



Benjamin Franklin: Founding Father

Presented by The Westlake 9/12 Project

- “They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.”
- “Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”
- “Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing.”
- “In wine there is wisdom, in beer there is Freedom, in water there is bacteria.”
- “We are all born ignorant, but one must work hard to remain stupid.”

- “In those wretched countries where a man cannot call his tongue his own, he can scarce call anything his own. Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freeness of speech ... Without freedom of thought there can be no such thing as wisdom, and no such thing as public liberty without freedom of speech, which is the right of every man ... ~ Silence Dogood No. 8, 1722.

INTRODUCTION

- Benjamin Franklin was a leading writer, printer, political philosopher, politician, Freemason, postmaster, scientist, inventor, humorist, civic activist, statesman, and diplomat.
- Benjamin Franklin was born on Milk Street, in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 17, 1706, and baptized at Old South Meeting House.
- Benjamin Franklin's father, Josiah Franklin, was a tallow chandler, a soaper and candle maker. Benjamin was Josiah Franklin's fifteenth child and tenth and last son.

EARLY YEARS

- Josiah Franklin wanted his son Benjamin to attend school with the clergy, but only had enough money to send him to school for two years. He attended Boston Latin School but did not graduate; he continued his education through voracious reading. His schooling ended when he was ten.
- At 12, Franklin became an apprentice to his brother James, a printer, who taught Ben the printing trade. When Ben was 15, James founded *The New-England Courant*, which was the first truly independent newspaper in the colonies
- When denied the chance to write a letter to his brother's newspaper for publication, Franklin adopted the pseudonym of "Silence Dogood", a middle-aged widow. Mrs. Dogood's letters were published, and became a subject of conversation around town.

EARLY YEARS

- At age 17, Franklin ran away to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, seeking a new start in a new city. When he first arrived, he worked in several printer shops around town, but he was not satisfied by the immediate prospects.
- At age 17 in 1723, Franklin proposed to 15-year-old Deborah Read while a boarder in the Read home. Her mother declined Franklin's request, and so she married John Rodgers, who deserted her. Franklin established a common-law marriage with Deborah Read on September 1, 1730. They took in Franklin's recently acknowledged young illegitimate son, William, and raised him in their household. They had two children together.

EARLY YEARS

- Their son, Francis Folger Franklin, was born in October 1732 and died of smallpox in 1736. Their daughter, Sarah "Sally" Franklin, was born in 1743 and grew up to marry Richard Bache, have seven children, and look after her father in his old age.
- While working in a printing house, Franklin was convinced by Pennsylvania Governor Sir William Keith to go to London, ostensibly to acquire the equipment necessary for establishing another newspaper in Philadelphia.
- Finding Keith's promises of backing a newspaper empty, Franklin worked as a typesetter in a printer's shop in what is now the Church of St Bartholomew-the-Great in the Smithfield area of London.

EARLY YEARS

- He returned to Philadelphia in 1726 with the help of Thomas Denham, a merchant who employed Franklin as clerk, shopkeeper, and bookkeeper in his business.
- In 1727, Benjamin Franklin, then 21, created the Junto, a group of "like minded aspiring artisans and tradesmen who hoped to improve themselves while they improved their community." Reading was a great pastime of the Junto, but books were rare and expensive. The members created a library initially assembled from their own books on Franklin's urging. Franklin soon conceived the idea of a subscription library, which would pool the funds of the members to buy books for all to read.

EARLY YEARS

- Franklin's idea was the birth of the Library Company of Philadelphia: its charter was composed by Franklin in 1731. In 1732, Franklin hired the first American librarian, Louis Timothee.
- The Library Company is now a great scholarly and research library.
- In 1728, Franklin had set up a printing house in partnership with Hugh Meredith; the following year he became the publisher of a newspaper called The Pennsylvania Gazette.
- In 1730 or 1731, Franklin was initiated into the local Masonic lodge. He became a Grand Master in 1734, indicating his rapid rise to prominence in Pennsylvania.

EARLY YEARS

- In 1732, Ben Franklin published the first German-language newspaper in America.
- In 1733, Franklin began to publish the noted *Poor Richard's Almanack*.
- In 1741, Franklin began publishing *The General Magazine and Historical Chronicle for all the British Plantations in America*, the first such monthly magazine of this type published in America.
- In 1758, the year he ceased writing for the Almanack, he printed *Father Abraham's Sermon*, also known as *The Way to Wealth*. Franklin's autobiography, begun in 1771 but published after his death, has become one of the classics of the genre.

RELIGION

- Franklin's parents were both pious Puritans. The family attended the Old South Church, the most liberal Puritan congregation in Boston, where Benjamin Franklin was baptized in 1706.
- Although Franklin's parents had intended for him to have a career in the Church, Franklin as a young man adopted the Enlightenment religious belief in deism, that God's truths can be found entirely through nature and reason.
- Franklin retained a lifelong commitment to the Puritan virtues and political values he had grown up with, and through his civic work and publishing, he succeeded in passing these values into the American culture permanently.

RELIGION

- Franklin had a "passion for virtue". These Puritan values included his devotion to egalitarianism, education, industry, thrift, honesty, temperance, charity and community spirit.
- Franklin formulated a presentation of his beliefs and published it in 1728. It did not mention many of the Puritan ideas regarding salvation, the divinity of Jesus, or indeed much religious dogma.
- He clarified himself as a deist in his 1771 autobiography, although still considered himself a Christian. He retained a strong faith in a God as the wellspring of morality and goodness in man, and as a Providential actor in history responsible for American independence.

RELIGION

- After the disillusioning experience of seeing the decay in his own moral standards, and those of two friends in London whom he had converted to Deism, Franklin turned back to a belief in the importance of organized religion, on the pragmatic grounds that without God and organized churches, man will not be good.
- Moreover, because of his proposal that prayers be said in the Constitutional Convention of 1787, many have contended that in his later life Franklin became a pious Christian.

RELIGION

- Franklin saw the printing press as a device to instruct colonial Americans in moral virtue. He saw this as a service to God, because he understood moral virtue in terms of actions, thus, doing good provides a service to God.
- Like the other advocates of republicanism, Franklin emphasized that the new republic could survive only if the people were virtuous. All his life he explored the role of civic and personal virtue, as expressed in Poor Richard's aphorisms. Franklin felt that organized religion was necessary to keep men good to their fellow men, but rarely attended religious services himself.

RELIGION

- Franklin was an enthusiastic supporter of the evangelical minister George Whitefield during the First Great Awakening. Franklin did not subscribe to Whitefield's theology, but he admired Whitefield for exhorting people to worship God through good works.
- Franklin published all of Whitefield's sermons and journals, thereby earning a lot of money and boosting the Great Awakening.

RELIGION

- Franklin sought to cultivate his character by a plan of 13 virtues, which he developed at age 20 (in 1726) and continued to practice in some form for the rest of his life. His autobiography lists his 13 virtues as:
 - "Temperance. Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation."
 - "Silence. Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation."
 - "Order. Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time."
 - "Resolution. Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve."
 - "Frugality. Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing."

RELIGION

- "Industry. Lose no time; be always employ'd in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions."
- "Sincerity. Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly."
- "Justice. Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty."
- "Moderation. Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve."
- "Cleanliness. Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes, or habitation."
- "Tranquility. Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable."
- "Chastity. Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation."
- "Humility. Imitate Jesus and Socrates."

PUBLIC LIFE

- Franklin was appointed postmaster of Philadelphia in 1737, holding the office until 1753, when he and publisher William Hunter were named deputy postmasters–general of British North America, the first to hold the office. On July 26, 1775, the Second Continental Congress established the United States Post Office and named Benjamin Franklin as the first United States Postmaster General.
- Franklin became involved in Philadelphia politics and rapidly progressed. In October 1748, he was selected as a councilman, in June 1749 he became a Justice of the Peace for Philadelphia, and in 1751 he was elected to the Pennsylvania Assembly.

PUBLIC LIFE

- In 1751, Franklin and Thomas Bond obtained a charter from the Pennsylvania legislature to establish a hospital. Pennsylvania Hospital was the first hospital in what was to become the United States of America.
- In 1752, Franklin organized the Philadelphia Contributionship, the first homeowner's insurance company in what would become the United States.
- On August 10, 1753, Franklin was appointed deputy postmaster-general of British North America. His most notable service in domestic politics was his reform of the postal system, with mail sent out every week.

PUBLIC LIFE

- In 1754, he headed the Pennsylvania delegation to the Albany Congress. This meeting of several colonies had been requested by the Board of Trade in England to improve relations with the Indians and defense against the French.
- As part of the delegation to the Albany Congress, Franklin proposed a broad Plan of Union for the colonies. While the plan was not adopted, elements of it found their way into the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution.
- Later in 1756, Franklin organized the Pennsylvania Militia. He used Tun Tavern as a gathering place to recruit a regiment of soldiers to go into battle against the Native American uprisings that beset the American colonies.

PUBLIC LIFE

- In 1757, Franklin was sent to England by the Pennsylvania Assembly as a colonial agent to protest against the political influence of the Penn family, the proprietors of the colony. He remained there for five years, striving to end the proprietors' prerogative to overturn legislation from the elected Assembly, and their exemption from paying taxes on their land. His lack of influential allies in Whitehall led to the failure of this mission.
- In London, Franklin opposed the 1765 Stamp Act. Unable to prevent its passage, he made another political miscalculation and recommended a friend to the post of stamp distributor for Pennsylvania.

PUBLIC LIFE

- Pennsylvanians were outraged by what they perceived as his lack of opposition to the Stamp Act, and threatened to destroy his home in Philadelphia. Franklin soon learned of the extent of colonial resistance to the Stamp Act, and he testified during the House of Commons proceedings that led to its repeal.
- With this, Franklin suddenly emerged as the leading spokesman for American interests in England. He wrote popular essays on behalf of the colonies. Georgia, New Jersey, and Massachusetts also appointed him as their agent to the Crown.

PUBLIC LIFE

- The Pennsylvania Assembly unanimously chose Franklin as their delegate to the Second Continental Congress.
- In June 1776, he was appointed a member of the Committee of Five that drafted the Declaration of Independence.
- In December 1776, Franklin was dispatched to France as commissioner for the United States. Franklin remained in France until 1785. He conducted the affairs of his country toward the French nation with great success, which included securing a critical military alliance in 1778 and negotiating the Treaty of Paris (1783).

PUBLIC LIFE

- Franklin's advocacy for religious tolerance in France contributed to arguments made by French philosophers and politicians that resulted in Louis XVI's signing of the Edict of Versailles in November 1787.
- Franklin also served as American minister to Sweden, although he never visited that country.
- When he returned home in 1785, Franklin occupied a position only second to that of George Washington as the champion of American independence. After his return, Franklin became an abolitionist and freed his two slaves. He eventually became president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society.

PUBLIC LIFE

- Special balloting conducted October 18, 1785, unanimously elected Franklin the sixth president of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, replacing John Dickinson. The office was practically that of governor. Franklin held that office for slightly over three years, longer than any other, and served the constitutional limit of three full terms.
- In 1787, Franklin served as a delegate to the Philadelphia Convention. He held an honorary position and seldom engaged in debate. He is the only Founding Father who is a signatory of all four of the major documents of the founding of the United States: the Declaration of Independence, the Treaty of Alliance with France, the Treaty of Paris and the United States Constitution.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- As a scientist, Franklin was a major figure in the American Enlightenment and the history of physics for his discoveries and theories regarding electricity. In recognition of his work with electricity, Franklin received the Royal Society's Copley Medal in 1753, and in 1756, he became one of the few 18th-century Americans elected as a Fellow of the Society.
- Franklin was a prodigious inventor. Among his many creations were the lightning rod, glass harmonica (a glass instrument, not to be confused with the metal harmonica), Franklin stove, bifocal glasses and the flexible urinary catheter. Franklin never patented his inventions; he believed that the benefits derived from his inventions belonged to the public.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- He founded many civic organizations, including the Library Company, and Philadelphia's first fire department.
- Franklin became a successful newspaper editor and printer in Philadelphia, the leading city in the colonies, publishing the *Pennsylvania Gazette* at the age of 23.
- He became wealthy publishing this and *Poor Richard's Almanack*, which he authored under the pseudonym "Richard Saunders".
- He pioneered and was first president of Academy and College of Philadelphia which opened in 1751 and later became the University of Pennsylvania.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- He organized and was the first secretary of the American Philosophical Society and was elected president in 1769.
- Franklin had a major influence on the emerging science of demography, or population studies. In the 1730s and 1740s, Franklin began taking notes on population growth, finding that the American population had the fastest growth rate on earth. In 1751, he drafted *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.* Four years later, it was anonymously printed in Boston, and it was quickly reproduced in Britain, where it influenced the economist Adam Smith and later the demographer Thomas Malthus, who credited Franklin for discovering a rule of population growth.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Benjamin Franklin, in his capacity as a farmer, wrote at least one critique about the negative consequences of price controls, trade restrictions and subsidy of the poor. This is succinctly preserved in his letter to the London Chronicle published November 29, 1766 titled 'On the Price of Corn, and Management of the poor'.
- Franklin was, along with his contemporary Leonhard Euler, the only major scientist who supported Christiaan Huygens's wave theory of light, which was basically ignored by the rest of the scientific community.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- While deputy postmaster, Franklin became interested in the North Atlantic Ocean circulation patterns. While in England in 1768, he heard a complaint from the Colonial Board of Customs: Why did it take British packet ships carrying mail several weeks longer to reach New York than it took an average merchant ship to reach Newport, Rhode Island? The merchantmen had a longer and more complex voyage because they left from London, while the packets left from Falmouth in Cornwall.
- Franklin put the question to his cousin Timothy Folger, a Nantucket whaler captain, who told him that merchant ships routinely avoided a strong eastbound mid-ocean current. The mail packet captains sailed dead into it, thus fighting an adverse current of 3 miles per hour.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Franklin worked with Folger and other experienced ship captains, learning enough to chart the current and name it the Gulf Stream, by which it is still known today. Franklin published his Gulf Stream chart in 1770 in England, where it was completely ignored.
- In 1853, the oceanographer and cartographer Matthew Fontaine Maury noted that while Franklin charted and codified the Gulf Stream, he did not discover it.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- On October 21, 1743, Franklin deduced that storms do not always travel in the direction of the prevailing wind, a concept that greatly influenced meteorology. On October 21, 1743, according to popular myth, a storm moving from the southwest denied Franklin the opportunity of witnessing a lunar eclipse. Franklin was said to have noted that the prevailing winds were actually from the northeast, contrary to what he had expected. In correspondence with his brother, Franklin learned that the same storm had not reached Boston until after the eclipse, despite the fact that Boston is to the northeast of Philadelphia. He deduced that storms do not always travel in the direction of the prevailing wind, a concept that greatly influenced meteorology.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Franklin noted a principle of refrigeration by observing that on a very hot day, he stayed cooler in a wet shirt in a breeze than he did in a dry one.
- To understand this phenomenon more clearly Franklin conducted experiments. In 1758 on a warm day in Cambridge, England, Franklin and fellow scientist John Hadley experimented by continually wetting the ball of a mercury thermometer with ether and using bellows to evaporate the ether. With each subsequent evaporation, the thermometer read a lower temperature, eventually reaching 7 °F ;, while nother thermometer showed that the room temperature was constant at 65 °F.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- An aging Franklin accumulated all his oceanographic findings in *Maritime Observations*, published by the Philosophical Society's transactions in 1786. It contained ideas for sea anchors, catamaran hulls, watertight compartments, shipboard lightning rods and a soup bowl designed to stay stable in stormy weather.
- In a 1772 letter to Joseph Priestley, Franklin lays out the earliest known description of the Pro & Con list, a common decision-making technique, now sometimes called a decisional balance sheet.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- While traveling on a ship, Franklin had observed that the wake of a ship was diminished when the cooks dumped their greasy water overboard. He studied the effects on a large pond in London. "I fetched out a cruet of oil and dropt a little of it on the water ... though not more than a teaspoon full, produced an instant calm over a space of several yards square." He later used the trick to "calm the waters" by carrying "a little oil in the hollow joint of my cane"
- Franklin is known to have played the violin, the harp, and the guitar. He also composed music, notably a string quartet in early classical style. While he was in London, he developed a much-improved version of the glass harmonica, in which the glasses rotate on a shaft, with the player's fingers held steady, instead of the other way around.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Franklin was an avid chess player. Franklin was inducted into the U.S. Chess Hall of Fame in 1999. The Franklin Mercantile Chess Club in Philadelphia, the second oldest chess club in the U.S., is named in his honor.
- In 1736, Franklin created the Union Fire Company, one of the first volunteer firefighting companies in America. In the same year, he printed a new currency for New Jersey based on innovative anti-counterfeiting techniques he had devised. Throughout his career, Franklin was an advocate for paper money.
- While living in London in 1768, he developed a phonetic alphabet in *A Scheme for a new Alphabet and a Reformed Mode of Spelling*. This alphabet never caught on, and he eventually lost interest

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Between 1750 and 1753, the "educational triumvirate" of Benjamin Franklin, the American Samuel Johnson of Stratford, Connecticut, and the immigrant Scottish schoolteacher William Smith built on Franklin's initial scheme and created what Bishop James Madison, president of the College of William & Mary, called a "new-model" plan or style of American college.
- Franklin solicited, printed in 1752, and promoted an American textbook of moral philosophy by Samuel Johnson, titled *Elementa Philosophica*, to be taught in the new colleges to replace courses in denominational divinity.
- In June 1753, Johnson, Franklin, and Smith met in Stratford. They decided the new-model college would focus on the professions, with classes taught in English instead of Latin, have subject matter experts as professors instead of one tutor leading a class for four years, and there would be no religious test for admission.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Johnson went on to found King's College (now Columbia University) in New York City in 1754, while Franklin hired Smith as Provost of the College of Philadelphia, which opened in 1755.
- At its first commencement, on May 17, 1757, seven men graduated; six with a Bachelor of Arts and one as Master of Arts. It was later merged with the University of the State of Pennsylvania to become the University of Pennsylvania. The College was to become influential in guiding the founding documents of the United States: in the Continental Congress, for example, over one third of the college-affiliated men who contributed the Declaration of Independence between September 4, 1774, and July 4, 1776, were affiliated with the College.

FRANKLIN ON SLAVERY

- Franklin owned as many as seven slaves, two males who worked in his household and his shop. Franklin posted paid ads for the sale of slaves and for the capture of runaway slaves and allowed the sale of slaves in his general store.
- Franklin profited from both the international and domestic slave trade, even criticizing slaves who had run off to join the British Army during the colonial wars of the 1740s and 1750s.
- Franklin, however, later became a "cautious abolitionist" and became an outspoken critic of landed gentry slavery.
- In 1758, Franklin advocated the opening of a school for the education of black slaves in Philadelphia.

FRANKLIN ON SLAVERY

- Franklin took two slaves to England with him, Peter and King, and King left his service there in 1756: by 1758 he was working for "a lady in Suffolk". Whether Franklin could have compelled King's return is open to doubt in the light of earlier English Common Law decisions and the subsequent case of *Shanley v Harvey*, but in any case he did not attempt to do so.
- After returning from England in 1762, Franklin became more anti-slavery. By 1770, Franklin had freed his slaves and attacked the system of slavery and the international slave trade. Franklin, however, refused to publicly debate the issue of slavery at the 1787 Constitutional Convention. Franklin tended to take both sides of the issue of slavery, never fully divesting himself from the institution.

FRANKLIN ON SLAVERY

- While he initially owned and dealt in slaves, by the late 1750s, he began arguing against slavery and became an abolitionist.
- After his return from France, Franklin freed his two slaves. He eventually became president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society.

RECOGNITION

- In 1753, both Harvard and Yale awarded him honorary degrees
- In 1756, Franklin received an honorary master of arts degree from the College of William & Mary.
- In 1756, Franklin had become a member of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures & Commerce (now the Royal Society of Arts or RSA), which had been founded in 1754 and whose early meetings took place in Covent Garden coffee shops. After his return to the United States in 1775, Franklin became the Society's Corresponding Member, continuing a close connection. The RSA instituted a Benjamin Franklin Medal in 1956 to commemorate the 250th anniversary of his birth and the 200th anniversary of his membership of the RSA.

RECOGNITION

- In 1759, the University of St Andrews awarded Franklin an honorary doctorate in recognition of his accomplishments. He was also awarded an honorary doctorate by Oxford University in 1762. Because of these honors, Franklin was often addressed as "Dr. Franklin."
- In 1781, he was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.
- Franklin's likeness is ubiquitous. Since 1928, it has adorned American \$100 bills, which are sometimes referred to in slang as "Benjamins" or "Franklins."

RECOGNITION

- From 1948 to 1963, Franklin's portrait was on the half dollar.
- He has appeared on a \$50 bill and on several varieties of the \$100 bill from 1914 and 1918. Franklin appears on the \$1,000 Series EE Savings bond.
- Philadelphia's Benjamin Franklin Parkway (a major thoroughfare) and Benjamin Franklin Bridge (the first major bridge to connect Philadelphia with New Jersey) are named in his honor.

RECOGNITION

- In 1976, as part of a bicentennial celebration, Congress dedicated a 20-foot marble statue in Philadelphia's Franklin Institute as the Benjamin Franklin National Memorial.
- Many of Franklin's personal possessions are also on display at the Institute, one of the few national memorials located on private property.
- In London, his house at 36 Craven Street, which is the only surviving former residence of Benjamin Franklin, was first marked with a blue plaque and has since been opened to the public as the Benjamin Franklin House.

RECOGNITION

- Franklin bequeathed £1,000 (about \$4,400 at the time, or about \$125,000 in 2018 dollars) each to the cities of Boston and Philadelphia, in trust to gather interest for 200 years.
- The trust began in 1785 when the French mathematician Charles-Joseph Mathon de la Cour, who admired Franklin greatly, wrote a friendly parody of Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanack called Fortunate Richard. The main character leaves a smallish amount of money in his will, five lots of 100 livres, to collect interest over one, two, three, four or five full centuries, with the resulting astronomical sums to be spent on impossibly elaborate utopian projects.

RECOGNITION

- Franklin, who was 79 years old at the time, wrote thanking him for a great idea and telling him that he had decided to leave a bequest of 1,000 pounds each to his native Boston and his adopted Philadelphia.
- By 1990, more than \$2,000,000 had accumulated in Franklin's Philadelphia trust, which had loaned the money to local residents. From 1940 to 1990, the money was used mostly for mortgage loans.
- When the trust came due, Philadelphia decided to spend it on scholarships for local high school students.

RECOGNITION

- Franklin's Boston trust fund accumulated almost \$5,000,000 during that same time; at the end of its first 100 years a portion was allocated to help establish a trade school that became the Franklin Institute of Boston, and the whole fund was later dedicated to supporting this institute.
- Benjamin Franklin is a prominent figure in American history comparable to Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln, and as such he has been honored on U.S. postage stamps many times. The image of Franklin, the first Postmaster General of the United States, occurs on the face of U.S. postage more than any other notable American save that of George Washington.