagues Charles Osborne and Joseph Watson. James Ralph (d. 1762) travelled to England with Franklin later but did not return to Philadelphia when Franklin came back. In England James Ralph became a successful writer of politics, history, and other subjects. His *History of England* in two volumes (1744-6) and *The Case of the Authors by Profession* of 1758 became the dominant narratives of their time. Back in Philadelphia Franklin served to establish the Junto, a society of young men who met together on Friday evenings for "self-improvement, study, mutual aid, and conviviality" in 1727. The rules required that every member in his turn "should produce and read an essay of his own writing, on any subject he pleased", once in three months. So many young men wanted to join the Junto that a number of spin-off clubs were established. Franklin's group lasted 30 years. In 1743 Franklin wrote "A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge" - the founding document of the prototype of the American Philosophical Society.

We may thus conclude that the beginnings of writers groups, as of many other American practices, can be traced to the germinative years of the 18th century.

ⁱ As found in *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES*. EDITED BY CHARLES W ELIOT LLD. P F COLLIER & SON COMPANY, NEW YORK (1909).

The source for the well-known "Autobiography" was written and published first before the word "autobiography" came into vogue and became a popular genre. Its beginnings are in a document drafted in 1771, in England, as a letter to the author's son William (ca. 1730 – November 1814). The selections from Charles Eliot's version have been edited and further notes added below by the present writer.

ⁱⁱ This is close to what we do in our Writers Group meetings. However, we do not employ criticism as much as some of Franklin's colleagues. We also enjoy a regular agenda item of "Prompted Writings" – a technique possibly not known during Franklin's time.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'discovered' is used here in a sense that has now been lost, to mean 'disclose'. I found this confusing at first. We discussed this in our group some years ago when I presented a previous draft of this essay at a meeting. Later, Jane Harre found the meaning that was intended. Since then I have also found

1. another place in Franklin's long letter to his son where 'discover' is used in the same way. His brother James, for whom Benjamin worked as an indentured apprentice for some years, owned and published a newspaper in Boston. Something that was published in it "gave offence to the Assembly. He was taken up, censur'd, and imprison'd for a month, by the speaker's warrant, I suppose, because he would not **discover** his author."
2. a dictionary published in 1871 which gives the meanings of the word then as follows:

Discover, v. a. 1. **Reveal, communicate, tell, disclose, exhibit, show, manifest, make manifest, impart, make known, lay open, lay bare, expose to view.** 2. Ascertain, detect, find out, get the first knowledge of. 3. Descry, discern, espy, see, behold, get sight of, get a glimpse of. Discovery, n. 1. Disclosure, revelation, making known. 2. Finding, finding out. 3. First sight, first view. (Richard Soule, *A Dictionary of English Synonymes and Synonymous or Parallel Expressions Designed as a Practical Guide to Aptness and Variety of Phraseology*. Boston, 1871)

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