

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

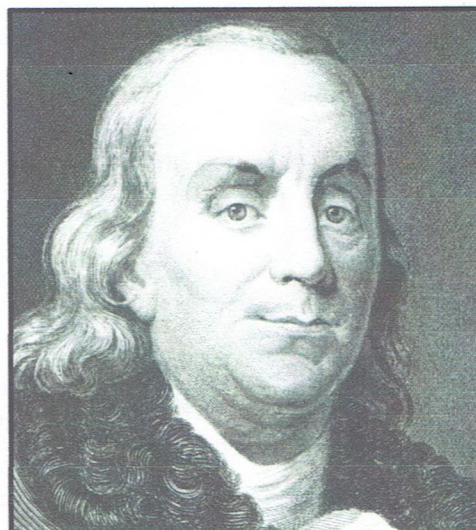
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(1) I am probably most famous for being one of the Founding Fathers of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. Besides being a statesman and diplomat, I was also a writer, newspaper publisher, scientist and inventor. I invented many useful household devices as well as made electricity a legitimate scientific field of study.

(2) I was born on the 17th of January, 1706 in Boston, Massachusetts. I was one of seventeen children born to Josiah Franklin who was a soap and candle maker. My family only had enough money to send me to school for two years. When I was ten all my formal schooling ended, but I loved learning so I decided that I would teach myself everything and anything I wanted to know. I was constantly reading books on a huge variety of topics and wore spectacles (eyeglasses) at an early age. My older brother James founded the first independent newspaper in the colonies called the *New-England Courant*. Though I was only 15, I held strong opinions on many issues and wanted to write for the newspaper, but my brother refused me. I decided to take the pseudonym (a fake name) of Mrs. Silenced Dogood and wrote into the newspaper, pretending to be a middle-aged woman. The newspaper liked my letters and published them. The readers also enjoyed my letters and my writing was a hit. Unfortunately my brother found out and we had a fight.

(3) At the age of 17, I ran away to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to make my own fortunes in the world. After several jobs at different printing houses, I opened up my own printing house in 1728 when I was 22. I began publishing a newspaper called *The Pennsylvania Gazette* a year later. I was a big proponent of free speech and believed that newspapers were the best way to voice opinions on political and social reforms as well as morally educate the populace on proper virtuous behavior.

(4) When I was 17, I fell in love with Deborah Read who was two years my junior. I asked for her hand in marriage but I was considered unsuitable because of my lack of money. Deborah's mother married her to another man who ran away with Deborah's dowry money. Though Deborah was still legally married, I continued to love her and when I was 24, I asked her if she would be willing to live in a common-law marriage with me. She agreed and we had two children together.



Benjamin Franklin
Scientist, Inventor (1706-1790)

(5) In 1733, I began publishing a very popular book called *Poor Richard's Almanac* and I came out with new editions for the next 25 years. I also had other literary successes which put me into good finances. This allowed me to focus time on my other interests like developing inventions and conducting scientific research. One of my inventions came out of annoyance. After wearing spectacles for many years, I got really tired of their inconvenience. When I looked up from reading, objects in the distance were blurry through my glasses. I invented spectacles called bifocals that had split lenses that allowed the lower part of the lens to focus on close objects and the upper part to focus on distant ones. I also invented the Franklin stove which allowed homeowners to heat their homes more efficiently. I made many inventions but never patented any of my ideas because I wanted them to be free for anyone to use and improve upon.

(6) In 1743, I saw a science exhibition in Boston. The display on static electricity interested me the most, however, I was unimpressed with the presentation. The presenter seemed like he didn't know what he was talking about and I figured that I could do a better job of understanding electricity if I did my own research. At the time, no one gave much thought to electricity as a scientific field of study. No one really knew what it was. I discovered that for electricity to occur there

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needed to be a charged “fluid” that moved from one point to another. This fluid turned out to be electrons, which no one had any concept of at the time. I also invented primitive batteries using Leyden jars which no one would recognize as batteries these days. I also realized that charge could not be created, only collected – this idea later became the *Law of Conservation of Electric Charge*. In 1751, I published my findings on electricity in a book called *Experiments and Observations on Electricity* which captured the imagination of many scientists and made electricity a legitimate field of study.

(7) A year later, I carried out my most famous scientific investigations on electricity. I set out to prove that lightning was in fact just electricity. I flew a kite attached to a key to

collect the electric charges from the clouds. I protected myself by standing on an insulator and sheltering under a cover. After my demonstration, others attempted to repeat my experiment and some were electrocuted in their attempts. I also invented the lightning rod. Using the observation that lightning was attracted to tall, sharp pointed objects, I thought that attaching this type of rod to a building would attract lightning to the rod which would conduct the lightning safely to the ground while sparing the surrounding building.

(8) Shamefully, I was also a slave owner in my younger years. I both bought and sold slaves. As time went on, I began to question the morality of this practice and freed my slaves. I went on to speak against the practice of slavery and fought for its abolition.