

10002

The only known copy of

Samuel Keimer's *Elegy on the Death of Aquila Rose*

**Benjamin Franklin's first known
Philadelphia printing job 1723**

Composed directly in type (without intervening recourse to pen and paper) by Philadelphia's most eccentric printer-poet (Samuel Keimer) about the city's second most famous journeyman (Aquila Rose, poet and secretary to the Assembly) and worked off by the city's most famous printer and man of letters (Benjamin Franklin). As such, an extraordinary broadside of great importance in the history of American printing, uniquely representing the place of early Philadelphia printers in the development of colonial belles-lettres.

Carmen D. Valentino
Rare Books & Manuscripts

SAMUEL KEIMER

was “a significant force in early American printing. Between 1722 and 1729 he published pirated editions of Jacob Taylor’s and Titan Leeds’s almanacs and reprinted Sir Richard Steele’s *The Crisis*, William Penn’s *Charter of Privileges of 1701*, an English dictionary, and two histories, one of Diodorus Siculus, and the other of the wars of Charles XII of Sweden. In addition, he issued Epictetus’s *Morals*, the first translation of a Latin or Greek classic in America; printed William Sewel’s *History of the Quakers*, with Franklin’s assistance; and was largely responsible for introducing Daniel Defoe’s works to Pennsylvania” (*American National Biography*, 1999, 12: 457). Samuel Keimer printed in Philadelphia from 1723 to 1730. In the latter year he sold his printing office to David Harry and emigrated to Barbados.

From the first forty years of Philadelphia printing, 1686-1725, only twenty-three broadsides were known to survive before the discovery of Keimer’s *Elegy*. Of these, nineteen survive in unique exemplars. Five of these nineteen carry Samuel Keimer’s imprint or have been attributed to Keimer’s printing office, viz. Evans 2577, Evans 3044, Bristol B656, Bristol B657, and Bristol B704.

Samuel Keimer’s *Elegy on the Death of Aquila Rose* was his first American publication. Until its re-discovery, only fifty of Keimer’s American imprints were known to survive in at least one copy—while an additional item is currently known only through the photostat of a fragment. Of these fifty-one items, twenty are known from unique exemplars—not all of which are complete; nine are known to exist in only two copies; and seven are known to exist in only three copies.

Aquila Rose, who “[t]hough he lived in Philadelphia for little more than six years . . . had a significant impact on the development of literary culture there. His charismatic personality and educated tastes attracted others with interest in belles-lettres into an informal company gathering for the exchange of ideas and poetry. This group, the first circle of belletrists in Philadelphia, included such notables as William Allen, David French, Jacob Taylor, [Joseph] Breintnall, and [Gov. William] Keith” (*American National Biography*, 1999, 18: 857)—and provided a model for the young Benjamin Franklin’s subsequent organizational successes in the same field.

Elegy on the Death of Aquila Rose

The circumstances surrounding the composition and printing of this broadside entered the annals of American literature and history when Franklin told the story of his arrival in Philadelphia in his *Autobiography*: After breaking his articles of apprenticeship to his older brother and master James Franklin in 1723, young Benjamin sailed for New York. Over four decades later, Franklin recalled that upon reaching New York,

My Inclinations for the Sea, were by this time worn out, or I might now have gratify'd them.—But having a Trade, & supposing my self a pretty good Workman, I offer'd my Service to the Printer of the Place, old Mr Wm. Bradford.—He could give me no Employment, having little to do, and Help enough already: But, says he, my Son at Philadelphia has lately lost his principal Hand, Aquila Rose, by Death. If you go thither I believe he may employ you.—Philadelphia was 100 Miles farther. I set out, however [. . . Now in Philadelphia:] After Dinner my Sleepiness return'd: and being shewn to a Bed, I lay down without undressing, and slept till Six in the Evening; was call'd to Supper; went to Bed again very early and slept soundly till the next Morning. Then I made my self as tidy as I could, and went to Andrew Bradford the Printer's.—I found in the Shop the old Man his Father, whom I had seen at New York, and who travelling on horse back had got to Philadelphia before me.—He introduc'd me to his Son, who receiv'd me civilly, gave me a Breakfast, but told me he did not at present want a Hand, being lately supply'd with one. But there was another Printer in town lately set up, one Keimer, who perhaps might employ me; if not, I should be welcome to lodge at his House, & he would give me a little Work to do now & then till fuller Business should offer. The old Gentleman said, he would go with me to the new Printer: And when we found him, Neighbour, says Bradford, I have brought to see you a young Man of your Business, perhaps you

may want such a One. He ask'd me a few Questions, put a Composing Stick in my Hand to see how I work'd, and then said he would employ me soon, tho' he had just then nothing for me to do. And taking old Bradford whom he had never seen before, to be one of the Towns People that had a Good Will for him, enter'd into a Conversation on his present Undertaking & Prospects; while Bradford not discovering that he was the other Printer's Father; on Keimer's Saying he expected soon to get the greatest Part of the Business into his own Hands, drew him on by artful Questions and starting little Doubts, to explain all his Views, what Interest he rely'd on, & in what manner he intended to proceed.—I who stood by & heard all, saw immediately that one of them was a crafty old Sophister, and the other a mere Novice. Bradford left me with Keimer, who was greatly surpriz'd when I told him who the old Man was. Keimer's Printing House I found, consisted of an old shatter'd Press, and one small worn-out Fount of English, which he was then using himself, composing in it an Elegy on Aquila Rose before-mentioned, an ingenious young Man of excellent Character much respected in the Town, Clerk of the Assembly, & a pretty Poet. Keimer made Verses, too, but very indifferently.—He could not be said to write them, for his Manner was to compose them in the Types directly out of his Head; so there being no Copy, but one Pair of Cases, and the Elegy like to require all the Letter, no one could help him.—I endeavour'd to put his Press (which he had not yet us'd, & of which he understood nothing) into Order fit to be work'd with; & promising to come & print off his Elegy as soon as he should have got it ready, I return'd to Bradford's who gave me a little Job to do for the present, & there I lodged & dined. A few Days after Keimer sent for me to print off the Elegy. And now he had got another Pair of Cases, and a Pamphlet to reprint, on which he set me to work.—”



A N E L E G Y

On the much Lamented DEATH of the INGENIOUS and WELL-BELOV'D

AQUILLA ROSE,

CLERK to the Honourable ASSEMBLY at Philadelphia, who died the 24th of the 6th Month, 1725. Aged 28.

WHAT Mourning Accents thus aloud raise,
 What doleful Echoes hourly thus appear?
 What Sighs from melting Hearts proclaim aloud,
 The solemn Mourning of this numerous Crowd?
 In Sable CHARACTERS the News is Read,
 Our ROSE is wither'd, and our EAGLE's dead,
 In that our dear AQUILLA ROSE is dead,
 Cropp'd in the Blooming of his precious Youth:
 Who can forbear to weep at such a Truth!
 Assist ye Philadelphians with Consent,
 And join with me to give our Sorrows Vent,
 That having wept till Tears shall trickling glide,
 Like Streams to Delaware from Sebolyki Side,
 My painful Muse being eas'd may then rehearse,
 Between each Sob, in Elegiac Verse,
 (And in soft Numbers warble forth Desire,)
 To breath his Worth, warm'd with Angelick Fire,
 But why do my ambitious Thoughts presume
 To span the glorious Sun, or grasp the Moon:
 The Task confounds! But yet I dare begin
 To call my Muse as humble Off ring in,
 That nobler Bands in Strains more lofty may
 Conspire to sing praises and heavy Lots display,
 To distant Climes, where his Great Worth was known,
 That they to us may echo back a Groan.
 For there are those bright Youths, who when they hear
 The dismal Tying, to his Worth reverse,
 In melting flood Strains will then rehearse
 The Praise of Him who constitutes our Verse.
 Belov'd he was by most, his very Name,
 Oath with deep Silence his great Worth proclaim,
 As if Kind Heavens had Secrets to disclose,
 By Royal Terms of Eagle and a Rose,
 The Arms most near akin to England's Crown,
 Each Royal Emblem this sweet Truth does own,
 And lively noble Images affords,
 One's Queen of Flowers, the Other King of Birds.
 His Qualities will next bespeak his Fame,
 A Lovely POET whose sweet fragrant Name
 Will last till circling Years shall cease to be,
 And sink in vast profound Eternity.
 His flowing Numbers and his lofty Rhimes
 Have breath'd, and spoke his Thoughts, thro' every Line,
 So warm'd my Soul (and oh inspire my Tongue,
 As if a Chorus by a Seraph sing,
 A generous Mind would his all his Friends he bore,
 Scarce one he had, but daily humbly more,
 Some say he'd Foes, his Foes I never knew,
 Who spoke ill of him, mostly spoke untrue,
 Courteous, and humble, pleasant, just and wise,
 No Affection vain did in him rise,
 Sincere, and plain, (I make not any Doubt,
 He was the same Within-Silence Within,
 He lov'd plain Truth, but hated formal Case
 In those who Truth and Honesty did want,
 A curious Artist at his Business, he
 Could Think, and Speak, Compose, Correct so free,
 To make a Dead Man speak, or Blind to see,
 Of different learned Tongues, he somewhat knew,
 The French, the Latin, Greek and Hebrew too.

Firm to his Vows, a tender Husband prov'd,
 And Father-like, his Princely Babe he lov'd,
 Our Wife and Great Vice-Roy did him respect,
 Our learned Mayor (I know) DID him affect,
 Our grave Assembly voted him most fit,
 Their wife Debates in Writing to commit,
 By which great Honour they did clearly shew,
 To Write, as well as Print, he fully knew,
 And what was still more Great, and worthy Note,
 (Its said) they gave him too a casting Vote.
 But stop my Muse, and give thy Sorrows vent,
 Such Sorrows which in Hearts of Friends are pent,
 Search deep for Sighs and Groans in Nature's Store,
 Then weep so long, till thou canst weep no more,
 Next summons all thy Strength, and others call,
 To tell his Death, and solemn Funeral.
 While on his Death-Bed, oh, Dear- Lord, he cry'd,
 He sang, and sweetly like a Lamb, he dy'd,
 His Corps attended, was, by Friends so soon
 From Seven at Morn, till One a-clock at Noon,
 By Matter Printers, carried towards his Grave,
 Our City-Printer such an Honour gave,
 A Worthy Merchant did the Widow lead,
 And then both mounted on a stately Steed,
 Next Preachers, Common-Council, Aldermen,
 A Judge and Sheriff, grac'd the solemn Train,
 Nor fail'd our Treasurers, in Respect to come,
 Nor said the Keeper of the ROLES at home,
 Our aged Post-Master here now appears,
 Who had not walk'd so far for twice-Twelve Years,
 With Merchants, Shopkeepers, the Young and Old,
 A numerous Throng, not very easy told,
 The Keeper of the S.E.A.L. did on Him wait,
 Thus was he carry'd like a King, — in State,
 And what still adds a further Lustre to't,
 Some rode well mounted, others walk'd afoot,
 Church-Folks, Dissenters, here with one Accord,
 Their kind Attendance readily afford,
 To shew their Love; each differing Sect agree,
 To grace his Funeral with their Company,
 And what was yet more grateful, People cry'd,
 Belov'd he lov'd, See how belov'd he dy'd.
 When to the crowded Meeting he was bore,
 I wept so long till I could weep no more,
 While beautiful LIGHT FOOT did, like Noah's Dove,
 Sweetly display God's Universal Love,
 His Words like Balm (or Drops of Honey) laid,
 To heal those Wounds Grief in my Heart had made,
 Three other Preachers did their Task fulfill,
 The Loving Chalkley, and the Lowly Hill,
 The famous Langdale did the Sermons end,
 For this our highly honour'd, worthy Friend,
 And now with Joy, with holy Joy we'll leave,
 His Body resting in his peaceful Grave,
 His Soul in the bless'd Arms of ONE above,
 Whose brightest Character is that of LOVE.
 A GOD that's slow to mark what's done amiss,
 Who would not serve so dear a GOD as this!
 In whose kind, gracious lovely Arms we'll leave him,
 For HE that bought him, has most Right to have him.

Philadelphia: Printed, and Sold by S. Kears in High-street. (Price Two-Pence.)