ASTRONOMY DURING THE EARLY YEARS OF THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

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"It was not without being sensible how very unequal I am to the undertaking that I first consented to comply with the request of several gentlemen for whom I have the highest esteem, and to solicit your attention to a subject which an able hand might indeed render both entertaining and instructive. I mean astronomy." These words are not my own but rather they were spoken by David Rittenhouse in an "Oration" delivered on February 24, 1775, before the American Philosophical Society. According to the minutes of the society, the oration was delivered in the college "to a crowded audience, consisting of his Honor the Governor of the Province, the Assembly, and a great number of gentlemen of the first distinction, besides the members of the Society." Moreover, the oration was dedicated "To the delegates of the Thirteen Colonies, assembled in Congress at Philadelphia, to whom the future liberties, and consequently the virtue, improvement in science and happiness in America are intrusted."

Again to quote the words of Rittenhouse:

Astronomy, like the Christian religion, if you will allow me the comparison, has a much greater influence on our knowledge in general, and perhaps on our manners, too,
Editor's Summary

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