

LEVELED Book • W

Ben Franklin



Written by Jane Sellman

Ben Franklin



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One hundred dollar bills are sometimes called Benjamins because they have Ben Franklin's image on them.

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Introduction

Do you have a public library near you? Thank Benjamin Franklin.

Do you have lights to read by? Thank Benjamin Franklin.

Does your mail come right to your door? Do you get to play outside later in the summer because it stays lighter longer? Thank Benjamin Franklin.

Do you live in a free and independent country? Thank Benjamin Franklin.

How did one man do so much?

Early Life

“ . . . All the little money that came into my hands was ever laid out in books.”

Born on January 17, 1706, to Josiah and Abiah Franklin in Boston, Massachusetts, Benjamin Franklin was the youngest son of 17 children. His father worked hard making candles and soap. His mother managed the large household.

When he was eight years old, Ben started school. He liked learning and did well in all his subjects except arithmetic. However, Josiah and Abiah could not pay for years of school for their children. Only the wealthy could afford that. So ten-year-old Ben went to work for his father. He cut wicks and filled the molds for candles. He cleaned up the shop, ran errands, and spent hours near vats of boiling tallow. Tallow is a fat that comes from sheep and cows. Ben thought it smelled awful.

This candle-making shop was probably similar to the shop where Ben worked for his father.



Ben dreamed of being a sailor. He loved the water and swam in the local pond with his friends every chance he had. Once he took a kite to the pond, and as he held onto the kite string, the air pulled the kite. He relaxed and let the kite pull him across the pond.

Ben's parents did not want him to be a sailor because of the dangers he would face on long ocean voyages. So Josiah took Ben to visit bricklayers, carpenters, and blacksmiths. He hoped that Ben would find a job he liked. Ben learned skills he later used in his own home; however, he did not find a job.

Though he wasn't in school, Ben read as much as possible. He read all of his father's books and used his **meager** spending money to buy more books.

Josiah noticed that Ben loved books. James, one of Ben's brothers, had recently set up a printing business. At last, Josiah knew the perfect job for Ben.



A painting shows Boston Harbor in the 1700s.



Apprentices like Ben set metal letters by hand for each word in a document. They worked right to left as the type needed to be backward to print correctly.



A Young Apprentice

“Hope of gain

Lessens pain.”

Josiah arranged for Ben to be an **apprentice** to James. Ben, now twelve, would work for James and learn printing. He would do this until he turned twenty-one. For eight years, he would receive no pay, just food and a bed. In his last year, he would get a small **salary**.

Ben became good at setting the type (the letters) for books and newspapers. He soon became friends with other apprentices. Some worked for booksellers, and they lent him books. He read for hours at night so he could return a book the next day.

Ben wrote this letter asking the people of Philadelphia to support an end to slavery.

Being Fair

While Ben was an apprentice, he felt he was unfairly treated. This made him strive to be fair to others. He thought that women should have opportunities for an education. He also supported abolition, or the end of slavery.

AN ADDRESS TO THE PUBLIC,

FROM THE

Pennsylvania Society for promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, unlawfully held in Bondage.

It is with peculiar satisfaction we assure the friends of humanity, that in prosecuting the design of our association, our endeavours have proved successful, far beyond our most sanguine expectations.

Encouraged by this success, and by the daily progress of that luminous and benign spirit of liberty, which is diffusing itself throughout the world; and humbly hoping for the continuance of the divine blessing on our labors, we have ventured to make an important addition to our original plan, and do therefore, earnestly solicit the support and assistance, of all who can feel the tender emotions of sympathy and compassion, or relish the exalted pleasure of beneficence.

Slavery is such an atrocious debasement of human nature, that its very extirpation, if not performed with felicitous care, may sometimes open a source of serious evils.

The unhappy man who has long been treated as a brute animal, too frequently sinks beneath the common standard of the human species. The galling chains that bind his body, do also fetter his intellectual faculties, and impair the social affections of his heart. Acquainted in more like a mere machine, by the will of a master, reflection is suspended; he has not the power of choice; and reason and conscience, have but little influence over his conduct: because he is chiefly governed by the passion of fear. He is poor and friendless—perhaps worn out by extreme labor, age and disease.

Under such circumstances, freedom may often prove a misfortune to himself, and prejudicial to society.

Attention to emancipated black people, it is therefore to be hoped, will become a branch of our national policy; but as far as we contribute to promote this emancipation, so far that attention is evidently a serious duty, incumbent on us, and which we mean to discharge to the best of our judgment and abilities.

To instruct, to advise, to qualify those who have been restored to freedom, for the exercise and enjoyment of civil liberty. To promote in them habits of industry; to furnish them with employments suited to their age, sex, talents, and other circumstances; and to procure their children an education calculated for their future situation in life. These are the great outlines of the annexed plan, which we have adopted, and which we conceive will essentially promote the public good, and the happiness of these our hitherto too much neglected fellow creatures.

A Plan so extensive cannot be carried into execution, without considerable pecuniary resources, beyond the present ordinary funds of the society. We hope much from the generosity of enlightened and benevolent freemen, and will gratefully receive any donations or subscriptions for this purpose, which may be made to our treasurer, James Starr, or to James Pemberton, chairman, of our committee of correspondence.

Signed by order of the Society,

B. FRANKLIN, President.

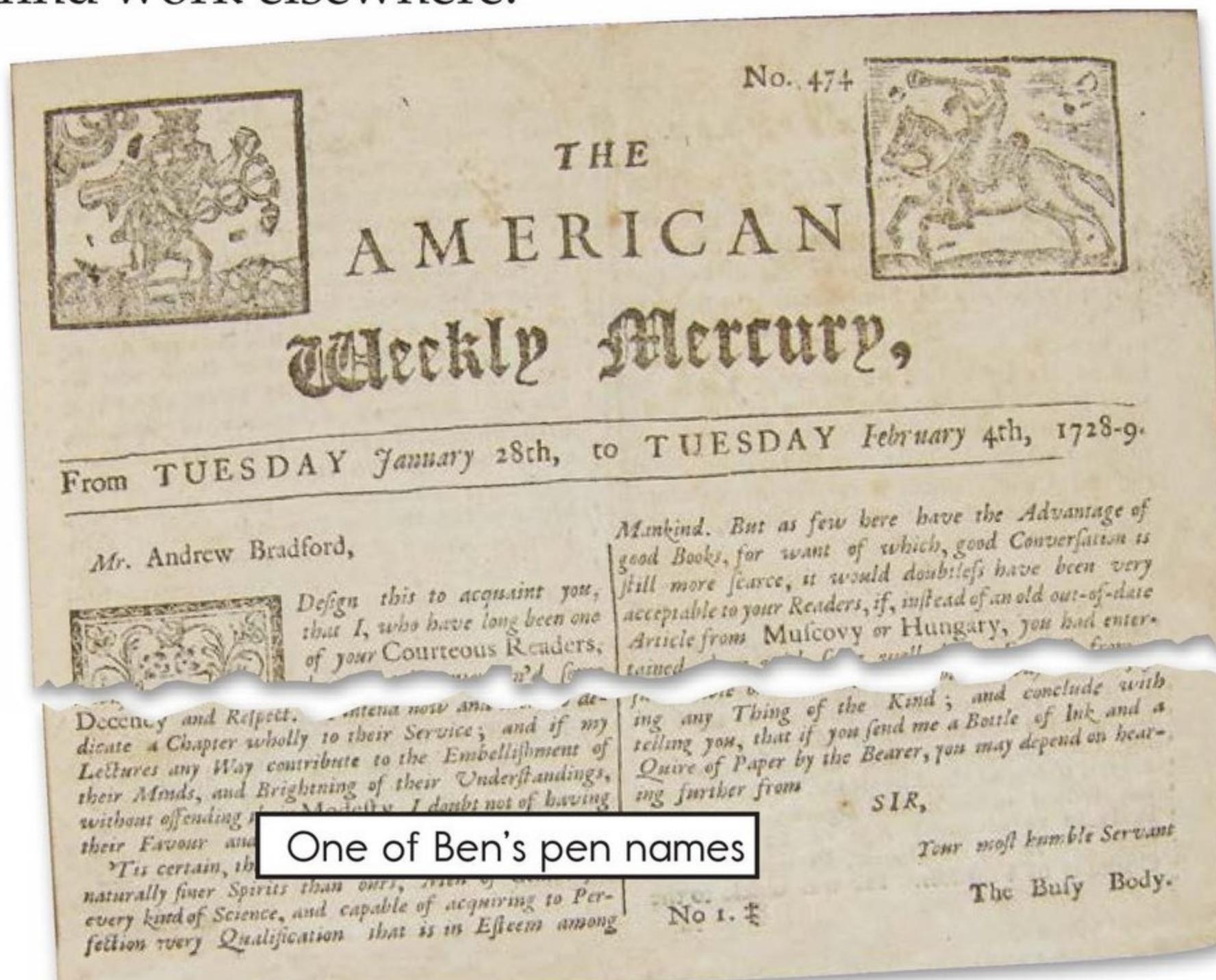
Philadelphia, 9th of November, 1789.

Ben ate alone and studied. He used any extra money to—you guessed it—buy books. He even tackled arithmetic again and became good at it.

Ben started writing too. He would read an essay, put it aside, and later re-write it from memory. He even wrote a few poems. But his father said that poets made no money, so Ben should stick to writing essays.

Ben even contributed to a newspaper James published called the *New England Courant*; though James did not know it for a while. James and his friends, using pen names, wrote the newspaper's articles. They even wrote the letters to the editor. Ben decided to write a letter, but he did not tell James. Ben pretended to be a middle-aged woman named Silence Dogood. He slipped his first letter to the editor as Silence Dogood under the door of the print shop. James printed it. People liked it. Ben wrote more letters. Soon James found out his little brother wrote the letters and became annoyed.

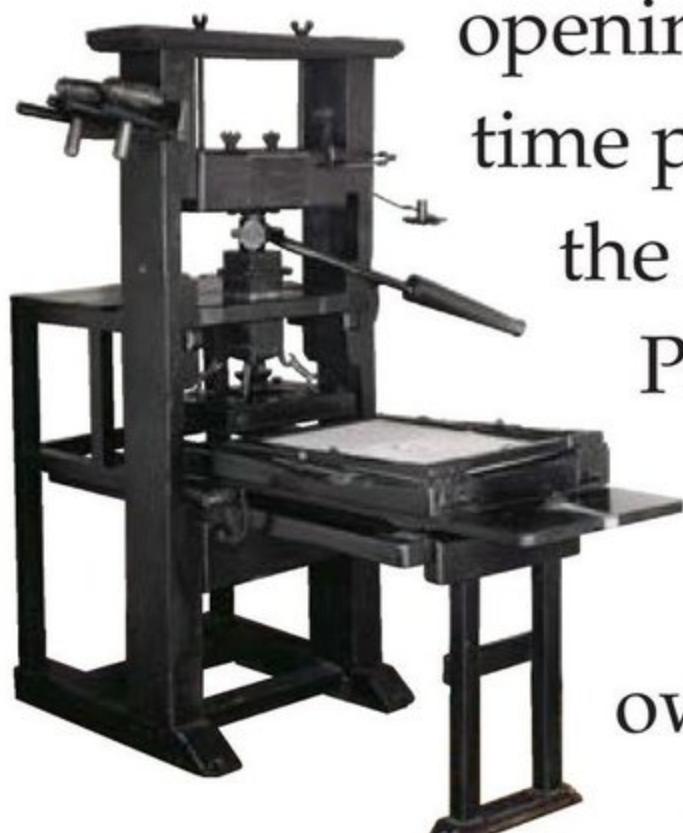
Ben and James had not been getting along. Josiah often had to settle arguments between them. Finally, at age seventeen, Ben left Boston to find work elsewhere.



Printer and Businessman

"He that can have patience, can have what he will."

Ben found work in another print shop in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He worked hard so that he could follow his dream of one day



1700s printing press

opening his own shop. During this time period, Great Britain controlled the American **colonies**, including Pennsylvania where Ben lived.

In 1724, Ben left for London to buy printing equipment for his own business with money promised by a new friend, Governor William Keith.

Ben found London to be an exciting place. He stayed for two years, gaining more printing experience. He also had fun and made friends. He hung out in coffee shops to discuss and **debate** ideas.

Do You Know?

In the 1700s, people were reading more than in the 1600s. They were learning how to discuss issues. They began to value logical thinking and to question traditions. They proposed new ways of looking at the world. They even began to challenge government. This time period was called the *Enlightenment*.



A young Ben working in his own print shop

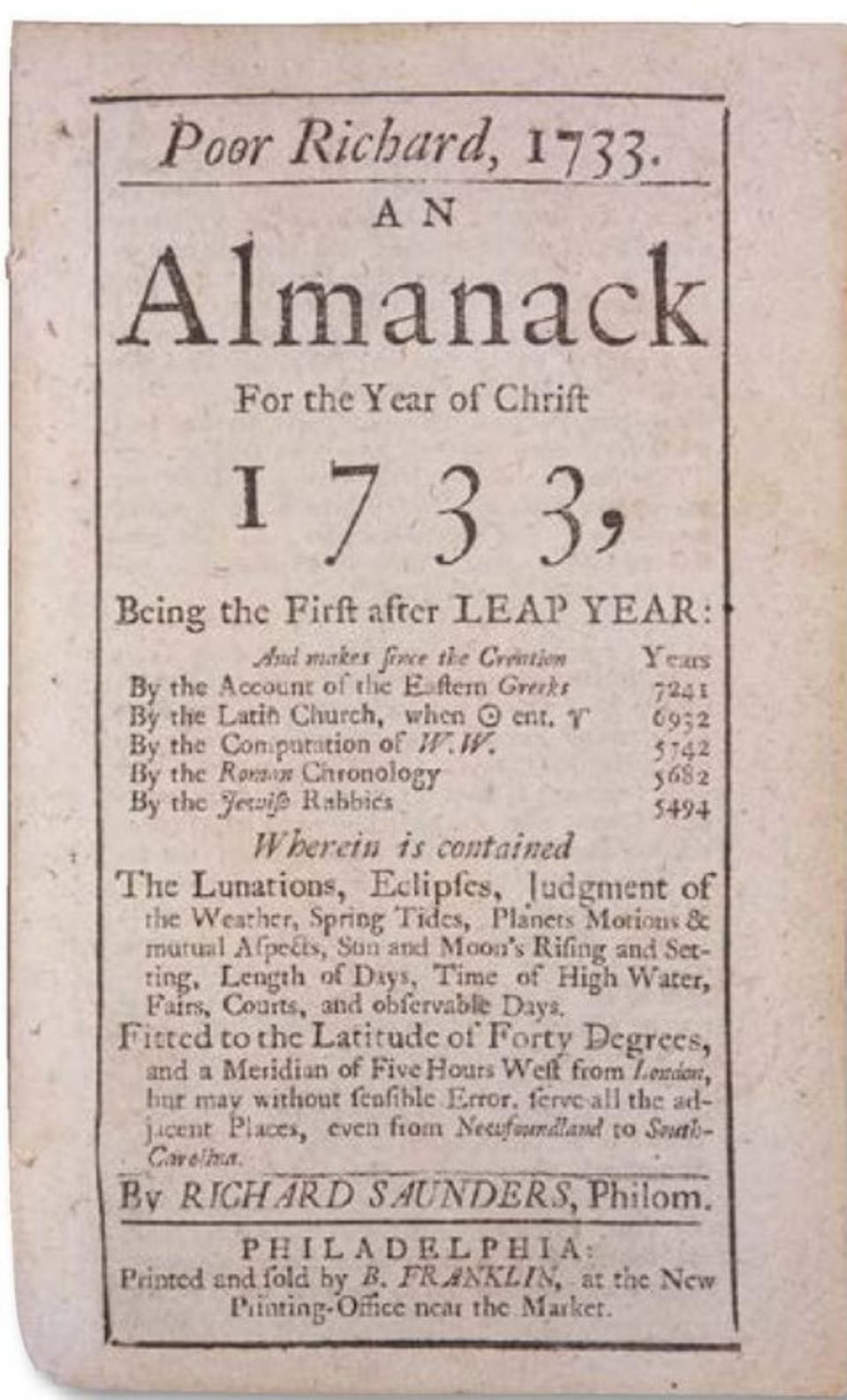
The money that Ben's friend promised never came, so Ben could not start his business. A kind **merchant** helped him get home to Philadelphia, where he returned to the printing trade.

Ben was only 22 when, in 1728, he finally opened a print shop in Philadelphia. He published a newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and used it to inform people and to speak his mind. He soon became the official printer for Pennsylvania.

Family Man, Community Activist

"Be civil to all; sociable to many; familiar with few; friend to one; enemy to none."

Ben married Deborah Read in 1730. She helped him run the print shop—where they also sold stationery as well as his father's soap and candles. Ben had a baby son, William, from a past romance. He and Deborah raised him. They had two more children, Sarah and Francis, but Francis died of smallpox when he was four. Sarah was nicknamed Sally. She loved to read, just like her father.



Soon Ben started one of his most popular publications, *Poor Richard's Almanack*. An almanac contains information on the tides, the times for sunset and sunrise, and the weather. This bestseller included many of Ben's well-known sayings such as, "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."



Ben is seated at a desk in the lending library he organized with friends.

Busy as he was, Ben also had other interests. He remembered when he spent spare pennies to buy books, so he and his friends organized the first lending library. Ben also started the first volunteer fire company in the colonies. He even founded a school that eventually became the University of Pennsylvania. He and his friend, Dr. Thomas Bond, founded a hospital together.

People noticed that Ben got things done. The government put him in charge of mail delivery. He improved it. His daughter, Sally, sometimes went with him when he rode along the mail route.

Inventor and Scientist

"In success be moderate."

For twenty years, Ben built up his printing business. He had print shops in other cities, too. He and Deborah saved much of the money he made, which allowed Ben to retire early and devote time to his many **passions**.

Ben liked to invent things that improved everyday life. He had already designed a stove that gave more heat than the ones most people were using. He also invented swim fins, bifocals, and an



Bifocals enable people to see better at two distances.



extension arm to reach books on high shelves. He improved streetlights and suggested Daylight Saving Time as a way to save money on lighting.

1717	1729	1731
Invents swim fins	Proposes the use of paper money	Starts America's first lending library

A historical image of an old, worn-out paper dollar bill. The bill is rectangular with a textured surface, showing signs of age and damage. It features some printed text and a circular emblem, though the details are not clearly legible.

Ben founded the American Philosophical Society, a club where scientists could gather for study and discussion. Ben wished to study weather and **electricity**. He believed that storms traveled from one place to another. Like other scientists, he thought that lightning was electricity. He wanted to prove this.

One afternoon, Ben and his son, William, went outside to a meadow because they had seen a storm coming. Ben had made a kite out of silk and wood. He attached a stiff wire to the top of his kite; then tied a silk ribbon to the kite string. He tied a key to the ribbon. Ben and William wanted the ribbon to stay dry so they stood inside a shed and flew the kite from the doorway. As the storm increased, Ben and William saw loose threads on the string standing up.



This painting shows what it would have been like the day of Ben's kite experiment.

Carefully, Ben put a knuckle near the key. *Ouch!* He got a tiny shock and saw a spark. Now Ben was convinced that lightning was electricity.

Lightning often caused fires, and Ben wanted to invent a way to protect buildings and people. His invention was called a lightning rod, and it is still used today. He did not apply for a patent. (A patent is like a license. It says that no one else can make the same thing without your permission.) This allowed anyone to use his inventions without his permission.

How It Works

A lightning rod is attached to the highest part of a building. The rod has a wire attached to it that leads to the ground. When lightning hits the rod, the electricity goes along the wire and safely into the ground.



The Empire State Building acts as a lightning rod for the surrounding area.

1736

Organizes a volunteer fire company

1737

Becomes Postmaster of Philadelphia and improves mail delivery

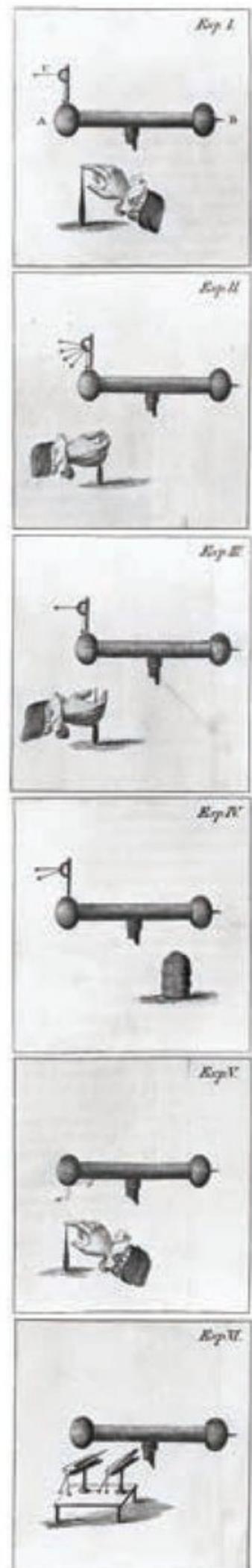


Founding Father

“Those who would give up essential liberty, to purchase a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety.”

Ben was generous with his time, as well as his inventions. He spent many years trying to help the colonies and later played an important role when the colonies sought their **freedom** from Great Britain.

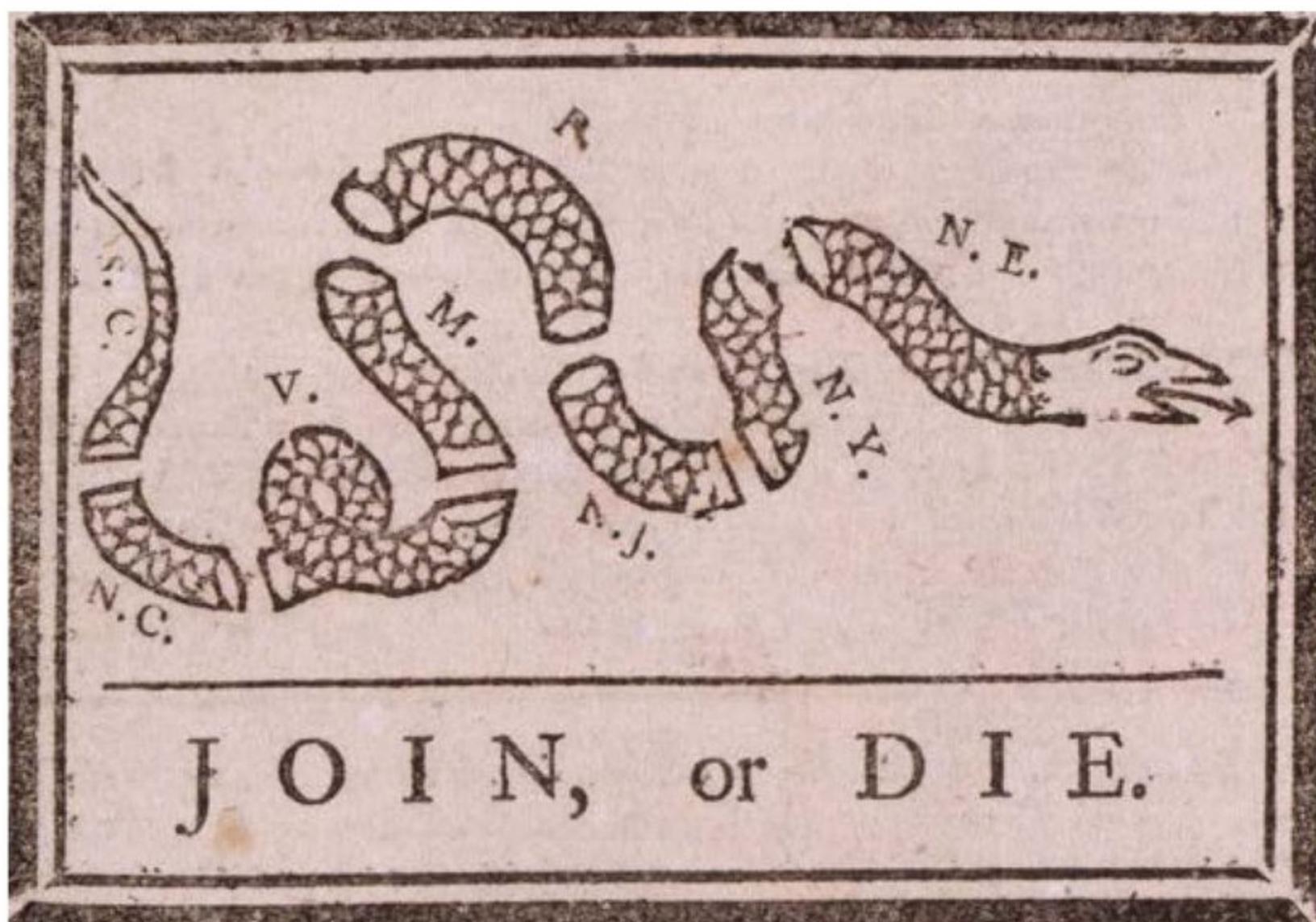
As early as 1754, Ben talked about uniting the colonies. He even went overseas many times to work out problems between the colonies and Great Britain’s government. He tried to educate the British about the colonies. Ben even convinced some of the British people that the colonists could govern themselves.



Ben's lightning rods as they appeared in his book describing the experiments.

1739	1741–1744	1750
Leads a protest against pollution	Invents the Franklin stove; publishes one of America's first magazines	Invents the lightning rod

Ben had always been a loyal citizen of Great Britain. Just the same, he believed the colonies, which were an ocean away and better able to defend themselves, should be independent from Great Britain. In 1775, Ben became a **delegate** to the Continental Congress, a group of colonists who worked for independence from Great Britain. The delegates argued constantly. Ben became a peacemaker and negotiator.



Some colonists did not want independence from Great Britain. Ben urged them to unite for independence using this political cartoon.

1751	1752	1754
Develops methods for keeping city cleaner and dealing with garbage	Conducts kite experiment	Proposes that the colonies unite; prints America's first political cartoon



Ben also joined the committee formed to write the Declaration of Independence, the document proclaiming the colonies' independence. Thomas Jefferson did most of the writing, but Ben made a few suggestions. After it was finished, everyone in the Continental Congress read it. Of course, every member had a change or a suggestion. Ben sat down with Thomas. He knew that Thomas was bothered by the many changes. Ben was a good friend and told him a funny story to try to cheer him up.



Ben reads a copy of the Declaration of Independence with John Adams (center) and Thomas Jefferson.

1762	1764	1773
Invents glass armonica—a musical instrument	Proposes the idea of Daylight Saving Time	Theorizes that the common cold is passed from person to person



Ben attends a reception in his honor in France.

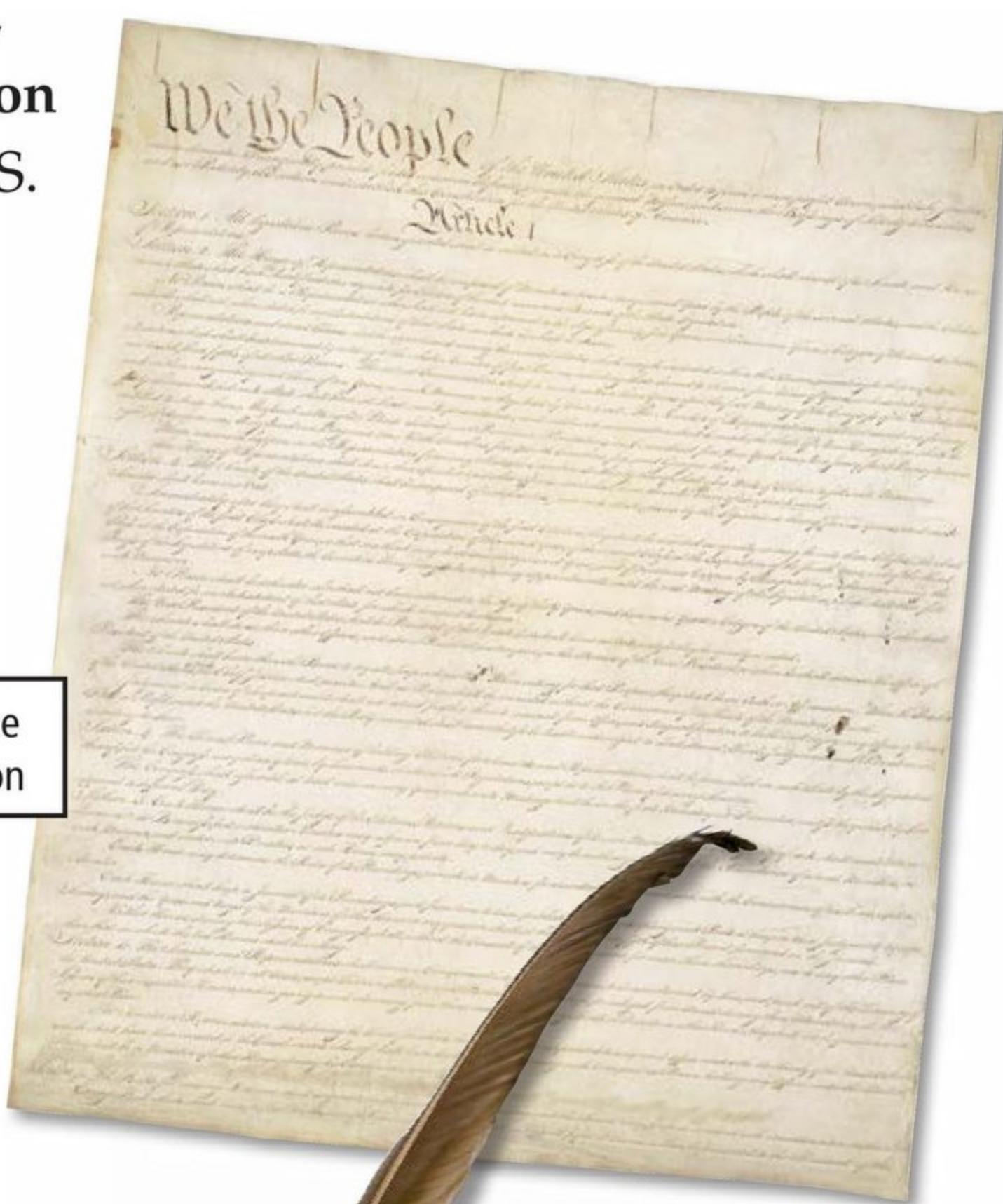
Ben was now in his seventies. He would have liked to take it easy; however, the colonists wanted him to go to France to get help in their fight for independence. Luckily, the French loved Ben. They thought he was friendly, funny, and down-to-earth. He made great friends there. During the American Revolution, France helped the colonies in their fight for independence.

1775–1776	1784	1786
Helps to write and signs the Declaration of Independence	Invents bifocals	Invents extension arm for taking books down from a shelf

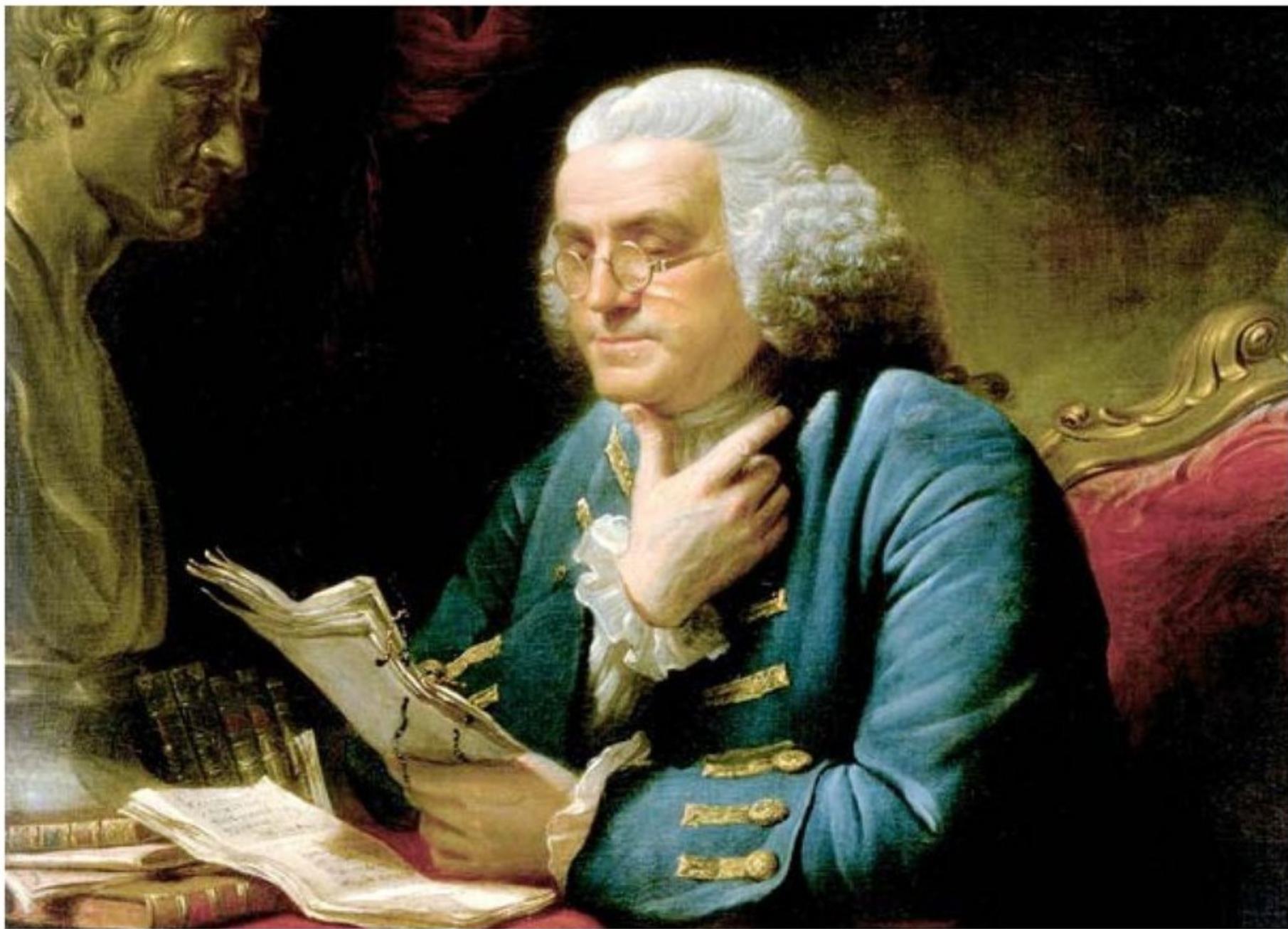


After the revolution, Ben helped establish peace between the new United States of America and Great Britain. He also was elected president of Pennsylvania three times. Before he retired from public duties, he took on one more job. In 1787, he became part of the Constitutional Convention and helped to create the U.S. Constitution, the **foundation** of today's U.S. government.

First page of the U.S. Constitution



1787	1789
Helps to create the U.S. Constitution	Becomes President of the Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery



Conclusion

"All would live long, but none would be old."

During his last years, Ben became bedridden. However, he still read and wrote. Deborah, his wife, had died many years before. His daughter, Sally, and her family moved in to take care of him. He enjoyed the company of his family, especially his grandchildren. Every afternoon, his granddaughter, Deborah, would bring her spelling lesson. They would go over the words together. When she did well, he would give her a spoonful of jelly.

Three months after his 84th birthday, one of America's greatest writers, leaders, inventors, and patriots, Benjamin Franklin, died.

Glossary

apprentice (<i>n.</i>)	someone who learns the work of a trade from a skilled professional (p. 7)
colonies (<i>n.</i>)	towns, cities, territories, or groups of people controlled by another country (p. 10)
contributed (<i>v.</i>)	did something for or gave something to a person or cause (p. 9)
debate (<i>v.</i>)	to discuss an important subject at length and in detail (p. 10)
delegate (<i>n.</i>)	a person who represents other people (p. 18)
electricity (<i>n.</i>)	energy created by moving charged particles; especially as a source of power (p. 15)
essay (<i>n.</i>)	a short piece of writing that gives the writer's ideas, feelings, and opinions on a particular subject (p. 8)
foundation (<i>n.</i>)	the beginning point and support from which something develops (p. 21)
freedom (<i>n.</i>)	the state of being free, or having the right and power to act and think as one wishes (p. 17)

meager (<i>adj.</i>)	low; too little to be worth much (p. 6)
merchant (<i>n.</i>)	a person who buys and sells goods or products (p. 11)
passions (<i>n.</i>)	objects or activities that create intense feelings or interest (p. 14)
publications (<i>n.</i>)	sources, especially printed materials, by which information is communicated to the public (p. 12)
salary (<i>n.</i>)	a fixed amount of money received for work, usually calculated per year (p. 7)

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