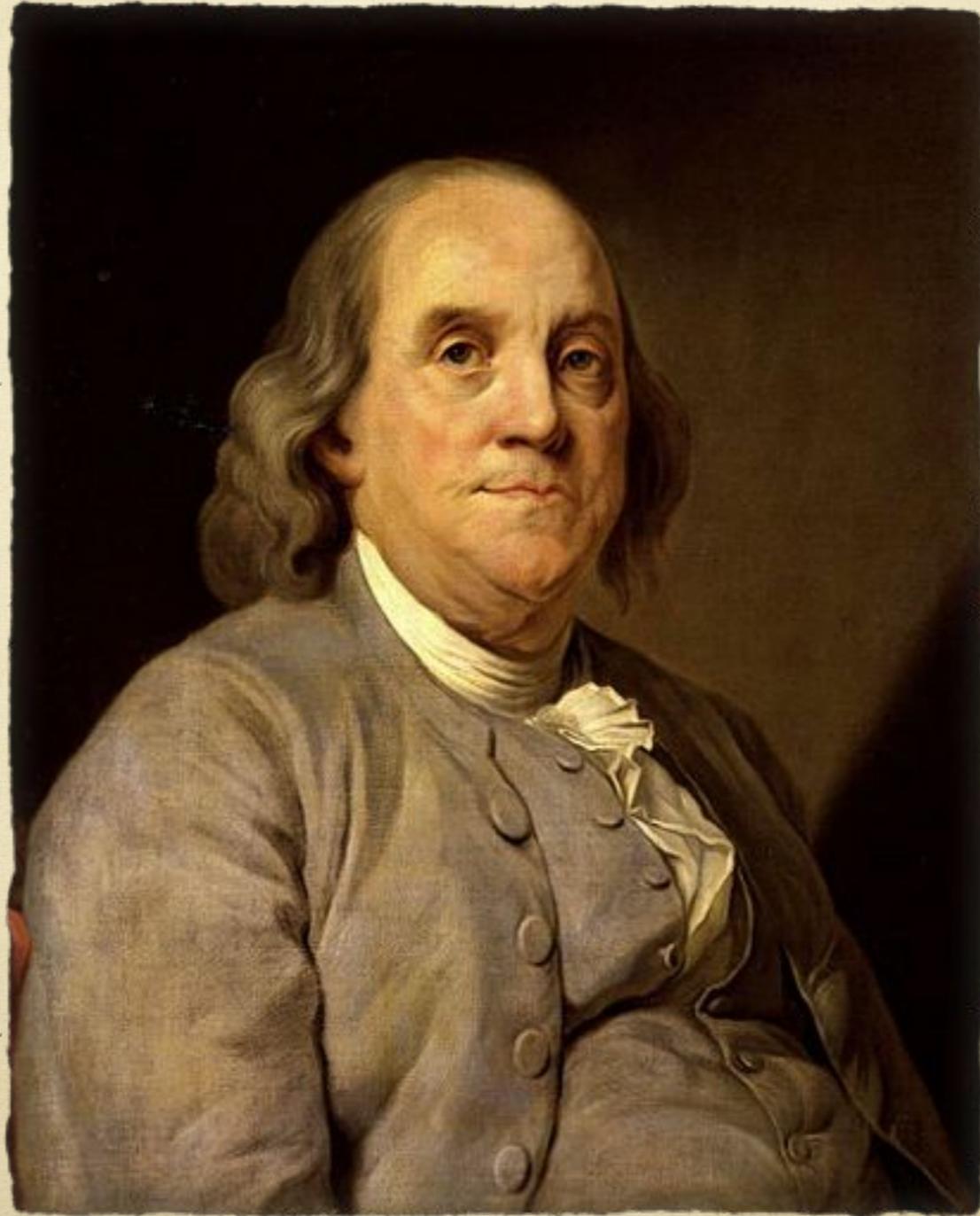


# Benjamin Franklin



**Benjamin Franklin** ( January 6, 1705 – April 17, 1790) was one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. A renowned polymath, Franklin was a leading author, printer, political theorist, politician, freemason, postmaster, scientist, inventor, civic activist, statesman, and diplomat. As a scientist, he was a major figure in the American Enlightenment and the history of physics for his discoveries and theories regarding electricity. As an inventor, he is known for the lightning rod, bifocals, and the Franklin stove, among other inventions. He facilitated many civic organizations, including Philadelphia's fire department and a university.

## Early life in Boston

Benjamin Franklin was born on [Milk Street](#), in [Boston, Massachusetts](#), on January 17, 1706, and [baptized](#) at Old South Meeting House. He was one of seventeen children born to [Josiah Franklin](#), and one of ten born by Josiah's second wife, Abiah Folger; the daughter of [Peter Foulger](#) and [Mary Morrill](#). Among Benjamin's siblings were his older brother [James](#) and his younger sister [Jane](#).

Josiah wanted Ben 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. Although "his parents talked of the church as a career" for Franklin, his schooling ended when he was ten. He worked for his father for a time, and at 12 he 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](#)



Franklin's Birthplace, Milk Street.



bust above the second floor facade of this building.

# Philadelphia

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. After a few months, 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. Following this, 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.

## Newspaperman

Upon Denham's death, Franklin returned to his former trade. 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](#). The *Gazette* gave Franklin a forum for agitation about a variety of local reforms and initiatives through printed essays and observations. Over time, his commentary, and his adroit cultivation of a positive image as an industrious and intellectual young man, earned him a great deal of social respect. But even after Franklin had achieved fame as a scientist and statesman, he habitually signed his letters with the unpretentious 'B. Franklin, Printer.

In 1732, Ben Franklin published the first [German language](#) newspaper in America – *Die Philadelphische Zeitung* – although it failed after only one year, because four other newly founded German papers quickly dominated the newspaper market. Franklin printed Moravian religious books in German. Franklin often visited Bethlehem staying at the [Moravian Sun Inn](#). In a 1751 pamphlet on demographic growth and its implications for the colonies, he called the [Pennsylvania Germans](#) "Palatine Boors" who could never acquire the "Complexion" of the English settlers and to "Blacks and Tawneys" as weakening the social structure of the colonies. Although Franklin apparently reconsidered shortly thereafter, and the phrases were omitted from all later printings of the pamphlet, his views may have played a role in his political defeat in 1764.



Benjamin Franklin (center) at work on a printing press.

Reproduction of a Charles Mills painting by the Detroit

Publishing Company.



[Deborah Read Franklin](#) (c. 1759). Common-law wife of Benjamin Franklin



[Sarah Franklin Bache](#) (1743–1808). Daughter of Benjamin Franklin and Deborah Read

## Common-law marriage to Deborah Read

In 1723, at the age of 17, Franklin proposed to 15-year-old [Deborah Read](#) while a boarder in the Read home. At that time, Read's mother was wary of allowing her young daughter to marry Franklin, who was on his way to London at Governor [Sir William Keith's](#) request, and also because of his financial instability. Her own husband had recently died, and Mrs. Read declined Franklin's request to marry her daughter. While Franklin was in London, his trip was extended, and there were problems with Sir William's promises of support. Perhaps because of the circumstances of this delay, Deborah married a man named John Rodgers. This proved to be a regrettable decision. Rodgers shortly avoided his debts and prosecution by fleeing to [Barbados](#) with her [dowry](#), leaving Deborah behind. Rodgers's fate was unknown, and because of [bigamy](#) laws, Deborah was not free to remarry. Franklin established a [common-law marriage](#) with Deborah Read on September 1, 1730. They took in Franklin's young, recently acknowledged illegitimate son, [William](#), and raised him in their household. In addition, they had two children together. The first, [Francis Folger Franklin](#), born October 1732, died of [smallpox](#) in 1736. Their second child, [Sarah Franklin](#), familiarly called Sally, was born in 1743. She eventually married [Richard Bache](#), had seven children, and cared for her father in his old age. Deborah's fear of the sea meant that she never accompanied Franklin on any of his extended trips to Europe, despite his



Benjamin Franklin by Benjamin Wilson

Franklin used London as a base to travel. In 1771, he made short journeys through different parts of England, staying with Joseph Priestley at Leeds, Thomas Percival at Manchester and Erasmus Darwin at Lichfield.

In Scotland, he spent five days with Lord Kames near Stirling and stayed for three weeks with David Hume in Edinburgh. In 1759, he visited Edinburgh with his son, and recalled his conversations there as "the *densest* happiness of my life". In February 1759, the University of St Andrews awarded him an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree, and in October of the same year he was granted Freedom of the Borough of St Andrews.

He had never been to Ireland before, and met and stayed with Lord Hillsborough, who he believed was especially attentive. Franklin noted of him that "all the plausible behaviour I have described is meant only, by patting and stroking the horse, to make him more patient, while the reins are drawn tighter, and the spurs set deeper into his sides." In Dublin, Franklin was invited to sit with the members of the Irish Parliament rather than in the gallery. He was the first American to receive this honor. While touring Ireland, he was moved by the level of poverty he saw. Ireland's economy was affected by the same trade regulations and laws of Britain that governed America. Franklin feared that America



Marble memorial statue, [Benjamin Franklin National Memorial](#)

Franklin struggled with obesity throughout his middle-aged and later years, which resulted in multiple health problems, particularly gout, which worsened as he aged. In poor health during the signing of the US Constitution in 1787, he was rarely seen in public from then until his death.

Benjamin Franklin died from pleuritic attack at his home in Philadelphia on April 17, 1790, at age 84. Approximately 20,000 people attended his funeral. He was interred in Christ Church Burial Ground in Philadelphia. In 1728, aged 22, Franklin wrote what he hoped would be his own epitaph:

The Body of B. Franklin Printer; Like the Cover of an old Book, Its Contents torn out, And stript of its Lettering and Gilding, Lies here, Food for Worms. But the Work shall not be wholly lost: For it will, as he believ'd, appear once more, In a new & more perfect Edition, Corrected and Amended By the Author



The grave of Benjamin Franklin, [Philadelphia](#), Pennsylvania



Franklin on the Series 2009

# hundred dollar bill