

## It's Ben Franklin Month!

Well, it should be, anyhow! He was born on January 17, 1706, in Boston, the tenth son of soap maker, and he went on to become one of the greatest minds and personalities that America has ever produced...a truly amazing man! Ben decided to run away in 1723, finally arriving in Philadelphia. Franklin found work as an apprentice printer and eventually set himself up in his own printing shop. Franklin seemed to work all the time, and the citizens of Philadelphia began to notice the diligent young businessman. Soon he began getting the contract to do government jobs and started thriving in business. In 1729, he bought a newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, which soon became the most successful in the colonies. This newspaper, among other firsts, would print the first political cartoon, authored by Ben himself. In 1730, he married his childhood sweetheart, Deborah Read.

Franklin thrived on work. In 1733, he started publishing *Poor Richard's Almanack* under the guise of Richard Saunders. What distinguished Franklin's almanac were his witty aphorisms and lively writing. Many of the famous phrases associated with Franklin, such as, "A penny saved is a penny earned" come from *Poor Richard*.

Franklin continued his civic contributions during the 1730s and 1740s. He helped launch projects to pave, clean and light Philadelphia's streets. He started agitating for environmental clean up. He helped to launch the Library Company in 1731. Thus was born the nation's first subscription library. In 1743, he helped to launch the American Philosophical Society, the first learned society in America. He also brought together a group who formed the Pennsylvania Hospital in 1751. The Library Company, Philosophical Society, and Pennsylvania Hospital are all in existence today.

In 1736, he had organized Philadelphia's Union Fire Company, the first in the city. His famous saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," was actually fire-fighting advice, and, in 1752, Franklin helped to found the Philadelphia Contribution for Insurance Against Loss by Fire, also still in business today. Those with insurance policies were not wiped out financially. In the meantime, Franklin's printing business was thriving. By 1749 he retired from business and started concentrating on science, experiments, and inventions. In 1743, he had already invented the Franklin stove, refusing to take out a patent. Among Franklin's other inventions are swim fins, the glass armonica (a musical instrument) and bifocals. His observations on electricity, including his kite experiment which verified the nature of electricity and lightning brought Franklin international fame.

In 1765, Franklin was caught by surprise by America's overwhelming opposition to the Stamp Act. His testimony before Parliament helped persuade the members to repeal the law. He started working actively for Independence. Franklin was elected to the Second Continental Congress and worked on a committee of five that helped to draft the Declaration of Independence. Though much of the writing is Thomas Jefferson's, much of the contribution is Franklin's. In 1776 Franklin signed the Declaration, and afterward sailed to France as an ambassador to the Court of Louis XVI. The French loved him! He was a favorite of the ladies (several years earlier his wife Deborah had died), and Ben was now a notorious flirt. Franklin also helped secure loans and persuade the French they were doing the right thing. Franklin was on hand to sign the Treaty of Paris in 1783, after the Americans had won the Revolution. Now a man in his late seventies, Franklin returned to America. He signed the Constitution. One of his last public acts was writing an anti-slavery treatise in 1789.

Franklin died on April 17, 1790 at the age of 84. An astounding 20,000 people attended his funeral [<http://www.ushistory.org/franklin/facts/>].

I actually save Franklin covers, as part of my "Historical Figures" collection. I haven't been looking for them very long, but I already have 74. There should be hundreds. His name is used on everything from financial institutions to Hotels to Insurance companies to...you name it! An extraordinary man, and one of my favorite historical personalities!

