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Cover:

*“View of Several Public Buildings, in Philadelphia,”* attributed to Charles Willson Peale, engraved by James Trenchard; *The Columbian Magazine*, Philadelphia, January 1790.

## *Foreword*

As the fifty-five delegates to the Constitutional Convention assembled in Philadelphia’s Independence Hall in the momentous summer of 1787, they were not two blocks from Carpenters’ Hall, where the fifty-five-year-old Library Company of Philadelphia had occupied two rooms since 1774. The Library Company had opened its doors to the First and Second Continental Congresses, and so it was probably only to formalize an arrangement taken for granted that the directors resolved, on 5 July 1787, to “furnish the Gentlemen composing the Convention now sitting, with such Books as they may desire during their Continuance in Philadelphia.” Two days later William Jackson, secretary to the Convention (and a member of the Library Company) returned the thanks of the delegates to the directors for “their polite attention.” And so the Library Company became “The Delegates’ Library.”

Unfortunately, no circulation records for the period exist, so that we can never know which delegate borrowed or consulted what work. But virtually every significant work on political theory, history, law, and statecraft (and much else besides) could be found on the Library Company’s shelves, as well as numerous tracts and polemical writings by American as well as European authors. The existence of a 1789 printed catalogue of the collection makes it possible to ascertain with great certainty what those works were, and the very copies that the delegates might have used are still on our shelves.

During the Convention the delegates brought the cumulative wisdom of Western thought to bear in the practical matter of framing a workable government. Regardless of the degree to which they con-