

SCIENCE

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NATIONAL ACADEMIES AND THE PROGRESS OF RESEARCH¹

II. THE FIRST HALF CENTURY OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

IN the days preceding the American Revolution, the Royal Society was to this country what it still is to the existing British Colonies: the central and authoritative representative of scientific research.² Americans eminent for their contributions to science were elected Fellows, and their papers appeared in the *Philosophical Transactions*. The list of colonial Fellows includes Cotton Mather, Bowdoin, Dudley, and the three Winthrops in New England; Franklin, Rittenhouse and Morgan in Pennsylvania; Banister, Clayton, Mitchell and Bird, in Virginia, and Garden and Williamson in the Carolinas. But so distant a body could not meet all local needs. Thus Franklin, active in every field, undertook the organization of the American Philosophical Society in 1743, some years before its time, as its early demise proved. In 1766 the American Society held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge was established and Franklin, then in Europe, was elected its first president. In the meantime the earlier society was revived, and

¹ For most of the material in the following pages the writer is indebted to a history of the "First Half Century of the National Academy of Sciences," prepared and edited by Frederick W. True in connection with the recent celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the academy.

² See an excellent article by G. Browne Goode, from which the data used in the introduction of the present paper are taken: "The Origin of the National Scientific and Educational Institutions of the United States," Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1889.