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.

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 bellettrists in Philadelphia, included such notables as William Allen, David French, Jacob Taylor, [Joseph] Breinna, and [Gov. William] Keith" (American National Biography, 1999, 18: 837)—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 shown 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 shutter'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. —
AN ELEGY
AQUILA ROSE,

Who died the 4th of the 6th Month, 1737.

To the much lamented Death of the Insignious and Well-belov'd

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