Benjamin Franklin Bache’s Childhood Diary: The “Shaping” of a “Self”

Marie-Jeanne Rossignol
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This paper explores the childhood of later radical Philadelphia printer and journalist Benjamin Franklin Bache, which he spent in France and Switzerland between the ages of 7 and 16 (1776-85). It is based on the correspondence of his grandfather, Benjamin Franklin, and more importantly, on the diary written in French by Benny Bache, together with other documents. At stake are issues of education and bilingualism. Going beyond traditional historiography, the paper also tries to frame the education of Benny Bache within the context of the age of revolutions, by revealing how this future supporter of the French Revolution was trained as an apprentice in a Paris printer’s workshop as part of his education. Such an experience, together with his language skills, may explain why he could later acclaim the egalitarian abolition of slavery by France in 1794, a rare voice to do so in the United States.

Cet article est consacré à l’enfance du journaliste « radical » de Philadelphie Benjamin Franklin Bache, qui vécut en France et en Suisse de l’âge de 7 à 16 ans (1776-85). Ont été utilisés comme sources la correspondance de son grand-père Benjamin Franklin, et, de manière plus originale, le journal intime qu’il rédigea en français, comme d’autres documents. Si ces documents permettent d’explorer les questions d’éducation et de bilinguisme, ils nous donnent aussi l’occasion de replacer l’éducation de Bache dans le contexte de l’ère des révolutions, puisque ce futur partisan de la Révolution française fut formé comme imprimeur dans un atelier parisien. Cette expérience, comme son bilinguisme, peuvent nous aider à comprendre pourquoi il fut une des rares voix aux Etats-Unis à saluer l’abolition de l’esclavage par la France en 1794.

1. A longer version of the paper was first presented at the Consortium on Revolutionary Europe (Tallahassee, March 2011), then at the Société d’études anglo-américaines XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles (Paris, January 2012), and finally at the Society of Early Americanists (Savannah, Georgia, 2013). Research funded by the CIRESC (Centre International de Recherches sur l’ESClavage), and conducted at the American Philosophical Society (November 2012), made reading the Bache papers possible. I need to thank Jim Green for fruitful discussions, as well as Arianne Baggerman who suggested Benjamin Franklin Bache’s diary had to be worth reading and brought children’s diaries to my attention in March 2012 in Liverpool. As a result this short version focusing on the diary was presented at the 2014 LARCA conference on “The Problematization of the Self” organized by Jeffrey Hopes. The phrase “Shaping the Self” is a reference to Ariane Baggerman’s 2011 volume.

Benjamin Franklin Bache is a well-known figure in the pantheon of revolutionary and early America. A biography covers his life, while a number of books focus on his activities as the editor of a radical newspaper in Philadelphia in the 1790s before he fell a prey to the yellow fever in 1797, aged 28 (Faÿ, The Two Franklins; Stagg). Yet his close connection with his famous grandfather and fellow-printer Benjamin Franklin tends to overshadow Bache, all the more so as no artist ever painted or represented him. In her book on Franklin’s years in Paris during, and after, the War of Independence, Stacey Schiff does mention the boy and writes about his fate in compassionate terms, as had previously been done by Claude-Anne Lopez and Eugenia W. Herbert. Yet her narrative of Bache’s adventures in France and Switzerland between the ages of 8 and 17 is peripheral to her presentation of the elder Franklin’s activities while Lopez and Herbert just ignore the young Bache’s training as an apprentice in Paris. Jeffrey A. Pasley also explains that Benjamin Franklin Bache had been educated as “a European gentleman” but he does not really qualify that statement, apart from saying Benny Bache had hobnobbed with his grandfather’s famous visitors (81). Actually, little in the historiography is made of the fact that he spent his childhood abroad with his famous grandfather, and was brought up as bilingual, writing letters and even a diary in French between 1782 and 1785. Only Bernard Faÿ focused specifically on the diary in French, but as a lens through which the end of the Old Regime could be observed, and he was only interested in the entries for 1784 (Faÿ, “Paris”). Children’s diaries were a common phenomenon in elite families in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and testified to a new emphasis on education, and on control, of young people seen as representing the future (Müller 2). Indeed Bache’s famous grandfather tightly supervised his education and more or less tried to mold Bache in his own image by steeping him in the realities of Parisian printers’ workshops, as is revealed in the diary. Yet spending his childhood in Paris then Geneva in the pre-revolutionary years, and becoming fluent in French at an early age, mixing both with artisans and aristocrats, probably “shaped” Bache’s sense of “self” in a unique way (Baggerman et al).

The Paris and Geneva years 1776-84

Benjamin Franklin Bache was born on August 12, 1769, in Philadelphia, the first-born son of Sarah Bache, Benjamin Franklin’s daughter. She and her husband Richard Bache, had six more children
afterwards, never really became prosperous and lived mostly in the shadow of her illustrious father. At the time Benny (Benjamin Franklin Bache’s nickname) was born, his grand-father was in England as colonial agent and did not come back until May 5, 1775, when fighting had already broken out between the metropole and its colonies in North America (Morgan 220). In the fall of the following year, Franklin left for France, with two of his grandchildren in tow, Benny, then only 7, and Temple, 16, who was the illegitimate son of William Franklin, Benjamin Franklin’s loyalist son. Temple and Benny were not the only children to cross the Atlantic as American diplomats’ family in this troubled period: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, amongst others, also brought children to the Old World.

When he left for France, Franklin may have wanted to give his grandchildren the opportunity of a more sophisticated elite European background: Temple had already benefited from an education in an English boarding school and Benny’s father was not wealthy; so going to Paris could be an asset to both of them as a French education was considered as highly desirable in the eighteenth century (Smith 54-58, Morgan 173, Schiff 30). Franklin’s reputation as a scientist was well established in France; following a visit in the summer of 1767, and his election to the Académie Royale des Sciences as a foreign member in 1772, he knew he could count on a network of scientific and enlightened friends in Paris in case he needed advice on schools (Chaplin 194-5, 207). The education of children was a widely-shared preoccupation in the eighteenth century in the wake of John Locke’s 1693 popular essay Some Thoughts on Education, and the elder Franklin himself had expounded his ideas on the subject in 1749 in his Proposals for the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania, which was to serve as the basis for the creation of the College of Pennsylvania (Franklin, Proposals 13-14). But although Proposals had supported an education in English, with the pillars of English republican authors serving as models, Franklin now offered his grandson a French-language education, in the new context of the French alliance and war against Britain. He did not duplicate with them the kind of “radical”

2. Here are some of Franklin’s proposals in this little volume heavily influenced by Locke’s ideas: “The English Language might be taught by Grammar; in which some of our best Writers, as Tillotson, Addison, Pope, Algernoon Sidney, Cato’s Letters, &c. should be Classicks.”
education he had forged for himself, but exposed them to French Enlightenment ideas and French culture as a whole (Anderson xiii).

The French (or rather French-language) education of Benjamin Franklin Bache must be divided into three moments, Paris, Geneva, and Paris again. When he arrived in Paris with his grandfather in the fall of 1775, Benny was enrolled in a local boarding school, that of Mr. d’Hourville. By May 1777, Franklin could report on Benny’s growing ability to speak French; at the time, Benny had been transferred to another school, that of Mr. Le Coeur; he was joined by a number of other expatriate children whose presence probably made life in a French-language environment more tolerable, and guaranteed he would not lose his English (Franklin, Papers 24:63, Papers 25:91, 646, Schiff 155, Smith 61). He would visit his grandfather every Sunday for dinner. By 1778, Benny could write French much better than English, but that does not mean he had lost his spoken English as a letter by his grandfather testifies: “Enclosed is a letter from Ben to his Mother. He chose to write it in French as more familiar to him than the English […]. There are 4 or 5 English boys in the School or I think he would be in danger of losing his English” (Franklin, Papers 26: 9-10). However this rather comfortable situation did not continue: by the spring of 1779, with his grandson now perfectly fluent in French, Benjamin Franklin decided to send him to Geneva so that he could receive an education not only in a Protestant environment, but also in a republican one, as is evidenced in this quote by the elder Franklin: “As he is destined to live in a Protestant Country, and a Republic, I thought it best, to finish his education, where the Proper Principles prevail” (Franklin, Papers 29: 342n2, 351).

The 10-year old started on a 700-km long journey to Geneva to embark on what was to be the second stage in his French-language education, lasting for the next four and a half years (Schiff 213). Supervising him during this journey was Philibert Cramer, a printer and publisher with whom he developed an affectionate connection (Lopez & Herbert 221). Busy networking with French liberal aristocrats and scientists, as well as negotiating peace, Benjamin Franklin corresponded only on an irregular basis with his Switzerland-based grandson, who had to weather through the 1781-1782 Revolution in Geneva (Schiff

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3. Charles Cochran arrived at the same time, Jesse Deane and John Quincy Adams in February 1778.
Benny’s correspondence reveals the youth’s eagerness to please his grandfather, while feeling increasingly isolated away from any family member (Franklin, Papers 37: 682). Yet he tried to please a respected grandfather by studying hard, drawing and reading, displaying in his letters a mastery of French which led his family to fear he was becoming a “Frenchman.” In order to counter this impression, the youth then turned to improving his written English, by translating Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* as exercise, and eventually writing his correspondence in English, although he was much more comfortable in French: his letters describing his schoolwork on July 27, August 30 and October 1 and 3, 1782, were penned in French but on November 15, he made a special effort to write in English for example (Franklin, Papers 37: 682-83, 38: 52, 169-70, 186, 309).

Additionally, in the summer of 1782, the discipline-conscious Benny launched into an activity typical of children from educated families at the end of the eighteenth century: he started writing a diary, in French. This activity was obviously part of a set of educational measures, which also involved the sending of books by his grandfather to Benny, and Benny’s buying books himself (on the advice of his tutor, or Benjamin Franklin). What applied to Otto van Eyck, the child whose diary was studied by Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker, can also be said of Benny: “The diary was part of a comprehensive didactic regime to which he submitted” (82). Diary-keeping was seen by many educators as important at the time and was recommended in educational manuals, so the diary may have been started at the initiative of his schoolmaster, Monsieur de Marignac (Baggerman & Dekker 95). The thesis of Baggerman and Dekker is that such diaries were a way for parents to move education from repression to self-control. A diary was supposed to help a child reason, and learn how to control his or her passions/emotions (Baggerman & Dekker 5). Self-control being one of the key tenets in Benjamin Franklin’s own self-education as reflected in his *Autobiography*, such preoccupations obviously resonated with his views. Franklin himself had also kept a

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4. In February 1781, there was an attempt in Geneva to enfranchise the population, which led to a revolutionary Committee of Safety taking over power in 1782. Military reaction by France, Piedmont and Bern brought this experiment to an end.

5. In the Castle-Bache Collection at the American Philosophical Society, the diary is described as a series of 8 notebooks, with each about 10 pages. The diary is to be found in Reels 1 & 2 of the Castle-Bache Collection, American Philosophical Society.
diary in his youth, during his journey from London to Philadelphia in 1726, referring to it as his “journal” (Franklin, *The Autobiography* 48). So he might have suggested the exercise himself. In the end, there is no clear indication as to who may have urged Benny to start a diary, but this diary in French paradoxically opens the doors of an American boy’s inner life in the final years of his stay in France.

By the end of June 1783, in the wake of an illness, and negative reports about his Swiss school, Benny was finally repatriated to his grandfather’s abode in Passy (Lopez & Herbert 231). Now fourteen, Benny spent the last two years of his French education in the close proximity of his grandfather, as is revealed by his continued diary. This was to be the final, but now it also appears, definitely the most interesting, part in Benny’s French experience, all the more so as he moved from a child in his preoccupations to a teenager with increasing responsibilities. The climax of these two years in Paris was undeniably his being trained as a printer to follow in his grandfather’s footsteps.

**Training as a Printer in Pre-Revolutionary Paris 1784-85**

Reading the diary for the spring and summer of 1784, one follows a carefree Benny swimming across the river Seine, fishing, attending mesmerism sessions, marveling at hot-air balloons, building kites, chasing neighborhood cats with a friend and eventually killing one, in what was typical cruelty to animals in modern Europe (Darnton). There were a few formal outings with his grandfather (dinner at the Adamses for instance, or meeting with Prince Henri de Prusse), but unlike his cousin Temple, Benny was not meant for a position as diplomat. Indeed, by 1784, Franklin had grown critical of some of the post-revolutionary developments in the United States: the creation of the Society of the Cincinnati, which established what looked very much like a hereditary aristocracy in America, drew sardonic, and staunchly republican, comments from him. In a letter to Benny’s mother in January 1784, Franklin dismissed the whole idea of inherited privilege, recommending an education in “the useful arts” so as to avoid the perils of aristocratic idleness, in what can be considered as a very “republican” and “radical” paragraph (Best 86):

> But the descending honour, to Posterity who could have no Share in obtaining it, is not only groundless and absurd, but often hurtful to that Posterity, as it is apt to make them proud, disdaining to be employed in useful Arts, and thus falling into Poverty, and all the...
Meannesses, Servility, and Wretchedness attending it; which is the present case with much what is called the Noblesse in Europe.

He would not attempt to train Benny for high office, but apprentice him to a printer so that the youth could sustain himself in life usefully. An inkling that the elder Franklin valued the “useful Arts” in the education of his grandson can be found in a letter he had written Benny during his Geneva stay, on January 1782, and in which he congratulated the boy on his keeping an account of his expenses: “You will thereafter find it a great advantage, if you acquire the habit of doing so, and continue the practice through life” (Franklin, Papers 36: 476-77). The elder Franklin’s bitterness also stemmed from his being unable to secure diplomatic employment for Temple, Benny’s cousin, whom he had trained as a secretary. Due to Temple’s father being a loyalist, the young man never could receive a position in the American civil service, and Franklin by that time wielded more influence in Paris than in Philadelphia so he could not really help his grandson (Elkins & McKitrick 458, Wood 210-12, 222).

What has been left unexplored in recent biographies of Bache are the specific conditions of Benny’s apprenticeship as a printer in pre-revolutionary Paris in 1784 and 1785, and how this may have paved the way (or not) for his later radicalism. First of all Benny’s training as a printer must be connected with Franklin’s renewed interest in the printing business throughout his Paris stay. Through printing Benjamin Franklin reverted to the earlier culture of Boston and Philadelphia artisans which he had never totally forgotten, even though he had made his name known as a civil servant in Britain, then as a scientist throughout Europe, and finally as a diplomat. Luther Samuel Livingston in his Franklin and his Press at Passy describes how, as early as 1777, Franklin had engaged in the buying of large quantities of type for his own press, as well as for North-American printers, from Parisian type-casters such as the house of Fournier. He set up a printing press in his own home which made it possible for him to print official documents such as passports, and also “bagatelles,” amusing texts he wrote for his pleasure and that of his friends; he also turned to famous Paris printers to help him print pamphlets and broadsides in the last years of the War, such men as Denys Pierre and François Didot (Livingston). Training his grandson as a type-caster may have been an attempt on the part of Benjamin Franklin to start a business making and selling type in North America, thus making sure printers in the United States would no longer have to rely on European type. This may also have been part of
Benny’s more general training as a printer as some printers also were type-casters.

Benny was to be apprenticed to artisans, however he was never treated like a typical French apprentice. In the fall of 1784, his grandfather first hired a type founder (Emeri) “to teach” Benny “to cast types” at his home in Passy. Ever the dutiful child, and the serious-minded student, Bache drew a small document entitled “Explications des machines nécessaires pour la fonte des caractères d’imprimerie par Benjamin Franklin Bache Durant son apprentissage sous Mtre Emeri commencé le 1er Novembre 1784 à Passy” which presented the various tools involved in the casting of type (“cuiller,” “creuset,” etc.). Faced with his new occupation, Benny proved compliant (at least in his diary), though he was also fascinated by reports of assassinations in Passy and nearby Pont de Neuilly. Over this period, his grandfather took him along for natural history lectures, as well as dinners with the Lafayette and other glitterati: Benny’s manual education was to go along with more intellectual pursuits, just as Benjamin Franklin himself had mixed work as an apprentice to his brother with an assiduous reading programme during breaks (he read during meal times, eating sparsely, Franklin, *The Autobiography* 15). The type-casting training itself ended on March 19, leaving Benny two weeks off which he spent sightseeing in Paris. By April 5, Benjamin Franklin Bache was back training to be a printer, this time at the house of the famous printer François-Ambroise Didot, inventor of a new type of printing press, of a new type (the “didot”) and in charge of printing books for the Dauphin (Martin & Chartier 125, 572, Labarre 102-03, Veyrin-Forrer 165-72).

This is a brief but fascinating part of Benjamin Franklin Bache, yet one that has received little attention on the part of his biographers. Although Benny was preserved from the wild world of Parisian apprentices, yet the youth was exposed to the home and workshop of a Paris printer, a bourgeois yet an artisan in the very stratified Paris social context: apprentices and journeymen did not mix with master printers, although the master printers themselves did not belong to the “upper class.” In “Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin,” Robert Darnton reports on a growing antagonism between master printers and their journeymen and apprentices in the eighteenth century (Darnton 75-107). In the diary, Benny speaks highly of the Didots, probably echoing his grandfather’s own admiring words: “Mon Grandpapa a obtenu de Mr. Didot, le meilleur imprimeur de ce siècle...”
[...] de me prendre chez lui quelque temps pour m’enseigner son art. Je
prends mes repas chez lui, et loge chez Mme Le Roy, une amie de mon
grand-père. Je m’y suis rendu aujourd’hui avec mon cousin et j’ai fait
la connaissance de la famille [...] il réunit chez lui la gravure, la forge,
la fonderie et l’imprimerie. C’est une famille à ce qui me paraît fort
agreeable. Les repas sont frugalles (sic)” (Diary April 5). Indeed, the
elder Franklin took great care not to have his grandson mix with
ordinary apprentices as he had him stay with Jean-Baptiste Le Roy, a
member of the Académie des Sciences, a long-time scientific corre-
spontent, and a friend as was Mrs. Le Roy (Chaplin 207, Lopez 212-13).

However, working alongside Didot’s youngest son, Benny became
acquainted with Ancien Régime’s artisan workways, such as special
holidays (the Printers’ Fete) when they did not go to work (Darnton 85,
Bache Diary May 6). After a first “fete” May 6 and 7, 1785, Bache
noted that work was interrupted again for the same reason ten days
later: “dimanche 15, lundi 16, mardi 17, étant fête, il n’y a pas moyen
de faire travailler les ouvriers” (May 15, 16, 17). As this quote suggests,
he may have sensed the social conflict which was then brewing
between masters and workers. Describing social tensions in printers’
workshops, one observer reported in 1788 that workers did not raise
their hats to visitors, spoke rudely to them, smoked on the premises and
delayed projects (Mercier, Tableaux de Paris XII in Chauvet 203). In
1785, when Bache was working a printer’s apprentice, these tensions
crystallized around the issue of pay raises as master printers had raised
their prices, but not wages (Chauvet 195). But there is no sign in the
diary that the youthful Bache sympathized with the workers’ grievances.

During the following weeks, Benny became his grandfather’s
trusted aide, as his cousin Temple was constantly sick: he was put in
charge of overseeing his grandfather’s packing as Franklin was finally
going back to Philadelphia (Diary May 4, 14). Benny returned to Paris
to buy tools for the engraving and types, thanking Didot and Le Roy
for their hospitality (Diary end of May). The cases sent to America
included the Passy press, “typemaking machinery, type, rollers, ink and
paper,” all indicating that Franklin wanted to keep up his printing
activity when back in Pennsylvania (Jenkins). When one reaches June,
the diary becomes one of a mature youth, who takes seriously the
responsibilities granted him by his grandfather: indeed the Castle-
Bache Collection reveal that Benny was still keeping accounts in 1784,
a typical Franklin activity (Bache, “Dépenses”). Although taught to
have the deepest respect for artisans, Benny had also become used to getting along with the nobility and admiring them (Diary May 11), and had developed an intellectual curiosity for the arts which led him to enjoy a last visit to the Comédie Française (Diary April 27). He was now ready to pursue the life of a well-educated artisan in Philadelphia, at ease with both the wealthy and the middling sort, and this is exactly how Benjamin Franklin wanted it.

By the time he arrived in Philadelphia, Benny was judged to be an “Anglo-Frenchman” by his family (Schiff 404). Although he discontinued his diary, Benjamin Franklin Bache kept up his excellent written French through continued use, at least in the two years immediately following his stay in France. This is exemplified in his writing a volume of “Mélanges” which he began in May 1786 (Castle-Bache Collection). The goal of “Mélanges” was to serve as a repository for technical information to which Bache could refer later, as well as for wise sayings “Maximes.” Covered in the notebook were such topics as “L’Oisiveté,” “Anecdotes contre les Médecins,” “Médisance et Calomnie,” “Du Duel,” but a summary of Bache’s religious beliefs was also to be found (“Profession de foi”). By 1787, on the occasion of discussions on ratification of the federal constitution, Bache veered to English, a sign that his involvement in the political affairs of the United States were naturally drawing him to use the local language (“On the Rejection of the Constitution by the State of North Carolina”). However the notebook ended with a few remarks in French on the Études des Belles Lettres de “l’Abbé Rollin,” a classic in French rhetoric which had been reprinted in 1787, as if Bache still considered improving his French (Rollin). But obviously the years 1786 and 1787 were ones of a gradual switch to English language, and to American affairs. On their return to Philadelphia in 1785, Benjamin Franklin had set up a printing and type-founding establishment, which Benny was put in charge of running, after completing his education through a degree from the University of Pennsylvania (the type-founding activity never took off) (Pasley 80, Stagg 61). His grandfather’s death in 1790 is said to have devastated him and he quite logically launched a newspaper in the wake of his death, unsuccessfully applying for government printing (Philadelphia was then the capital of the United States). Initially moderate politically, the newspaper became radical in 1793, just as political divisions were flaring up in the United States, with the French Revolution crystallizing oppositions. The General Advertiser then became the most famous democratic-republican press
organ in the capital, embracing support for the French Revolution, voicing antislavery ideas, and denouncing federalists as tyrants (Elkins & McKitrick 459).

As a conclusion, I would like to examine the possible influence of Bache’s French education on his later radicalism, and also frame this article within my research on the Atlantic world and antislavery. Although in his later career as a newspaper editor, Bache is typically included in the group of “transatlantic radicals” who formed a transnational and cosmopolitan group in Philadelphia in the early 1790s, echoing French revolutionary ideas (Cotlar), yet there is little in his years in France and Switzerland that can be said as having prepared him to become a revolutionary. Jeffrey Pasley suggests that the elder Franklin was in contact in Paris with some of the journalists who later started radical journalism in Paris such as Marat and Brissot (81). Yet Marat wrote to Franklin before he left France in the spring of 1785 only with a view to furthering his current scientific views (Lopez & Herbert 267). As for Brissot, he was always keen on meeting famous Americans because he wanted to emigrate to the United States before the Revolution. One should be cautious not to interpret their actions in the mid-1780s through the lens of their later journalistic and political views.

In spite of his apprenticeship at a Paris printer’s, Benjamin Franklin’s grandson was mainly kept away from the world of workers. Yet the youth was confronted to revolution in Switzerland (Franklin, Papers 37: 682) and to the rigid social divisions at the Didots while his grandfather came back to Philadelphia convinced the republican principles of the American Revolution should be maintained. Although his European education did not train him as a radical, yet his stay in France and Switzerland opened Bache’s mind, and made him very receptive to news from France, all the more so as he was fully bilingual, having been raised in Paris and Geneva in the sensitive years of late childhood and youth when one’s impressions are most vivid and lasting, when they shape us in ways we cannot analyze at the time. He was not bi-cultural, since none of his family members enjoyed French ancestry; but bilingualism creates a sensitivity to, and a deep-seated understanding of, another country (or countries) which is hard to achieve otherwise, as Tom Paine’s ill-fated stay in France was to prove. Consequently Bache’s bilingualism and youthful experiences gave his later pro-French radicalism and trans-nationalism a more concrete
dimension, with potential revolutionary consequences (Bahtia & Ritchie). Yet the Castle-Bache Collection, which contains most of Bache’s papers, does not include correspondence with French revolutionaries. Elkins and McKitrick suggest Bache’s paper published letters by French diplomats based in the United States when crisis between France and the United States was looming in 1796, which might indicate he was in contact with them personally (Elkins & McKitrick 520). It would be worth researching this connection in the French diplomatic archives.

However I did not start this research out of an interest in Bache. Originally, I wanted to examine the kind of coverage American newspapers gave of the French abolition of slavery of 1794. Through the use of the “Early American Newspapers” database, I realized that Bache’s paper, The General Advertiser was more thorough than any other newspaper in covering this topic, that it published the translation of debates on the abolition of slavery held in the French National Assembly, as well as the translation of decrees by French authorities in islands where slaves had been freed such as Saint-Domingue (where they had mainly freed themselves) and Guadeloupe, where Victor Hugues had brought the good news. At a time when the debate on the abolition of slavery had not yet been shelved in the United States, but was certainly not very high on the political agenda of either party, Bache’s was a lone voice in trying to reopen the debate through his giving publicity to the French initiative. That is the reason why I was led to investigate his early years in France: his French education and bilingualism, training at an apprentice in Paris, and later political radicalism may have made him more open to follow the French in their brief attempt at trans-racial, universal, republicanism than many of his fellow Democratic-Republicans. But to this day, this remains a matter of speculation, pending further investigation.

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