

# Franklin Gazette

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"A long life may not be good enough, but a good life is long enough." Poor Richard, December, 1755

## President's Message

By Ralph Gregory Elliot

On a week long, six-plays-in-seven-days theater trip to London in March, I seized the opportunity to take a top-to-bottom tour of Franklin's house on Craven Street, now in the midst of a lengthy process of restoration prior to its inauguration as a tourist site and learning center about Ben and his times. While work on the second floor is largely completed, much more needs to be done on the remaining floors before the house is ready to receive visitors; and scaffolding and the sounds of hammering, sawing and sanding apparatus provided visual and aural evidence that work in that regard proceeds apace.

I must confess to being struck by the confining narrowness of the house, the relative smallness of the rooms and the fact that access to all upper floors will be only by steep flights of stairs. I shall watch with interest to see how in this limited space the visionary and exciting educational plans and programs contemplated for the space will be accommodated. I have invited those involved in this project to write for this issue to let you know in greater detail precisely what uses they intend and their timetable for the house; but as I write these lines hard upon our editor's May 15 deadline, I don't know if they have taken me up on that invitation.

(A digression. In a previous column, I noted that another brief resident of Craven Street, though long after Franklin's tenancy, was Heinrich Heine, the German poet, whose home a couple of houses from Franklin's, is graced, as is Ben's, by a commemorative marker. Recently, I learned that Heine, in his will, inserted a provision that Franklin would surely have loved. Heine left his entire estate to his wife on the condition that she remarry "because then there will be at least one man to regret my death.")

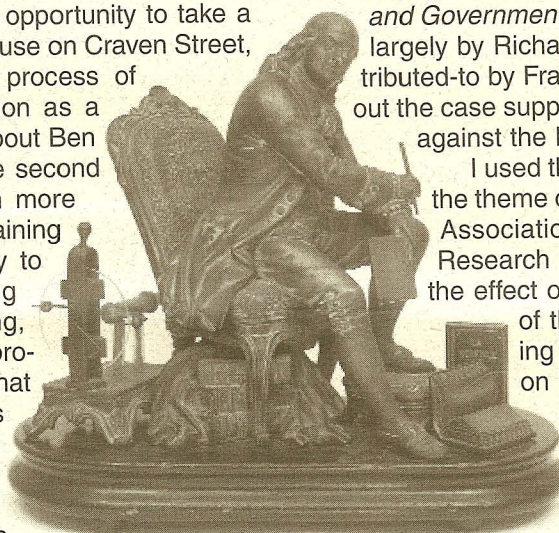
In another previous column I cited Franklin's words, "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety." These words are ascribed (I have not seen the text) to the 380-page *An Historical Review of the Constitution and Government of Pennsylvania*, written in 1759 largely by Richard Jackson but significantly contributed to by Franklin, which was designed to set out the case supporting Pennsylvania's grievances against the Penn Family proprietors.

I used these words again in early May as the theme of a talk I gave to the Iowa Library Association/Association of College and Research Libraries in Dubuque, discussing the effect on libraries of intrusive provisions of the USA Patriot Act and the chilling effect those provisions can have on the spirit of freedom of inquiry which Franklin cherished and which remains the hallmark of libraries everywhere. After my talk, a member of the audience told me that Franklin's words appear as well on a large billboard in downtown Chicago.

Someone asked me at dinner last evening what had attracted me to Franklin; and I responded that it was the infinite variety of his interests and contributions to be sure, but especially the continuing relevance of his observations and their contemporary utility today. The quotation above captures with a pith and acuteness unequaled by anything uttered today or heretofore the essence of the danger that confronts a society that needs to protect itself from ever-more-sophisticated means of doing it harm and a messianic zeal on the part of so many to avail themselves of those means, yet at the same time seeks to enjoy and exercise those very rights and liberties that make this society worth protecting.

Franklin would, had he expanded more on these perceptive admonitory words, have warned that throughout history dangers to public safety have all too enthusiastically been seized upon by those antipathetic to dissent and to unfettered freedom to inquire,

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Unidentified artist, bronze figurine of Franklin seated among books and scientific objects, mid-19th century. Courtesy of the American Philosophical Society.



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The Friends of Franklin, Inc.  
P.O. Box 40048  
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856.979.1613  
Fax: 856. 854.0773  
email:fof@benfranklin2006.org  
Website:  
www.benfranklin2006.org

Ralph Elliot, President

Carol Wojtowicz Smith,  
Editor  
cwsmith@verizon.net  
856-429-8331

Claude-Anne Lopez,  
Co-Editor

Roy Goodman  
Contributing Editor

Newsletter Coordination:  
Kathleen DeLuca

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## President's Message *cont. from p. 1*

speak, write, associate and worship as a convenient excuse to curb, to chill or to eliminate these core values of American society. All of these values find continued expression and exercise in the life of Franklin.

Robert Middlekauff, in his talk to the Friends in February at the Huntington Library, said the key to Franklin was his "curiosity" — a curiosity that inspired unbounded and unfettered inquiry, voracious reading, prolific writing, a multiplicity of memberships in a variety of associations founded by himself and by others, and a lifelong speculation on the existence of a Being beyond our ken or control. In 1731, at age 25, Franklin was instrumental in founding the Library Company of Philadelphia, which, happily, still thrives. In 1786, four years before his death, he gave 116 leather bound volumes to the people of Franklin, Massachusetts, which became the core of their library (a library now in danger of closing for lack of funds). (More on its history appears elsewhere in these pages.)

The open mind, free to roam wherever it chooses or its investigations may lead it, free to think,

free to discuss, free to explore both the sublime and the unspeakable, free to subject long-accepted notions to reexamination and rethinking — all these are the hallmarks of freedom, of a democratic society, of the very sort of society which, at this writing, we are seeking to establish in liberated Iraq, against the resistance of those who would impose on that tragic land a theocracy.

I hope that those who are planning Ben's tercentenary observances will, if not eschew, at least temper the impulse toward iconography and displays of tangible objects from the great man's life, and try through the multi-media magic with which Ben's spiritual descendants have blessed and endowed society, to emphasize Franklin as America's preeminent exemplar of those basic values that have made this nation great and whose continuing vitality is the reason this country deserves to prosper and endure and to be worthy of the sacrifices our young men and women continue to make to preserve it.



## Annual Fund Drive

As you know from my letter, we are in the midst of our second annual fund drive, seeking funds that are essential to the Friends' ability to afford its proper role in matters Franklinian. Last year, largely through the extraordinary generosity of a few of our devoted members, we raised \$10,000. I hope that this year we can double that base of contributors and increase the total amount given.

One of our long-time members has offered a challenge to all members. If we raise \$5,000 in donations, a \$500 payment will be donated to our cause and if we reach \$10,000, a \$1,000 payment will be donated.

To those of you who have already generously responded, our deepest thanks. For those with pens poised over checkbooks, the time has come to send in your contribution. We cannot succeed without your support.

Ralph Elliot



## Franklin Public Library

*In late April a newspaper article reported on the parlous state of public libraries in this country as a result of state and municipal budget cut-backs. Featured in the article was America's oldest public library in Franklin, Massachusetts. The story of this library, begun by a donation of books by Ben himself, is fascinating; and with the permission of the Reference Librarian, it is told in the following excerpt from "A History of America's First Public Library at Franklin, Massachusetts, 1790-1990". Contributions in aid of the library may be made payable to "Friends of the Franklin Library" and sent to them c/o Franklin Public Library, 118 Main Street, Franklin, MA 02036-1992. — Ralph Elliot*

**Franklin, Massachusetts Town Meeting, November 26, 1790** – "Voted: Article II – That the Rev. Nathaniel Emmons be Directed to lend the Books presented to this town by the late Dr. Franklin to the Inhabitants of this town at large, and until the town shall order other ways, they being accountable to him for the use and improvement of said Books."

With that vote a long struggle between the strong-willed, overbearing Dr. Emmons and the citizens of Franklin came to an end, or more correctly, nearly to an end, for just a month later, on Christmas Eve, Dr. Emmons was

to have the last word on all the books owned by the parish.

Four years earlier the Franklin Public Library had its origins in the donation of 116 books given by one of America's foremost patriots, Benjamin Franklin. That gift in turn had a strong influence on the life of the town's most famous son, Horace Mann, the father of American public education. Therefore, not only does Franklin have the first public library in America, it also can claim to being the only town whose fortunate choice of a name brought with it the establishment of a library for its citizens.

## Books Instead of a Bell

In 1778 when Franklin was incorporated as a town separate from Wrentham, the first name chosen was Exeter. Before the final act of incorporation, however, someone (who it was is not known) changed the name in order to honor Benjamin Franklin. (News that Franklin had successfully negotiated an alliance with the French had recently reached the rebellious colonies. The defeat of Burgoyne at the Battle of Saratoga and the diplomatic efforts of Benjamin Franklin had convinced the French to ally with the colonists.)

Seven years later someone in the town (who it was is not documented) approached Benjamin

Franklin reminding him of the great honor a small town of farmers in Massachusetts had bestowed upon him. It seems that the citizens of Franklin felt it was time for Benjamin Franklin to respond to that honor. He could, they thought, donate a bell for a steeple the town intended to build on its new meeting house. In a letter he wrote to Dr. Richard Price, Benjamin Franklin responded that the "country people" of Franklin should spare "...themselves the Expense of a Steeple at present, and that they would accept a gift of Books instead of a Bell, Sense being preferable to Sound."

Further mention of the donation is made in several letters writ-

*"I have written  
Dr. Price of  
London,  
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inhabitants of  
Franklin."*

ten in 1785. In April Franklin wrote to Jonathan Williams, Jr., his grand-nephew, concluding his letter with these words, "I have written Dr. Price of London, requesting him to make a choice of proper Books to commence a Library for the use of the inhabitants of Franklin. They will be sent directly from thence... ." On May 3rd Williams wrote to Franklin's grandson William Temple Franklin, "Remember me most dutifully and affectionately to the Doctor, tell him I have seen Dr. Price, who will in a few days give me The List of Books for Franklin Township."

On June 3, 1785, Richard Price wrote to Franklin, "Mr. Williams has given me much

*cont. pg. 6*



# At the Dawn of Science

By Claude-Anne Lopez

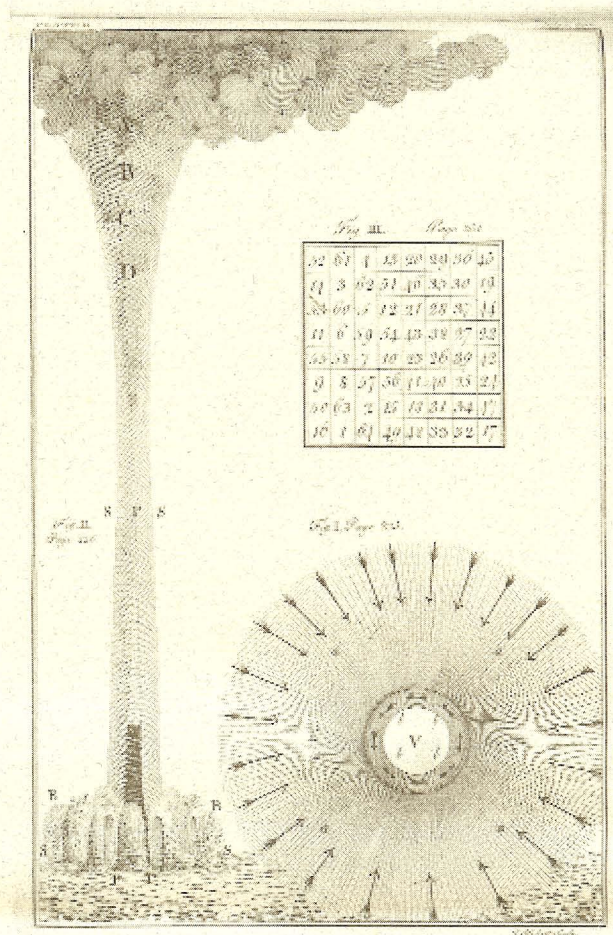
## Part I

When I was invited to give the opening talk at the annual convention of the American Physical Society in Philadelphia on April 7, I felt awe-stricken. What could I possibly say about science in the days of the Enlightenment that had not already been said gracefully and wittily by Bernard Cohen et al? It then occurred to me that since human relationships have always been my chief interest, I might have something to contribute about the atmospherics of science in those days, when research was pursued without a Nobel prize in sight, entailing secrecy, without grants leading to competition, but just for the fun and excitement of it, in an atmosphere of openness and international cordiality. Human nature being what it is, there existed of course some jealousies and bitterness, but as I see it friendliness was prevalent.

And so, using the thousands of documents available at the American Philosophical Society and at Franklin's papers at Yale, I shall tell two stories of scientific collaboration between generations and between cultures, two happy stories picked among the wealth of other equally deserving ones.

The first story, a transatlantic one, began between two men who had never met one another: the wealthy Quaker merchant Peter Collinson, living in London where he was a member of the Royal Society, and the still obscure Benjamin Franklin, twelve years his junior. Collinson was an avid botanist who introduced more than 50 new American plants in his fabulous garden and greenhouses; he warmly encouraged his fellow-botanist John Bartram, and found him aristocratic British customers for American seeds and shrubs. He loved to spread knowledge and kept scientists in many countries informed of new developments in their various fields. In a fit of enthusiasm, I referred to him once as a "pollinating bee," a metaphor that Alan Armstrong, about to publish an anthology of Collinson's letters, asked me if he could borrow. Such a flattering request led me to remember that on another occasion I had called that generous man "a little Internet all by himself." And here I am, the mother—or should I say grandmother?—of metaphors.

The correspondence between Collinson and Franklin started with a gift of books and apparatus to the Library Company of Philadelphia, Franklin's first project of a public nature, founded when he was 25. It opens in March, 1747, with Franklin writing: "Sir, your kind present of an electrical tube, with directions for using it, has put several of us on making electrical experiments, in which we have observed some particular phenomena that we look upon to be new...I never



Franklin, Benjamin, *Experiments and Observations on Electricity* (London, 1769), plate 2, p. 226, (figure of water spout and magic square). Courtesy of the American Philosophical Society.

was before engaged in any study that so totally engrossed my attention and my time as this has lately done..."

Two months later, Franklin relates that in Philadelphia they have observed the wonderful effect of pointed bodies in drawing off and throwing off the Electrical Fire. Another two months, and Franklin thanks again for a new set of books and more electrical apparatus for the Library Company. He comments on Mr. Musschenbroek's marvelous bottle—the Leyden Jar. "So wonderfully are these two states of Electricity combined and ballanced in this miraculous Bottle, the plus and minus, situated and related to each other in a manner that I can by no means comprehend!"

By August, Franklin is beset by self-doubt: "I am become a little diffident of my hypothesis, and ashamed that I have expressed myself in so positive a manner. In going on with these Experiments, how many pretty Systems do we build, which we soon find ourselves obliged to destroy! If there is no other Use discovered to Electricity, this, however, is something considerable, that it may help to make a vain Man



humble. I must now request that you would not expose those Letters; or if you communicate them to any Friends, you would at least conceal my Name."

### Now for some passages from Collinson...

**April 12, 1748:** "Respected Friend, I was very fortunate to receive both thy Curious Experiments on Electricity. I have imparted them to the Royal Society to whome they are very acceptable..."

**June 14, 1748:** "Friend Franklin, the Bearer Mr Kalm is an ingenious Man and comes over on purpose to Improve himself in Natural Inquiries. He is a Sweed...and as I am informed Employed by the Academy of Upsal to make Observations of the World. I recommend him to thy favour...I send the first Volume of the Voyage to discover NorWest passage."

**October 18, 1748.** Franklin: "We wish it were in our Power to do you some Service in Return for your long-continued Kindness to us...I am pleased to hear that my Experiments were acceptable to the Society...Of late we have done but little here in that Way; but possibly may resume this coming Winter as the approaching Peace gives us a Prospect of being more at Ease in our Minds." (Those were the days of the French and Indian War in which Franklin played an active role.)

**By March, 1750, a big jump.** Franklin: "The doctrine of points is very curious, and the effects of them truly wonderful; from what I have observed on experiments, I am of opinion, that houses, ships, and even towns and churches may be effectually secured from the stroke of lightening by their means; for if, instead of the round balls of wool or metal, which are commonly placed on the tops of the weathercocks, vanes or spindles of churches, spires or masts, there should be put a rod of iron 8 or 10 feet in length, sharpen'd gradually to a point like a needle, the electrical fire would, I think, be drawn out of a cloud silently, before it could come near enough to strike..." In other words: **THE LIGHTNING ROD** is almost born.

By now the correspondence covers a much wider range of topics. All of Franklin's enterprises, his mathematical puzzles (the magic squares), the Academy, the Philadelphia Hospital, the Albany Plan of Union, the French and Indian War, his essay on The Increase of Mankind, are discussed with his faraway friend. Soon, American-made gifts are on their way to London: an ultra-refined soap to wash the clothes of Collinson's forthcoming grandchild (that very Crown soap whose formula was a Franklin family secret), myrtle wax, special candles that produce the closest thing to daylight, a set of maps. Plus the description of an indigenous American animal, the ground hog, and a request for London satin to make a gown for his wife Debbie.

**In May, 1751,** Franklin needs help for a brand new project: "I have just received advice that the Deputy-Postmaster of America is thought to be near his end.

My friends advise me to apply for that post... 'Tis with great reluctance that I think of asking you to interest yourself in my private concerns, but I am quite a stranger to the manner of managing these applications... The Place would enable me to execute a Scheme long since form'd...which I hope would soon produce something agreeable to you and to all lovers of useful knowledge, for I have now a large acquaintance among ingenious men in America..." That new project is, of course, the American Philosophical Society, and the postmastership will provide a huge help to its launching.

Meanwhile, the "Philadelphia Experiments," published by the Royal Society, but not acted upon, have struck a chord in France. King Louis XV wants to see them performed. He watches them with great satisfaction and applauds Monsieur Franklin and Monsieur Collinson. Now the French scientists are eager to verify Franklin's conjectures on the analogy of lightning and electricity. The historic experiment takes place in Marly-la-Ville, well before Franklin, unaware of it, launches his kite.

An exultant Collinson writes on **July 7, 1752:** "By the public papers thou will see how thou has sett the French to work." On August 15: "Our papers are full of electrical experiments. Thou sees, a little electrical Hint given at Philadelphia has stimulated all Europe. All commends the thought of the Inventor. More I dare not Saye least I offend Chast Ears." A father, a big brother could not be prouder than Collinson at that moment.

In an effort to catch up, perhaps, the Royal Society decides to nominate Franklin, with Collinson one of the eight members to propose him. His election will take place on April 29, 1756, and Collinson will comment ecstatically: "I have the pleasure to tell thee how much thou art esteemed by many worthy men here: for on the Ballot for thy election...there was not one negative Ball; an instance of Unanimity that Lord Macclesfield told me he never before saw... Thy Diploma will be sent when ready."

In his message of congratulation, the Earl of Macclesfield, the Society's President, advised Franklin not to rest on his laurels, since further experiments would be needed to convince some of their colleagues. Little did he know, the Earl, that when Franklin felt he was right he would never consider wasting a minute to convince other people.

Furthermore, this was the very moment he was abandoning electricity to throw himself wholeheartedly into public life. On July 17, 1757, Franklin and his son William reached England and their first night in Europe was spent at the home of Peter Collinson on Mill Hill, 8 miles from London.

*To be continued*





# Benjamin Franklin and the Plant that Swept America

By Kate Ohno

Franklin's interest in all that was useful and practical is well known, and that he corresponded on horticultural subjects should be of no surprise. But about a year ago I was contacted by a retired biology professor whose specialty is plant genetics. He was investigating a claim that Franklin introduced broomcorn (a type of sorghum) seed to America. Broomcorn looks a good deal like corn in the early part of the growing season, but it produces the raw material used to make the business end of brooms and whisks. Professor Sam Moyer was writing an article about the history of broomcorn, and unable to document any of the stories found in agricultural books about Benjamin Franklin's involvement with the plant's introduction, he turned to the Friends of Franklin for an answer. The organization forwarded his questions to me. I was intrigued to discover that Franklin did indeed interest himself in broomcorn, and although he cannot be said to have introduced it into cultivation, he did play a role in promoting its use. According to a letter that he wrote to his sister, Jane Mecom, on Feb. 21, 1757, he brought the seed from Virginia (where he had travelled in the spring of 1756). I imagine he planted or caused the seed to be planted in Philadelphia, and meeting with success, he wondered if the plant would thrive in the colder climate of Massachusetts: "I enclose you some whisk seed; it is a kind of corn good for creatures; it

must be planted in hills, like Indian corn. The tops make the best thatch in the world; and of the same are made the whisks you use for velvet. Pray try if it will grow with you. . . . Give some to Mr. [Samuel] Cooper, some to Mr. [James] Bowdoin." A month later, on March 24, he also sent some to his friend Samuel Ward. He extolled the plant's virtues, and added, "It grows 10 foot high, and I believe must have a little more room than you commonly give your Indian Corn; but plant it at the same time. When tis ripe, gather it; you may strip the Seed off by Hand, from the Whisk, or your Fowls will pick it off. Give my dear Friend Katy [Catharine Ray, Ward's sister-in-law, who later became the wife of William Greene, governor of Rhode Island during the Revolution] enough of the Tops to make a Whisk for her Mantelet..."

Dr. Moyer, broomcorn geneticist and broomsquire, continues to grow the plant and manufacture brooms not far from Franklin's old stomping grounds of Philadelphia. You can learn about the plant's cultivation and how brooms are made by clicking on his web site: <http://www.art-craftpa.com/moyer.html>. He is giving a talk on the subject at the 32nd Annual Meeting and Conference of the Association for Living History, Farm & Agricultural Museums; see our Calendar.

The documents quoted above are all from vol. 7 of the Yale edition of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*.



## Public Library

*cont from p 3*

pleasure by calling upon me and bringing me a letter from you. I have, according to your desire, furnished him with a list of such books on government as I think some of the best, and added a present to the parish that is to bear your name, of such of my own publications as I think may not be unsuitable. Should this be the commencement of parochial libraries in the States, it would do great good."

And on June 12, 1785, Jonathan Williams, Sr. gives us

another insight into the donation, "I find by your letter to your Sister I, did not do what you expected. Advise whether the People of Franklin Town preferd Sound to Sence if so they ought not to judge for themselves however I, avoided giving them any expectations of a Bell or Book. I knew they had no right to either, it must & ought, depend on your pleasure I, believe Books will be much more acceptable, for they are poore, & in my Opinion, don't need a bell any more than a toad needs a tail, if they should have a Bell they must have a ringer & that would be a living expence." Franklin's sister

Jane Mecom also makes reference to the books in a letter written to him. It seems she wanted a copy of the list of books so that she might use it to direct her own reading. In a letter in December, 1785, Williams complained to Franklin that the books had not arrived.

The books finally arrived some time before June 22, 1786, for on that date Nathaniel Emmons and Hezekiah Fisher wrote a thank you letter to Franklin; and in 1787 Emmons's sermon delivered on the occasion of the arrival of the books was published in Providence.



## *Joys at Every Age*

It is well known that Franklin retired from business at the age of 42, but few people know how he envisioned spending that retirement. Here, in a letter of Sept. 29, 1748, he explained his thoughts to his friend, Cadwallader Colden: "Thus you see, I am in a fair way of having no other tasks than such as I shall like to give myself, and of enjoying what I look upon as a great happiness, leisure to read, make experiments, and converse at large with such ingenious and worthy men as are pleased to honor me with their friendship or acquaintance, on such points as may produce something for the common benefit of mankind, uninterrupted by the little cares and fatigues of business."


Some fifteen years later he grappled with a problem almost universally faced by middle-aged people: how best to accommodate the needs of an elderly relative. His sister, Jane Mecom, had written to him asking for advice about their half-sister, Elizabeth Douse. Mrs. Douse was the oldest daughter of Josiah Franklin and his first wife, Ann Child. Although Jane's letter has not survived, it is clear from Franklin's response that the seventy-nine-year-old Widow Douse wished to remain in her own home on Unity Street in Boston. Franklin had accepted a mortgage on the house in 1748, and the balance due had grown in five years to a debt of £100 Pennsylvania money, reflecting, no doubt, her straitened circumstances. However, Franklin intended for his sister to enjoy the house regardless of her ability to satisfy the debt, and he wrote to Jane on April 19, 1757, "As having their own way is one of the greatest comforts of life to old people, I think their friends should endeavour to accommodate them in that, as well as in any thing else. When they have long liv'd in a House, it becomes natural to them, they are almost as closely connected with it as the Tortoise with his Shell, they die if you tear them out of it. Old Folks and old Trees if you remove them, tis ten to one that you kill them. So let our good old Sister be no more importun'd on that head. We are growing old fast ourselves, and shall expect the same kind of Indulgencies. If we give them, we shall have a Right to receive them in our Turn."

By 1780 Franklin's age was within a few years of his feisty "good old Sister" when she had insisted on living independently in her Boston house. He reflected on aging in a letter to his old friend, Dr. Thomas Bond (whose house is now a Philadelphia hostelry) on March 16, 1780: "For my own part, I do not find that I

grow any older. Being arrived at 70, and considering that by travelling further in the same road I should probably be led to the grave, I stopped short, turned about and walked back again; which having done these four years, you may now call me 66. Advise those old friends of ours to follow my example, keep up your spirits and that will keep up your bodies, you will no more stoop under the weight of age than if you had swallowed a handspike."

Some years later his letter to the Bishop of St. Asaph (Jonathan Shipley, in whose garden structure he had begun to write the Autobiography) of Feb. 24, 1786, shows a mellower Franklin, more accepting of aging: "My health and spirits continue... I still have enjoyment in the company of my friends, and being easy in my circumstances, have many reasons to like living. But the course of nature must soon put a period to my present mode of existence. This I shall submit to with the less regret as, having seen during a long life a good deal of this world, I feel a growing curiosity to acquainted with some other, and can cheerfully with filial confidence resign my spirit to the conduct of that great and good Parent of mankind who created it, and who has so graciously protected and prospered me from my birth to the present hour."

The following year Franklin addressed the Constitutional Convention at the conclusion of its business. He reflected on the work just completed and tried to imagine how it would be viewed in the future. He admitted that while at present he had reservations about the Constitution, he was prepared to listen to opposing views, "For having lived long I have experienced many instances of being obliged by better information or fuller consideration to change opinions, even on important subjects, which I once thought right but found to be otherwise. It is therefore that the older I grow the more apt I am to doubt my own judgment and to pay attention to the judgment of others." Here, perhaps, is the secret of Franklin's success: he always remained optimistic, kept his ears open, and kept his eye on the future.





## Franklin's Well at Fort Allen, Weissport, Pa.

by Valerie-Anne Lutz and Jim Maier

The last remaining vestige of Benjamin Franklin's presence at Fort Allen, a well that Franklin reportedly dug by hand during his stay there in the winter of 1756, is tucked away behind a commercial building in the small town of Weissport, near Jim Thorpe in Pennsylvania's Pocono region.

Travelers entering Weissport will see the Penn Medical Group building, a white stucco structure at 413 Bridge Street on the right side of the road as they cross the bridge from Route 209. Behind the building stands the well, surrounded by a poured concrete base on which stands a circular red brick wall and topped by a small gabled roof.

On the next block, at the edge of the town square on the appropriately named Franklin Street, stands a statue of Franklin. The statue bears a plaque that describes the hastily built Fort Allen as located 201 feet southwest of the statue. Named after Chief Justice William Allen of Philadelphia, the fort contained two block houses and a well surrounded by a stockade fence. A few feet away, a historical marker notes the significance of the fort and the restored well, which it describes as "located directly behind houses opposite" (at 112-116 Franklin Street).

The well's current appearance, which lacks historical accuracy, resulted from a 1980s restoration effort designed not only to preserve the well, but also to improve safety. Recently planted shrubbery and small decorative retaining wall surround the well. The only portion of any significant age is the underground stone lining topped by a metal safety grate, probably installed after the removal of the original hand pump.

Pennsylvania's provincial government authorized the construction of Fort Allen (1755-1763) along with several other forts in the winter of 1755-56. Franklin, appointed Commissioner for Defense in 1755, recognized the importance of frontier defense. Following the November 24, 1755 massacre of Moravian settlers by Delaware Indians allied with the French, Franklin personally directed the construction of Fort Allen.

The nearest forts were Fort Norris, 15 miles to the east along Route 209 near Kresgeville, and Fort Franklin, 15 miles to the west in Auburn. Most of these wooden forts were used for only a few years before they fell into disrepair. By the nineteenth century, the Fort Allen Hotel occupied the site and only the well remained.

Please note that the well is located on private

property.

This article resulted from a search inspired by Jim Maier's purchase of two postcards depicting "Franklin's Well." After a few excursions through the area, Jim and Valerie-Anne Lutz found the Franklin statue and Fort Allen historical marker, which led to the location of the well. Valerie related the story to Roy Goodman, who suggested writing the above article. For more information about Fort Allen and the well, see the Allentown Morning Call archives at [www.mcall.com](http://www.mcall.com) and an excerpt from *Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania*, Vol. 1, by Thomas Lynch Montgomery, 1916, pg. 184-224 at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~usgenweb/pa/1pa/1picts/frontierforts/ff9.html>

*Following the November 24, 1755*

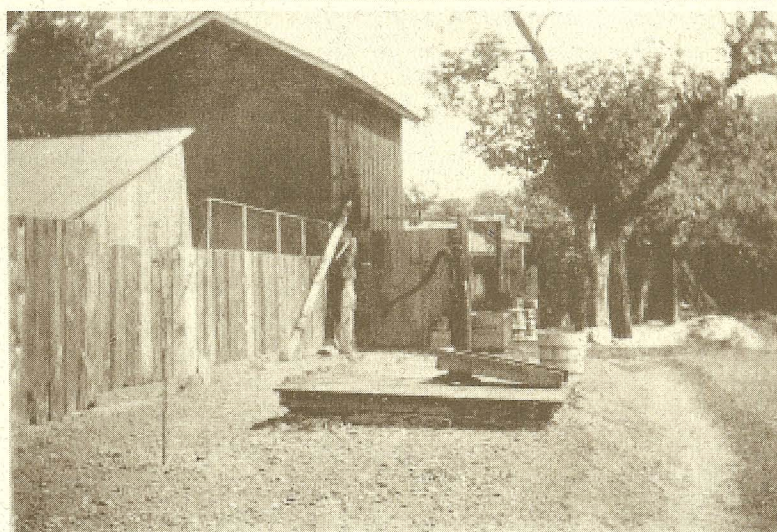
*massacre of Moravian settlers by*

*Delaware Indians allied with the*

*French, Franklin personally*

*directed the construction of*

*Fort Allen.*



THE ORIGINAL WELL, DUG BY BENJ. FRANKLIN, 1756. THE ONLY WELL REMAINING IN THE STATE. THE WELL OF FORT ALLEN, PENNSYLVANIA. BY J. G. HALL, OF PHILADELPHIA. 1890. 100 PAGES. \$1.00.

*Across the river from Lebanon  
Your Friend Paul*

Fort Allen Well, Ca. 1905



# FRANKLIN TIDBITS

## Good Reads

As we head into the less hectic days of summer several authors bring us new works on Franklin to peruse at leisure.



## Bolt of Fate: Benjamin Franklin and His Electric Kite Hoax

Just as historians around the country have celebrated the 250th anniversary of the lightning rod, we have a new work, which causes us to consider some of the surrounding circumstances.

Tom Tucker in his new book, *Bolt of Fate: Benjamin Franklin and His Electric Kite Hoax*, (Public Affairs, 2003) scheduled for release on June 17, 2003 suggests that Franklin never flew his kite in those well known and beloved accounts of the summer of 1752. Rather he suggests that it was part of a hoax to embellish his image abroad. Is Tucker, an author who specializes in the history of inventions, convincing in his account? Is this, as has been suggested, possibly the trick that won the American Revolution?



## Benjamin Franklin: An American Life

Walter Isaacson, in his upcoming book on Franklin, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (Simon & Schuster, 2003) provides a sweeping account of Franklin's life exploring at length his family's diverse circumstances and relationships and looking carefully at his achievements. Isaacson's book is scheduled for release on July 1, 2003 just days before the 227th anniversary of American Independence and the opening of the National Constitution Center. Isaacson, now president of the Aspen Institute, is the former chairman and CEO of CNN. Prior works include: *Kissinger: A Biography*. He will be speaking at the Free Library of Philadelphia on July 22. See the calendar for more information.



## Franklin in Time

*Time Magazine* will be excerpting Walter Isaacson's new book, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* in the issue

which will appear the week of July 4. The same issue will feature a short article by Claude-Anne Lopez on Benjamin Franklin and Women. This should be a keeper for collectors of Frankliniana!



## Deborah Franklin

Certainly Deborah Franklin was one of the most influential women in Franklin's life. Jennifer Reed Fry has just published a wonderful account of Deborah Franklin: "Extraordinary Freedom and great Humility: A Reinterpretation of Deborah Franklin" in the April issue of the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, vol. CXXVII, number II). Long overshadowed by her internationally known husband, Deborah's daily help in business activities as well as her acumen in reading political situations and events was a tremendous asset to her husband. However her role in his life is often overlooked. Fry draws upon letters, diaries and announcements in the *Gazette* to give us a more complete view of Deborah's skills and abilities, supplementing them with a gendered analysis and a closer look at local political activities.



## Franklin Institutions Endangered

While many organizations have been hard hit by budget cuts and shrinking endowments, two venerable institutions associated with Franklin have been particularly hard hit.

The *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported on April 25, 2003 that the Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology, a two-year private college in Boston, will end its degree program in August 2004. Instead it will offer a non-degree program in remedial education for students who have graduated from high school but are not quite prepared for college. The Institute will also offer English as a second language programs.

The Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology began offering courses in 1908. Its funding came from proceeds from The Franklin Fund, established when Franklin bequeathed 1000 pounds sterling to the city of Boston. After 100 years part of this fund was made available for the public good and managers of the fund felt a technological college met Franklin's expectations. The City of Boston provided the land for the Institute, at

the corner of Berkley and Appleton Streets in 1906. The Institute plans to move to a new location within the city of Boston, selling its current site. Further information about the Institute may be found at its web site [www.bfit.edu/pages/aboutfib/short\\_hist.html](http://www.bfit.edu/pages/aboutfib/short_hist.html).

The Franklin Public Library whose history can be found earlier in this issue, was faced with closing during the summer months and reopening for only one day in the fall earlier this spring as a result of major township budget cuts. Fortunately some additional funding has been found and the Library is now open on a limited schedule four days a week, with the prospect of adding a fifth day in July. It is to be hoped that eventually the library will be open seven days a week as it has in the past. For a virtual tour of the library's art and architectural resources as well as more information, visit the library's web site: [www.franklin.ma.us/auto/town/library](http://www.franklin.ma.us/auto/town/library).

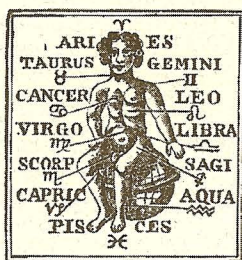


## Benjamin Franklin House, Craven Street, London

Ralph Elliot wrote briefly of the work now being done on the Benjamin Franklin House in London. More detailed information can be found on the Benjamin Franklin House web site, [www.thersa.org/franklin/default.html](http://www.thersa.org/franklin/default.html). Phase II of work on the interior of the 1730s building is well underway and presentation of the house as a dynamic museum and educational facility is scheduled for Franklin's 299th birthday, January 17, 2005. However, outreach activities continue even amidst the construction. Benjamin Franklin House Science Day recently brought inner city children together with children from the American Community Schools to explore Franklin's practical approach to science. The annual Symposium will take place in October on the provocative theme, Benjamin Franklin and the Human Genome!

Dr. Márcia Balisciano, Director of Benjamin Franklin House and a Royal Society of the Arts fellow, recently sent a copy of an article she prepared for the Royal Society of the Arts magazine in March. Asked to write about a hero among past fellows, not surprisingly she wrote glowingly about, Benjamin Franklin: The Practical Hero, whose election to the Royal Society is recounted by Claude-Anne Lopez earlier in this issue.





## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### Ongoing-February 2006

Exhibit at the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, "Only One Man Died: Medical Adventures on the Lewis and Clark Trail." Exhibit explores the medical aspects of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Meriwether Lewis carefully planned the trip consulting with doctors in Philadelphia to learn critical medical skills he would need on the expedition and purchasing medical supplies, scientific equipment and provisions.

### June 23, 2003, 3-5:30 PM

"The Broomcorn/Brooms Revolution," Daniel E. Jones and Samuel E. Moyer, part of the Association for Living History, Farm & Agricultural Conference, Revolutionary Times: The Transformation of Everyday Lives, to be held in the vicinity of Princeton, NJ, June 22-26. For additional information (and a glimpse of an innovative conference program) visit the ALHFAM website: [www.alhfam.org](http://www.alhfam.org)

### July 22, 2003, 7:00 PM

Walter Isaacson, author of *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* will give a talk on the life and times of Benjamin Franklin. Book signing to follow. Free Library of Philadelphia, 1901 Vine St. Philadelphia, PA 19103. For information call: 215-567-4341

### August 17, and October 11, 2003

Visit the home of Franklin's long-time friend John Bartram and tour the city from the river. Historic Bartram's Garden is hosting two special events in the next few months in conjunction with special hour-long river cruises. Boat departs from Bartram's Garden and sails up the Schuylkill to the Fairmount Waterworks and back. On August 17, 2003, Bartram's curator Joel Fry will speak on the Franklinia. Saturday, October 11, is the commemoration of the 275th anniversary of the purchase of the property by John Bartram in 1728. Tickets are \$15 apiece; call 215.729.5281 for more information.

### September 19, 2003

"The Atlantic Economy in the Era of Eighteenth-Century Revolutions," Conference of the Program in Early American Economy and Society, The Library Company of Philadelphia. Call (215) 546-3181 for more information, or visit the Library Company's web site, [www.librarycompany.org](http://www.librarycompany.org).

### October 30-November 1, 2003

Mark your calendars for the annual Benjamin Franklin tour to Annapolis, Md. Information will be mailed shortly.

### January 16, 2004

Celebration! Benjamin Franklin, Founder festivities including seminar, luncheon and procession to Franklin's grave. Details will follow. Call Carol Smith 856.429.8331 to be placed on advance mailing list.

### October 6, 2005

Benjamin Franklin Consortium Exhibit opens in Philadelphia at the Franklin Institute.

## Fenmore Seton

Friends of Franklin are saddened by the loss of one of their number, Fenmore Seton, of Hamden, Connecticut, who died on May 26, 2003. A 1938 graduate of Yale College, he established Seton Name Plate Corp. after serving as an officer in World War II. A philanthropist on both a local and a global scale, Fen headed Rehabilitation International, an organization which works to improve the quality of life for disabled people. In 1992 President George Bush presented him with the Presidential Distinguished Service award for his work with the disabled. We knew Fen as a dedicated member of both the Friends of Franklin and the Friends of the Franklin Papers, and he and his wife Phyllis helped to underwrite volumes 34 through 36 of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*.

## New Librarian at APS

Dr. Martin L. Levitt is the newly appointed Librarian of the American Philosophical Society. Dr. Levitt has been affiliated with APS for many years serving as acting director after the unexpected death of Dr. Edward Carter. He holds a doctorate in history from Temple University where he is an adjunct professor. His interests are wide ranging covering the fields of military and public history as well as the history of technology.



## Special Thanks to Our Life Members!

William D. Anderson, Jr.  
Wichita, KS  
Genya Asama  
Suwa-Gun Nagano-Ken, Japan

Jackson C. Boswell  
Arlington, VA

Anna Coxe-Toogood  
Wyndmoor, PA

Elly Fitzig  
Wichita, KS

James M. Gassaway  
Swarthmore, PA

Michael L. George  
Dallas, TX

Stuart Green, M.D.  
Los Alamitos, CA

William H. Greer, Jr.  
Chevy Chase, MD

Doug Hall  
Cincinnati, OH

Pamela Hartsock, Ph.D.  
Spring Valley, CA

James Hayase  
Tokyo, Japan

Dudley Herschbach  
Lincoln, MA

E. Cutter Hughes, Jr.  
Huntsville, AL

Mr. & Mrs. David A. Jones  
Louisville, KY

Frank B. Jones  
Bloomington, IN

Daniel Jouve  
Paris, France

Benjamin Franklin Kahn  
Chevy Chase, MD

Stuart E. Karu  
Cape Elizabeth, ME

John T. Kelly  
Penn Valley, PA

Stanley Klos  
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Charles Lard  
West Hartford, CT

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Claude-Anne Lopez  
New Haven, CT

Martin Mangold  
Rockville, MD

Albert Merck  
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Robert Middlekauff  
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Ikuko Nakano  
Kanagawa-ken, Japan

Michael Newcomb  
Cave Creek, AZ

Barbara Oberg  
Princeton, NJ

Greg Orwoll  
Rochester, MN

L. David Roper  
Blacksburg, VA

Michel Roubinet  
Ozoir La Ferriere, France

Deane M. Sherman  
Rockville, MD

Malcolm Smith  
Highland Park, IL

Noriyuki Uenami  
Tokyo, Japan

George Franklin Waters  
Rochester, MN

Douglas L. Whitley  
Batavia, IL

Ehsan Zayan  
London, UK

## Welcome and Thanks to New Members!

### Life Member

Greg Orwoll  
Rochester, MN

### Sustaining Friends

David Behlen,  
Little Falls, NY

Keith A. Tussings,  
New Brighton, MN

### Friends

John D. McCall,  
Alexandria, VA

Shelley Starbuck,  
Tulsa, OK

Mary Katherine Sullivan Davis,  
Springfield, IL



The Friends of Franklin Organization is seeking speakers on Franklin and various aspects of his life. If you are interested in sharing your research with other members of the Friends please contact Kathy DeLuca at 856.979.1613

Visit the  
Friends of Franklin website:  
[www.benfranklin2006.org](http://www.benfranklin2006.org)



## Join Friends of Franklin!

Would you like to become an official member of the Friends of Franklin organization? Do you have a friend or relative who might wish to join, or who would appreciate a gift membership? All individuals, scholars, students, collectors, and Franklinophiles, as well as institutions, are invited to become members of the Friends of Franklin at the following membership rates:

Life Members	\$1,000	Sustaining Friend	\$100
Institutional Members	\$1,000	Franklin Friend	\$50
Supporting Friend	\$ 250	Student Members (full time only; photocopy id)	\$20

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Website: [www.benfranklin2006.org](http://www.benfranklin2006.org)

Philadelphia, PA 19106

P.O. Box 40048

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