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The Clarinet in Early America: Some Preliminary Findings

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Those of us who are interested in the history of the clarinet have plenty of sources to go to when we want to read something about the European development of our instrument. But if you've ever attempted to find out anything about the clarinet in early America, you will surely have run into a dead end, as I did a couple of years ago when I first started to look around for books or articles on this topic. I found next to nothing that could give me any substantial information about the early history of my instrument in my own country! I read what I could, which was mostly Oscar Sonneck's old but important volume on *Early Concert Life in America* (see bibliography, below), and that at least gave me a few names of clarinetists. But I wanted to know more detail about the lives and activities of these players, and about how the clarinet fit into the musical and social life of the day. So I started to do my own research, and discovered a whole world that I knew nothing about. Period newspapers and other primary sources contain a great deal of information that can paint a vivid picture for us of the clarinet in early America. In this paper I'd like to give a short introduction to this subject

The earliest known mention of the clarinet in America is Benjamin Franklin's account, related in his *Autobiography*, of having heard the instrument at the Moravian community of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in 1756. It turns out that this is probably not true; Franklin wrote his autobiography late in life, and his recollection of early events was often faulty. Moreover, when Franklin wrote a letter to his wife just after his visit to Bethlehem, he made no mention of clarinets. Scholars who have worked in the Moravian archives, including myself, have found no evidence of clarinets this early. Nevertheless, the first real evidence of the clarinet in America comes not too long after this: in 1758 an advertisement appeared in the *New York Gazette and Weekly Postboy*, seeking musicians, including clarinetists, to play in General Lascell's regimental band, stationed at Amboy. It is undoubtedly through the activities of the British regimental bands that the clarinet first arrived in the American colonies in significant numbers. From the beginning of the Seven Years' War (or the French and Indian War, as many of us know it) in 1756 through the end of the American Revolution in 1783, no fewer than 84 British regiments served in the colonies, and most had their own bands. These military bands consisted of two clarinets and/or oboes, two horns, and two bassoons – in other words, the traditional *Harmonic* ensemble for which so much music was written in the second half of the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth. American militia units, and later the Continental Army, adopted this band tradition for themselves. These military bands not only executed their regimental duties but also played a large role in civilian musical life; regimental musicians formed the nucleus of instrumental ensembles that appeared on concerts in all of the large colonial cities. Their presence also stimulated the music trade, providing a market for music publishers, instrument makers, and stores selling sheet music and accessories.

Advertisements for regimental musicians, such as the one just mentioned, appeared constantly in colonial newspapers. A particularly interesting example is the ad in *Rivington's New York Gazette* of 1779, which sought a band of two horns, two clarinets, two oboes and one bassoon for maritime duty on the private warship the *General Pattison*. Sometimes clarinetists needed to be found for other reasons; in 1781 an ad appeared in a Philadelphia newspaper offering a reward for the capture and return of a clarinetist who had deserted his unit. Clarinets were occasionally mentioned among the spoils of war captured in battle, as in a newspaper report of the Battle of Trenton in 1777, which noted that among the captured were 20 drummers, nine musicians, and "a number of trumpets, clarionets, etc." In addition to the serious duties of war, military bands were also called upon for lighter pursuits, such as serenading. In 1768 we learn from a letter written by a young Philadelphian to his sister that

We - with four or five young officers of the regiment in barracks - drink as hard as we can to keep out the cold, and about midnight sally forth, attended by the Band which consists of ten

musicians, horns, clarionets, hautboys and bassoons, march through the streets and play under the window of any lady you choose to distinguish, which they esteem a high Compliment....I have been out twice and only once got a violent cold by it.

Clarinets were also used as domestic instruments in households that were wealthy enough to support a small band. Thomas Jefferson wrote as follows to a friend in Italy, for the purpose of scouting out possible servants for his plantation:

I retain for instance among my domestic servants a gardener... weaver... a cabinet maker... and a stone- cutter... to which I would add a vigneron. In a country where, like yours, music is cultivated and practised by every class of men, I suppose there might be found persons of those trades who could perform on the French horn, clarinet or hautboy and bassoon, so that one might have a band of two French horns, two clarinets and hautboys and a bassoon, without enlarging their domest[ic] expences. ...Without meaning to give you trouble, perhaps it mig[ht] be practicable for you in your ordinary intercourse with your pe[ople] to find out such men disposed to come to America. Sobriety and good nature would be desirable parts of their characters.

The clarinet was also clearly counted amongst the instruments that could be learned by a gentleman as a social "accomplishment." Teachers of the instrument are in evidence in America as early as 1767, when an anonymous individual advertised in the *South Carolina Gazette* that he was available to teach the German flute or the clarinet. The first teacher in early America whose name is known was John William Beck of Charleston, who in 1773 advertised as follows:

John William Beck, musician, begs leave to acquaint the publick that he teacheth to play on the following instruments, viz., clarinet, flauto traverso, flauto a bec, hautbois, or oboe de Simon [?], bassoon, violin, tenor violin, and bass violin as perfectly as any master in America. Any persons who apply may depend on his assiduity and punctual attendance on very reasonable terms, either at their own houses or at his house, one of Mr. Harbrick's tenements in Jew's Alley, King Street, and he flatters himself he shall give general satisfaction.

Teachers often advertised that they were capable of teaching more than one instrument, and Mr. Beck's versatility on both winds and strings is not at all unusual. [Refer to the list of teachers shown on the handout.] As in Europe, wind instruments were generally reserved for men, under the notion that the facial expressions required to play them were not becoming to ladies. (See the list, "Clarinet Teachers in Early America," below.)

What kinds of materials did early American clarinet students play from? Where did they get their instruments and accessories? Newspaper advertisements give us some information on these questions. Beginning in 1773, published clarinet tutors are sometimes listed in advertisements, but their specific titles are never mentioned. It seems likely, given that most of the teachers and players in early America were apparently of English or French extraction, that these tutors would have been the ones then available in London or Paris, imported to America. If you want to know more about these, I refer you to the writings of Albert Rice, including his new book on the Classical Clarinet, due out in August from Oxford University Press. The earliest American tutor devoted solely to the clarinet did not appear until ca. 1803; this was George Blake's *New and Complete Preceptor for the Clarinet*.

So far as the instruments themselves are concerned, early American clarinetists (if they had not brought their own instruments with them from the "old country") could have purchased either imported or domestically-made clarinets. It is a fascinating fact that the first maker of clarinets in America was already resident in New York in 1761. His name was Gottlieb Wolhaupter, and he advertised in the *New York Gazette* of November of that year as follows:

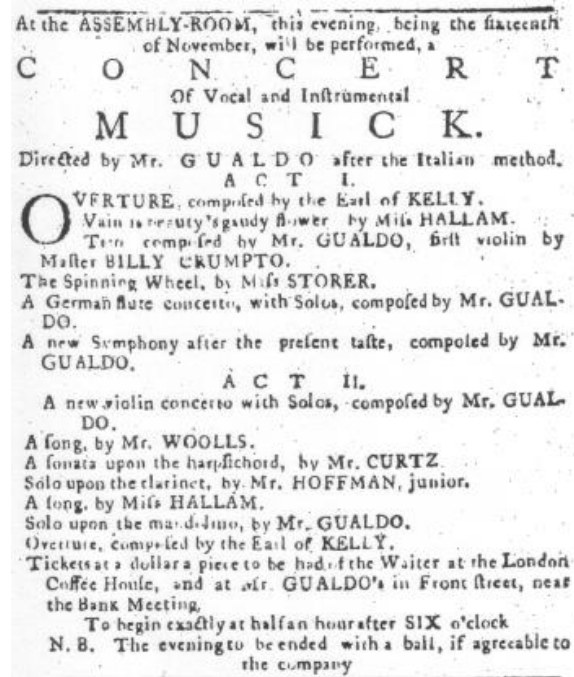
Gottlieb Wolhaupter, living at the sign of the Musical Instrument-Maker, opposite Mr. Adam Vanderberg's, has just imported from London, a choice parcel of the best English box-wood: Where he continues to make and mend, all sorts of musical instruments, such as German flutes, hautboys, clareonets, flageolets, bassoons, fifes; and also silver tea-pot handles.

Other clarinet makers in early America were David Wolhaupter of New York (probably a son of Gottlieb), Jacob Anthony of Philadelphia, Joshua Collins of Annapolis, and Isaac Greenwood of Salem, Massachusetts. The earliest importer of clarinets seems to have been Michael Hillegas of Philadelphia, who advertised imported clarinets in 1764. Imported clarinets are advertised frequently in colonial and Federal-era newspapers; as far as I can tell, most of the instruments were imported from London.

Music stores were selling clarinet reeds as early as 1772, and reed cases as early as 1780. It is interesting that they were not selling cane, from which the clarinetist could make his own reeds, but the finished product. Sheet music for the clarinet is often advertised, though again the exact titles of pieces are rarely given. The repertory of early American clarinetists is the topic for another paper.

Now to the subject of professional, concertizing clarinetists. There were many in early America, and I refer you to the list of names on your handout (see the list, "Clarinet Performers in Early America," below). We know more about some of these than about others; today I'd like to focus on just several important individuals. The earliest clarinetist to be mentioned by name in America was a military musician, a man named Charles Hoffman, Jr.. Not much is known about Hoffman, except that he was a member of the band of the 4th

Regiment of Artillery in the Continental Army, led by Colonel Thomas Proctor. This band was a very important one, and can probably be considered the first true American army band. Military documents state that Hoffman was born in Germany and enlisted in the Continental Army in 1777, where he attained the rank of Master Musician. That's the extent of what we know about him, except that he played on this concert in 1769:



The first named clarinet soloist in early America: Mr. Hoffman, Jr. From *The Pennsylvania Journal*, November 16, 1769.

Perhaps the most important and active clarinetist in early America was a man named Andrew Wolff. Oscar Sonneck, in his *Early Concert Life in America*, mentions a "Mr. Wolff[e]" numerous times, but simply lists the dates and places of his performances, and sometimes (when the newspaper information stretches to it) names the pieces he performed. However, I have been able to uncover a significant amount of additional information on Wolff, through archival research in Philadelphia and Baltimore. I think that he can be dubbed America's first virtuoso clarinet performer.

Nothing is currently known about Wolff's early life and career. From his name we can guess that he was probably German, or perhaps British of German extraction; but whether he was born in Germany, in Britain, or in America is not known. Pamela Weston states that he settled in Baltimore in 1786, but I have found no evidence of this. Wolff's first documented appearance was in Philadelphia in 1787, where he was listed as a performer on a concert at the Southwark Theatre. He seems to have been employed as a musician in the theatre orchestra of the Old American Company, which was early America's most important theatre troupe. The Old American Company based itself primarily at the Southwark, where it presented its longest season every year; but it was also a traveling company, running an annual circuit that included seasons in New York and Baltimore as well as in Philadelphia. Andrew Wolff seems to have been resident in Philadelphia for much of his life, though he also gave concerto performances in New York and Baltimore. A comparison of the dates of these performances with the movements of the Old American Company suggests that Wolff usually traveled with the company on its circuit. Between the years of 1787 and early 1816, Wolff's name is found regularly on concert announcements in these three cities. He performed no fewer than 50 times on public concerts in these years. His repertory included concertos and miscellaneous solos with orchestral accompaniment, chamber music (especially works for clarinet and string trio), Harmoniemusik, and obligato accompaniments for vocal soloists. Program notices in the newspapers frequently omit composer names for concertos; but we do know that Wolff performed works by Pleyel, Michel, and Lefevre, and he himself may well have composed clarinet concertos for his own performance.



The Southwark Theatre, Philadelphia (opened 1766) (From Irvin R. Glazer, *Philadelphia Theaters: A Pictorial Architectural History*)

In 1793, the Old American Company was driven out of Philadelphia by the opening of a rival theatre company performing at the so-called New Theatre on Chestnut Street (see illustration on next page). The Old Americans shifted their scene of operations more or less permanently to New York, and Wolff seems to have moved with them, at least for a few years. He doesn't reappear in Philadelphia until 1796, when he resumed his concert

THIS EVENING,
At the City-Tavern, will be Performed, a **CONCERT,**
for the Benefit of Mr. REHINE.
CONCERT.

| | |
|---|------------|
| FIRST ACT. | |
| Overture | by Stamitz |
| Song, <i>The Lover's Petition,</i> | Rehine |
| Solo Violino | Phille |
| Song, <i>No, 'twas neither Shape nor Feature,</i> | Harper |
| Quartet | Doveaux |
| Song, <i>O gentle Maid,</i> | Rehine |
| Sinfonia | Stamitz |
| SECOND ACT. | |
| Sinfonia | by Vanhall |
| Song, <i>Mary's Dream,</i> | Rehine |
| Concert Clarinetto | Wolf |
| Hunting Song | Harper |
| Quartet | Kammel |
| Song, <i>Ma Cher Amie,</i> | Rehine |
| Sinfonia | Kammel |

After the **CONCERT & BALL.**
Tickets, to admit a Gentleman and Lady, may be had at the City-Tavern, and of Mr. *Oswold,* at the Coffee House. Price, *One Dollar.*
The Concert to begin precisely at 7 o Clock.
Philadelphia, Nov. 28.

A concert announcement from the *Pennsylvania Packet* of November 28, 1788, showing the earliest performance by Mr. Wolff[.].



The New Theatre on Chestnut Street, Philadelphia (opened 1794) (From Irvin R. Glazer, *Philadelphia Theaters: A Pictorial Architectural History*)

activities there. Although there are no surviving records to prove it, I'm making an informed guess that he joined the orchestra of the New Theatre upon his return to Philadelphia. I base this guess on the fact that the concerts on which he performed from 1796 onwards usually involved other musicians and singers from the New Theatre company; and his occasional visits to Baltimore also pretty well coincided with the company's seasons there. Wolff actually resided in Baltimore for a number of years, probably from about 1808 through 1815 judging from the information I've gathered. An 1816 concert in Philadelphia seems to have been his last. Wolff died in Philadelphia in 1820, probably in early January. I discovered his estate administration documents in the Philadelphia City Archive. Among these documents is an inventory of personal belongings that were sold at auction after his death. This included one "clarinet," which fetched \$4.00 at the sale.

Another interesting figure in early American clarinet history was Margaret Knitel. She is a rare example of an early female clarinet soloist. She first appeared in Philadelphia in 1816, and seems to have made a great splash, because she appears frequently in that year and in 1817. Her program announcements show her performing works that I have not found on other clarinetists' programs: for example, the Crusell concerto shown below. She is named on a passenger list that survives from the ship *Amphitrite*, which arrived at the port of Philadelphia on November 4, 1816. The list notes that her husband, Anton Knittel [sic], was a musical instrument maker from Baden, Germany. She is listed as "Margreta," and her birthplace is given as Zurich, Switzerland. Her age was 28 at the time of her arrival, making her year of birth 1788. She must have been a colorful figure. Within two weeks of her arrival in Philadelphia, she was concertizing actively. She also carried on a public altercation with a singer, Mrs. Bastian, on whose concert she had apparently agreed to perform. Margaret Knitel issued the following statement in

Poulson's American Daily Advertiser on November 26, 1816:

TO THE PUBLIC.

The subscriber is under the necessity to inform the public, that she cannot lend her musical assistance to Mrs. Bastian at her Concert on Tuesday next (the 26th inst.) as advertised by her for the following reasons:

I requested Mrs. Bastian to pay some regard to a stranger, and to my embarrassed circumstances, by postponing her concert until some time after mine, which would take place on Thursday (28th inst.). She was deaf to all entreaties, insisting positively on my performing at her concert. I was then willing to gratify her, and to perform for her benefit a very beautiful and difficult piece on the Clarinet; to which she also turned a deaf ear, wishing to exact three pieces.

Her husband Mr. Bastian, the oracle in the business, threatened me with lawyers and offensive newspaper paragraphs, and other public insults, in case of refusal. Such threats roused my whole indignation; and as I never can be the slave to caprice and selfish dictates, so unhannionious to my feelings and the art I profess, I believe myself to be justified in refusing to assist her, feeling confident that my conduct on this occasion will meet with the approbation of a generous public.

Margaret Knitel.

Mr. Bastian, on Mrs. Bastian's behalf, issued a stern rejoinder to this paragraph in the newspaper a few days later, which makes it pretty clear that

there was a breach of contract on Madame Knitel's part. Be that as it may, the notoriety generated by this public disagreement probably only increased the audiences at both women's subsequent concerts. It is worth noting that Margaret Knitel might have been the first performer on the basset horn in early America; she is listed as playing that instrument on a concert in May of 1817 in Philadelphia. I should also mention that Pamela Weston has a few lines about Knitel in her books. She documents a concert that Knitel played in Kassel, Germany, in 1816 (probably just before she came to America). A reviewer from the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* attended the concert, and unfortunately had a relatively low opinion of Knitel's playing. He noted that "her delivery is cold, her skill trifling, but she received some applause for the unusualness of seeing the instrument played by a lady." I have yet to document activities for Margaret Knitel beyond 1817. She doesn't appear in Philadelphia newspapers of 1818 through 1825, so perhaps she moved elsewhere. I hope to track down more of her activities as my research progresses.

These are just a few of the two dozen or so early American clarinetists whose names appear on your handout. The stories of the others, as far as they can be known to this point, are equally interesting. And, there is much more to this subject. Time limitations prevent me from telling you about the French influence, for example, or about the Moravians, both of which subjects are very important in the history of the clarinet early America; and I have barely touched upon questions of repertory. But I hope that I have piqued your interest in this unexplored topic. For my part, I am continuing this project, with the certainty that further research will turn up more and more information, and fill in this significant chapter in our instrument's history.

Donald M. McCorkle, "The American Contribution to American Music," *Notes* 13 (1956), 600.
New York Gazette and Weekly Postboy, December 23, 1758.
 Raoul Camus, *Military Music of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1976), Appendix A, "Bands of Music in British Regiments of Foot, 1755-1783," 179-84.
Rivington's New York Gazette, July 18, 1778.
Pennsylvania Packet, September 8, 1781.
Massachusetts Spy, January 2, 1777.
 Beata Frances and Eliza Keary, eds., *The Francis Letters*, 2 vols. (London: Hutchison & Co., [n.d.]), I:91.
 Julian P. Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 13 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), II: 195-96.
South Carolina Gazette, July 27-August 3, 1767.
South Carolina & Amer Genl Gazette, December 17-24, 1773.
 The earliest newspaper ad to include clarinet tutors is in *Rivington's New York Gazette*, October 14, 1773.
New York Gazette, November 16, 1761.
New York Mercury, June 18, 1770.
 Advertised in German in the *Wochentliche Philadelphische Staats*, September 29, 1772; English version of the ad in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 18, 1772.
Maryland Gazette, February 25, 1773.
Salem Gazette, July 3, 1781.
Pennsylvania Gazette, January 5, 1764.
New York Mercury, October 5, 1772.
Rivington's New York Gazette, May 3, 1780.
 Camus, 138-39.
 Ibid.
 Pamela Weston, *More Clarinet Virtuosi of the Past* (London: The Author, 1977), 275.
 Thomas Clark Pollock, *The Philadelphia Theatre in the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1933), 137.
 All information in this paper about the Philadelphia theatre companies is taken from two sources: Pollock (see footnote 23) and Oscar Sonneck, *Early Opera in America* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1915).
 Andrew Wolff, estate administration documents. Philadelphia Register of Wills, 1820, file #25.
 Tepper, Michael H., ed., *Passenger Arrivals at the Port of Philadelphia, 1800-1819: The Philadelphia "Baggage Lists,"* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1986), 384.
Poulson's American Daily Advertiser, November 29, 1816.

GRAND CONCERT.

MADAME KNIDEL.

RECENTLY from Paris, has the honour to inform the Public, that her concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music, will take place at the Masonic Hall, on Tuesday the 19th instant, assisted by the principal Professors, and Amateurs of this city.

PART 1st.

Sinfonia, Full Band, Grynwetz.
 Song, Hope told a flattering tale, Mrs Bastian,
 Concerto Clarinet,

Madame Knidel, Bernard Crusell.

Song, the Willow, Mrs Bastian, Braban,
 Pot, Pourri, Violin, Mr Hupfeld Kreuzer,

PART 2d.

Quintett, Clarinet.

Madame Knidel, F Haffner,

Song, the Love Letter, Mrs Bastian, Braban,
 Variations, Clarinet,

Madame Knidel, Francis Hudson.

Song, "While Strephon" Mrs Bastian, Hook.
 Finale—Full Band Grynwetz.

Tickets one dollar each, to be had at George Willig's Music Store, and at the door of the Masonic Hall on the evening of the Concert.
 Nov 19 1816

Announcement of Margaret Knitel's first concert in America (From Poulson's *American Daily Advertiser*, November 16, 1816)

Ibid., May 19, 1817.
Weston, *More Clarinet Virtuosi*, 141-142.

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 - *Federal Gazette and Baltimore Daily Advertiser* (Baltimore), 1800-1815
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 - *New York Gazette* (New York), 1761
 - *New York Gazette and Weekly Postboy* (New York), 1758
 - *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), 1764
 - *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 1781
 - *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 1801-1825
 - *Rivington's New York Gazette* (New York), 1779
 - *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), 1767
 - *South Carolina & Amer Genl Gazette* (Charleston), 1773
- Other:
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Clarinet Teachers in Early America

(Places and dates given are those of the individual's first appearance as a teacher.)

| | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| John William Beck (Charleston, 1773) | Peter van Hagen, Sr. (New York, 1789) |
| Joshua Collins (Annapolis, 1773) | Jonas P. Barret (Boston, 1802) |
| Fagan and Ballantine (Hartford, 1777) | Mr. Foley (Baltimore, 1805) |
| Bartholemew Hobzl (Charleston, 1778) | Mr. Debissy (Philadelphia, 1806) |
| Mr. Shippen (Philadelphia, 1782) | M. Masi (Boston, 1807) |
| Peter Kalkoffer (Annapolis, 1782) | Joseph Rouault (New York, 1809) |
| Philip Phile and Fritz Tremner (Philadelphia, 1783) | Pasquole Lorie (Baltimore, 1811) |
| Philip Roth (Philadelphia, 1783) | Mr. Taylor (New York, 1812) |
| Mr. Hewill [Hiwell] (Providence, 1784) | John Hart (Boston, 1821) |
| Horatio Garnet (Portsmouth, NH, 1788) | |

Clarinet Performers in Early America

(Many of these individuals were probably also teachers. Places of activity are named, along with the year of the performer's first appearance in America. Complete names are given when known; variant spellings of names are given in square brackets.]

Charles Hoffman (Philadelphia; 1769)
Dorval (Boston; 1782)

Andrew Wolff [Wolf, Wolfe, Woolf] (Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York; 1787)
Horatio Garnet (Portsmouth, NH; 1791)
Foucard (Philadelphia, Boston, Charleston; 1793)
Beranger (Baltimore, Philadelphia; 1793)
Frederick Granger (Boston; 1793)
Henry [Henri] (Philadelphia, Hartford, New York, Boston; 1794)
Stone (Boston; 1795)
Dubois (Charleston, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, New York; 1795)
Auguste Gautier [Gaultier] (Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore; 1795)
Lullier (Philadelphia; 1795)
Anderson (Boston; 1796)
Francis C. Shaffer [Schaffer] (Boston; 1796)
Labatut (Charleston; 1799)
Bemo (New York; 1800)
Thibault [Thiboudt, Thibaut, Thibeault, Theabout] (Philadelphia; 1803)
Patrick Moffat (Boston, New York; 1805)
DeBissy (Philadelphia; 1806)
Peter F. Gentil (New York; 1808)
William [?] Turner (Boston, 1810)
Gaetano Carusi (Washington, Philadelphia; 1812)
Florant Meline (Philadelphia, Baltimore; 1812)
John Hart (Boston; 1812)
Gallaher (Philadelphia; 1814)
Margaret [Margreta] Knitel [Knittel, Knidel] (Philadelphia, 1816)
Norton (Boston, 1817)
Filpot (Philadelphia, 1820)

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