



# Robert Morris's Folly (The Lewis Walpole Series in Eighteenth-C)

*Ryan K. Smith*

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In 1798 Robert Morris—"financier of the American Revolution," confidant of George Washington, former U.S. senator—plunged from the peaks of wealth and prestige into debtors' prison and public contempt. How could one of the richest men in the United States, one of only two founders who signed the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, *and* the Constitution, suffer such a downfall?

This book examines for the first time the extravagant Philadelphia town house Robert Morris built and its role in bringing about his ruin. Part biography, part architectural history, the book recounts Morris's wild successes as a merchant, his recklessness as a land speculator, and his unrestrained passion in building his palatial, doomed mansion, once hailed as the most expensive private building in the United States but later known as "Morris's Folly." Setting Morris's tale in the context of the nation's founding, this volume refocuses attention on an essential yet nearly forgotten American figure while also illuminating the origins of America's ongoing, ambivalent attitudes toward the superwealthy and their sensational excesses.

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