

Biography: Benjamin Franklin

by Mary Stoyell Stimpson *from The Child's Book of American Biography*

Benjamin Franklin was one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. This biography begins when he worked in his printing business in Philadelphia.

After one or two useless trips to England, Franklin settled down to the printing business in Philadelphia. He was the busiest man in town. Deborah, his wife, helped him, and he started a newspaper, a magazine, a bookstore; he made ink, he made paper, even made soap (work that he hated so when a boy!). Then he published every year an almanac. Into this odd book, which people hurried to buy, he put some wise sayings, which I am sure you must have heard many times. Such as: "Haste makes waste"; "Well done is better than well said"; and "Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."

Franklin and his wife did so many things and did them well that they grew rich. So when he was only forty-two, Franklin shut up all his shops and took his time for studying out inventions. When you hear about the different things he invented, you will not wonder that the colleges in the country thought he ought to be honored with a degree and made him Doctor Franklin. Here are some of his inventions: lightning-rods, stoves, fans to cool hot rooms, a cure for smoking chimneys, better printing-presses, sidewalks, street cleaning. He opened salt mines and drained swamps so that they were made into good land. Then he founded the first public library, the first police service, and the first fire company. Doesn't it seem as if he thought of everything?

But better than all, Franklin always worked for the glory of America. When King George was angry and bitter against our colonies, Franklin went to England and stood his ground against the king and all his council. He said the king had no right to make the colonies pay a lot of money for everything that was brought over from England unless they had some say as to how much money it should be. If they paid taxes, they wanted to vote. They were not willing to be just slaves under a hard master.

"Very well, then," said the council, "then you colonists can't have any more clothes from England."

Mr. Franklin answered back: "Very well, then, we will wear old clothes till we can make our own new ones!"

In a week or so word was sent from England that clothing would not be taxed, and the colonists had great rejoicings. They built bonfires, rang bells, and had processions; and Benjamin Franklin's name was loudly cheered.

But England still needed money and decided to make the colonists pay a tax on tea and a few other things. Then the American colonists were as angry as they could be. They tipped the whole cargo of tea into Boston Harbor, and in spite of Franklin's trying to make the king and the colonists

understand each other, there was a long war (it is called the Revolutionary War) and it ended in the colonists declaring themselves independent of Great Britain. A paper telling the king and the world that the colonists should not obey the English rule any longer, but would make laws of their own was signed by men from all thirteen colonies. Benjamin Franklin was one of the men from Pennsylvania who signed it. As this paper—The Declaration of Independence—was first proclaimed July 4, 1776, the people always celebrate the fourth day of July throughout the United States.

Franklin was postmaster-general of the colonies; he was our first minister to the Court of France, the governor (or president, as the office was then called) of Pennsylvania, and helped, more than almost any other man, to make America the great country she is.

Franklin was admired in France and England for his good judgment and clever ideas. Pictures of him were shown in public places; prints of his face were for sale in three countries; medallions of his head were set in rings and snuff-boxes; he traveled in royal coaches, and was treated like a prince. But although it was "the Great Doctor Franklin" here, and "the Noble Patriot" there, he did not grow vain. Benjamin Franklin was just a modest, good American!

Questions

1. What was one of Franklin's sayings from his book?
2. Name two of Franklin's inventions.
3. What does *processions* mean here: "They built bonfires, rang bells, and had processions"?
4. Franklin served as governor, or president, of which state?