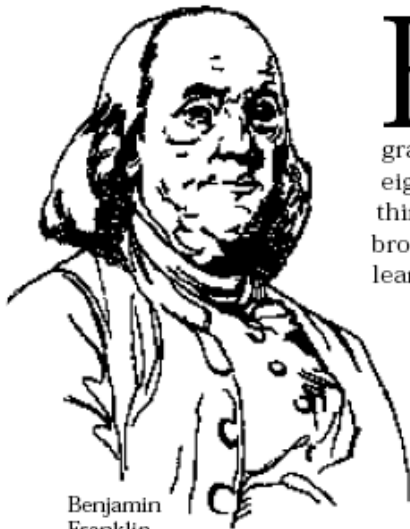


BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (1706-1790)



Benjamin
Franklin

Benjamin Franklin was born on January 17, 1706. He was the fifteenth child and the tenth son. He attended grammar school from the age of eight until age ten. At the age of thirteen he was apprenticed to his brother James, from whom he learned the printing trade. In 1721, he began to deliver newspapers for his brother's paper, the *New England Courant*, during the day and compose articles at night. The articles were published anonymously, but many saw the articles as offensive, consequently James Franklin was impris-

oned for a month, and the paper appeared under Benjamin's name for a short time.

In October 1723, after a disagreement with his brother, Benjamin left Boston and arrived soon after in Philadelphia. Later, in 1724, he went to London to procure printing equipment. Franklin finally returned in October 1726 to Philadelphia and eventually opened his own printing shop. The next year he organized *Junta*, a discussion group that later became the *American Philosophical Society*. Franklin purchased the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1729 and with his style and wit turned it into an informative and entertaining weekly newspaper.

Franklin was active in many public projects. He founded what was probably the first public library in America; it was later chartered as the *Philadelphia Library* in 1742. In 1732 Franklin published *Poor Richards Almanack* under the name *Richard Saunders*. It was very popular and full of practical wisdom. He was later named clerk of the *Pennsylvania General Assembly* and postmaster of Philadelphia. His interest in scientific studies led him to develop the lightning rod and, in 1744, the Franklin stove. He also developed the "one fluid" theory in explaining the two kinds of electricity, positive and negative. Franklin left his printing business and in 1750 was elected to the *Pennsylvania Assembly* where he served until 1764.

He held the position of Postmaster General for the colonies beginning in 1753, and served as a delegate to the intercolonial Albany Congress which met to discuss methods to deal with the dreaded French and Indian War. He developed the Albany Plan of Union, which many have said was a precursor of the United States Constitution. The Albany Plan of Union "provided for local independence within the framework of colonial union", but was too far ahead of public thinking to win approval. Franklin believed that had the plan been adopted, the American Revolution would have been averted.

In 1757 Franklin went to London as a representative of the Pennsylvania Assembly to persuade the proprietors to allow their Pennsylvania lands to be taxed. He remained in England five years after the completion of his mission as a representative of the colonies. Franklin returned to Philadelphia in 1762 and remained until 1764 when he returned to England as an agent for Pennsylvania. He became divided over his loyalty to his native land and his loyalty to Great Britain. After exhausting all conciliatory efforts Franklin returned to Philadelphia in 1775, acknowledging the inevitability of war. He soon became a member of the Second Continental Congress where he served on ten of its committees, and was later named Postmaster General of the United States. He also was a member of the Committee of Five to draft the Declaration of Independence and became one of its signers.

Later, as a diplomat to France, Franklin obtained liberal grants and loans from Louis XVI of France, and he helped negotiate a treaty of alliance and commerce. In 1781 Franklin and John Jay were appointed to negotiate a peace treaty with England. On September 3, 1783, the Treaty of Paris was signed at Versailles.

Franklin left his duties in France during March 1785, and upon his return to America was chosen as President of the Pennsylvania Executive Council, serving from 1785 to 1787. Franklin was then elected as a delegate to the convention which produced the Constitution of the United States of America. One of Franklin's last public acts was a petition to Congress on February 12, 1790 urging the abolition of slavery and the suppression of the slave trade.

In April of that year, Franklin died in Philadelphia at his home.