

EXCERPT: From *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania, Volume Three, 1757-1775*, pp. 531-537

For complete essay see *Lawmaking and Legislators in Pennsylvania, Volume Three, 1757-1775*, pp. 531-572

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

ASSEMBLY: City of Philadelphia, 1750, 1751, 1752, 1753, 1754, 1755, 1756, 1757, 1758, 1759, 1760, 1761, 1762, 1763, 1773, 1775 (resigned)
Speaker: 1763

b. 6 Jan. 1706, Boston, Mass.¹ **d.** 17 April 1790, Philadelphia, Pa. **Father:** Josiah Franklin (1657-1745). **Mother:** Abiah Folger Franklin (1667-1752). **m.** 1730 Deborah Read (Rogers) (1708-1774); **children:** Francis, Sarah. **Mother unknown:** William. **Offices:** Amer. cols.: deputy postmaster general of North America, 1753-74; agent to Great Britain, for Pa., 1757-62, 1764-75 (assistant, 1764); for Ga., 1768-74; for N.J., 1769-75; for Mass., 1770-75; U.S.: delegate, 2nd Continental Congress, 1775-77²; postmaster general, 1775-76; Indian commissioner for the Middle Department, 1775; commissioner to Canada, 1776; commissioner to France, 1776-78; minister plenipotentiary to France, 1778-84; delegate, 1787 Constitutional Convention; Pa.: clerk of the Assembly, 1736-50; Indian treaty commissioner, 1753; commissioner, Albany conference, 1754; provincial commissioner, 1755-56, 1763-64; commander, Northampton Co. defenses, 1756; member, Council of Safety, 1775-76 (president, 1775-76); delegate, 1776 Provincial Convention; delegate, 1776 Constitutional Convention (president); member, Supreme Executive Council, 1785-1788 (president, 1785-88); Phila. Co.: JP, 1749-57; city of Phila.: postmaster of Phila., 1737-53; common councilman, 1748-51; alderman, 1751-76; col., Associators, 1756; member, Committee of Observation and Inspection, 1775-76; city of Phila. and Phila. Co.: JP, 1776.³

Benjamin Franklin, one of Pennsylvania's most distinguished residents and, perhaps more than any other contemporary American, the embodiment of the dynamic spirit of change during the eighteenth century, played a major role in the establishment of an independent nation out of 13 British colonies in North America. He also served Pennsylvania as a member of the Assembly and the Supreme Executive Council, and as a delegate to the 1776 and 1787 constitutional conventions.

Franklin was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on 6 January 1706 to Josiah Franklin and Abiah Folger Franklin, the fifteenth of seventeen children sired by his father and the eighth of ten born to his mother, his father's second wife. Franklin lived in the corner house on Fort and High (later, Milk and Washington) streets, opposite the Congregationalist Old South Church, where his parents were members and where he was baptized.⁴ His father had been born in 1657 in the village of Ecton, Northamptonshire, England; he later moved to nearby Banbury, Oxfordshire, where he apprenticed under his older brother as a silk dyer. The search for greater economic opportunities brought Josiah Franklin to Boston in 1683 with his first wife, Anne Child Franklin (d. 1689), also a native of Ecton. Shortly after his arrival, he abandoned his initial trade, for which there was little demand in Massachusetts, and established himself as a dealer in tallow and candles. He became prominent within the South Church, occasionally hosting midweek meetings of the congregation, leading the services in closing prayer, and sometimes serving as precentor. In 1689, only five months after the death of his first wife, he married a fellow parishioner, Abiah Folger, who had been born in Nantucket, Massachusetts, and joined the South Church in 1688, despite the Baptist leanings of her parents.⁵

In his autobiography, Benjamin Franklin left a complimentary picture of his parents. In spite of bearing 10 children, his mother had "an excellent Constitution." His father was of average height but very strong, "ingenious, could draw prettily, was skill'd a little in Music and had a clear pleasing Voice." Franklin added that his father was "a mechanical Genius too." But what most impressed Franklin about his father was his

“sound Understanding, and solid Judgment in prudential Matters, both in private & publick Affairs.” Franklin noted that his father was consulted frequently by leading members of the community concerning civic and church matters, and “At his Table he lik’d to have as often as he could, some sensible Friend or Neighbour, to converse with, and always took care to start some ingenious or useful Topic for Discourse, which might tend to improve the Minds of his Children.” Moreover, Franklin recalled with admiration his father’s endeavors to settle him in future employment. Initially Franklin was destined for the church, but the expense of a college education and the meager income of educated but often impoverished ministers persuaded his father to remove Franklin from the grammar school and place him in a local school for writing and arithmetic. After finishing a short education, Franklin worked at his father’s candle shop for two years, to the age of 12, but he disliked the trade and his father feared that Franklin would follow his older brother Josiah to sea. “He therefore sometimes took me to walk with him,” Franklin recalled, “and see Joiners, Bricklayers, Turners, Braziers, &c. at their Work, that he might observe my Inclination, & endeavour to fix it on some Trade or other on Land.” Observing Franklin’s love of books, his father in 1717 arranged for his apprenticeship to Franklin’s older brother James, a printer.⁶

In the five years Franklin spent with his brother, he learned the printing trade and had the opportunity to see his own writing in print for the first time. At the age of 16, Franklin wrote a series of letters under the pseudonym “Silence Dogood,” supposedly a country parson’s widow, who in her good-natured, unassuming manner passed a critical eye over life in Boston from the arrogance of the church, to the city’s seamier night life, to women’s foolish fashionable clothing. The first letter appeared in the *New-England Courant* on 2 April 1722, and the fourteenth and final Dogood missive was published on 8 October.⁷ Written in an easy style that exhibited humor and clever turns of phrases, the letters were a success; both the letters and speculation about their author’s identity became topics of conversation among the newspaper’s readers. Franklin had not told his brother or his friends that the letters were his work, instead anonymously slipping the essays under the door of the newspaper’s office. He kept his secret, recalled Franklin, “till my small Fund of Sense for such Performances was pretty well exhausted.” After he revealed Dogood’s real persona, Franklin gained in reputation with James Franklin’s friends, but not with his brother, who concluded, remembered Franklin, “that it tended to make me too vain.”⁸

Franklin’s relationship with his brother James was often contentious, and James (according to Franklin) often beat him.⁹ However, eventually articles James Franklin had printed in his newspaper critical of the Massachusetts government led to his being forbidden from continuing to print the newspaper. James Franklin then contrived a plan to avoid prosecution, which plan also provided Franklin with an opportunity to free himself from his increasingly onerous apprenticeship. In February 1723 James Franklin replaced his name under the masthead of the *New-England Courant* with that of his younger brother, Benjamin Franklin. James Franklin had already spent a month in prison for mocking the government’s slow response to a report of pirates near Boston, and he had no intention of slackening his criticism of the government or the local clergy and the dons of Harvard. To preserve the legal fiction that Benjamin Franklin, and not he, was legally responsible for the material in his newspaper, James Franklin returned the apprenticeship indenture to Franklin and, although the two brothers had secretly agreed to continue their previous relationship, it no longer had the force of law. Moreover, James Franklin had little motivation to reveal the truth.¹⁰

Franklin seized the opportunity presented by the voided indenture to quit his brother’s shop.¹¹ However, resentments ran high between them, and James Franklin persuaded the other Boston printers not to employ his brother. Franklin, therefore, decided to abandon his native home for New York City, arriving there in either late September or early October 1723. “I found my self in New York,” he later wrote, “near 300 Miles from home, a Boy of but 17, without the least Recommendation to or Knowledge of any Person in the Place, and with very little Money in my Pocket.”¹²

Unable to find employment with the city’s only printer, William Bradford, Franklin was advised by him to inquire of his son Andrew in Philadelphia, also a printer. Franklin accordingly revised his plans and headed for Philadelphia. After being marooned for 30 hours on a boat without food or drink during a storm, and enduring a three-day, 50-mile journey on foot, partly in the driving rain, he arrived in Burlington, New Jersey, where he found river transportation to Philadelphia, reaching the Market Street wharf on a Sunday morning. According to his autobiography, Franklin immediately upon arrival made his (now famous) walk along Market Street to Fourth Street, south to Walnut Street, and then back to the wharf, dressed in his dirty work clothes, eating a loaf of bread purchased from a nearby baker, with two more loaves tucked under his

arms (he later gave the two extra loaves to a woman and child). He claimed to have walked by the home of his future wife, Deborah Read, who, standing in the door of her house, saw Franklin and concluded that he made “a most awkward ridiculous Appearance.” He subsequently followed a group of Quakers into their meetinghouse, sat down and, “hearing nothing said” and being very tired from his journey, fell asleep until the end of the meeting when a Friend “was kind enough to rouse me.”¹³ A sign of things to come, the first house that Franklin, later the leader of the Quaker party, “was in or slept in, in Philadelphia,” was a Quaker meetinghouse.

Although Franklin was unable to procure employment with the younger Bradford, he was hired by another Philadelphia printer, Samuel Keimer, through the intercession of the elder William Bradford, who had coincidentally arrived from New York at about the same time. Keimer arranged for Franklin to take up quarters at the home of John Read, his future father-in-law, whose house was next door to Keimer’s shop on the south side of Market Street, between Third and Fourth streets. The following year, Franklin had another unusual turn of luck; one of his brothers-in-law, Robert Holmes, a ship captain who sailed between Delaware and Boston, discovered Franklin’s whereabouts and wrote to him. Franklin wrote back to Holmes, who was in New Castle, Delaware, explaining his reasons for leaving Boston. Holmes happened to receive the letter while in the company of Pennsylvania’s governor, Sir William Keith.* On hearing Franklin’s story from Holmes and reading the letter, the governor declared him to be “a young Man of promising Parts” who should be encouraged. On returning to Philadelphia, Keith with John French* visited Franklin at Keimer’s shop, inquired of his well-being, and invited him to join them for lunch. “I was not a little surpriz’d,” recalled the unsuspecting Franklin, “and Keimer star’d like a Pig poison’d.” During their lunch, the impetuous Keith promised to use his influence on Franklin’s behalf and encouraged him to return to Boston in order to secure financial backing from his father, while Keith, as governor, would guarantee him the government printing for the colonies of Pennsylvania and Delaware. Franklin agreed and in April 1724 returned to the home of his parents.¹⁴

Once in Boston, Franklin was greeted warmly by his friends, including the Reverend Cotton Mather, and family, with the exception of his brother James. Wondering aloud who, regardless of their good intentions, would willingly sponsor a young, unproved apprentice, Josiah Franklin sent Keith a gracious letter thanking him for his interest in his son’s affairs but declining the offer. His father was nevertheless impressed that Franklin had obtained “so advantageous a Character from a Person of such Note” and that he had shown the ability to work and save his money. If he continued to demonstrate “steady Industry and a prudent Parsimony,” Josiah Franklin promised he would help his son set up his own business when he reached 21. Franklin returned to Philadelphia shortly thereafter and took up residence with Keimer on Market Street. During the summer of 1724 Franklin initiated his courtship with the young Deborah Read and continued to rest his hopes on Keith’s promised patronage. A frequent guest at the governor’s house, Franklin was encouraged by Keith to sail to London directly and to purchase the type and printer’s materials necessary to start his own business; furthermore, Keith promised the financial backing that Josiah Franklin had denied. On 5 November 1724 Franklin boarded the *London Hope* armed only with the assurances of the governor’s secretary that letters of credit and introduction from Keith to important contacts in London were safely in the ship captain’s mailbag.¹⁵

Franklin arrived in London on 24 December and soon discovered that there were no letters from Keith onboard the ship. When he finally revealed the whole story to fellow Philadelphian and merchant, Thomas Denham, who had accompanied Franklin on the trip, he learned the true character of the governor. Denham assured the stunned Franklin that Keith undoubtedly never wrote any such letters. “[H]e laught at the Notion of the Governor’s giving me a Letter of Credit,” remembered Franklin, “having as he said no Credit to give.” Thousands of miles from home, and with few resources, Franklin found employment at Samuel Palmer’s printing house in Bartholomew Close, London. As for Keith, Franklin would recall decades later with considerable charity that he was, after all, a good governor, but flawed: “He wish’d to please every body; and having little to give, he gave Expectations.” At the time, however, Franklin was not as forgiving. When a letter that he mistakenly had thought was his letter of introduction was returned to him and he learned that it contained a scheme of the governor’s to embarrass his political opponent Andrew Hamilton,* Franklin, “partly from Resentment & Ill-Will,” gave the letter to the appreciative Hamilton, who had just arrived in London. “And from that time,” Franklin observed, “he became my Friend, greatly to my Advantage afterwards on many Occasions.”¹⁶

In 1725 Franklin left Samuel Palmer for employment at John Watt's printing house near Lincoln's Inn Fields and took up quarters in the less expensive Duke Street.¹⁷ After two years of working and living in England, Franklin decided to return to Philadelphia. He arrived in his adopted city aboard the *Berkshire* on 11 October 1726, his passage paid by the returning merchant Denham, who had offered to employ Franklin as his mercantile clerk. Franklin returned to America a more mature person than the callow youth who had departed less than two years earlier. On the voyage home he boldly composed a plan for regulating his "future Conduct in Life," the record of which unfortunately has not survived. "It is the more remarkable," he later reflected, "as being form'd when I was so young, and yet being pretty faithfully adhered to quite thro' to old Age."¹⁸

At Denham's store on Water Street, Franklin "attended the Business diligently, studied Accounts, and grew in a little Time expert at selling." Although he "respected & lov'd" Denham and might have continued in his employ indefinitely, his tenure with Denham was cut short. In early 1727 Denham died, and Franklin, once again left "to the wide World," returned to Keimer's employment as a printer.¹⁹ There being no one producing printing type in the colonies, Franklin taught himself how to strike type and also made ink for Keimer's establishment. Within several months, however, Franklin realized that Keimer did not intend to keep him, but had only hired him to train his employees before finding an excuse to dismiss him. Keimer finally manufactured a quarrel with Franklin causing the latter to leave, but soon thereafter, having been awarded a contract to print New Jersey's paper currency and needing someone with the skill to make the necessary engravings, Keimer was forced to ask Franklin to return. Having been unable to find other employment, Franklin agreed to return, after entering into a secret agreement with fellow employee Hugh Meredith to start their own printing company as soon as the type and other supplies arrived from England. The money for the enterprise came from Meredith's father, who had hoped that Franklin's sobriety and industriousness would serve as an influence on his frequently intoxicated son.²⁰

Franklin and Meredith went into business for themselves in 1728. The following year they purchased the *Pennsylvania Gazette* from Keimer and, with the help of friends who provided them with printing jobs, their business prospered. In 1730 Franklin borrowed money to buy out the often-inebriated Meredith and over the next 18 years became very successful with a general printing business, in addition to printing both the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and *Poor Richard's Almanack*, a yearly publication that was as humorous as it was informative. He also organized profitable partnerships with other printers in Charleston, South Carolina; New Haven, Connecticut; and New York City, and in 1744 he took on an apprentice, David Hall, who in 1748 became his partner, undertaking the daily management of the business with the ultimate intention of becoming sole owner. Franklin in that year retired from printing and left his Market Street shop and home (between Front and Second streets) for a house near Second and Sassafras streets. He received from Hall over £8,000 as his share of the partnership's net income through 1766, when Hall became full owner.²¹

In January and February 1730 Franklin had received the appointment to print the minutes of the Assembly and the laws of the province.²² At the beginning of the 1736 Assembly term he petitioned to be appointed clerk of the Assembly, which proceeded to appoint him clerk for the ensuing term "without Opposition." Franklin wrote that in the following year "a new Member made a long Speech against me in order to favour some other Candidate." Franklin was reelected (perhaps with the help of Speaker Andrew Hamilton, whom he had befriended in England) despite the opposition.²³ But Franklin was not content to let the matter rest and, after a suitable grace period, he borrowed a book from the new member's considerable library and then graciously thanked him for the favor. "When we next met in the House," recalled Franklin, "he spoke to me, (which he had never done before) and with great Civility." The two became friends, and Franklin was named clerk every term through the 1750 Assembly. "And it shows how much more profitable it is," moralized Franklin while reflecting about the episode, "prudently to remove, than to resent, return & continue inimical Proceedings."²⁴

Franklin also renewed his interest in his erstwhile neighbor Deborah Read and on 1 September 1730 "took her to Wife." That the Franklins eschewed an official ceremony resulted from her unclear marital status. After Franklin had left for England in 1724, indicating to her that he would not return soon, at her mother's urging Deborah had married another man, John Rogers, who subsequently was rumored to have a wife living in England. Rogers soon abandoned Deborah and by 1730 there was a rumor that he had died. Franklin now "pity'd poor Miss Read's unfortunate Situation who was generally dejected, seldom chearful, and avoided Company," and because of his "Giddiness & Inconstancy when in London" he felt partially responsible for

her unhappy state. Despite Rogers' rumored pre-existing wife and his possible death, neither of which were subject to confirmation or dismissal at the time, the marriage of Benjamin Franklin and Deborah Read was unchallenged; indeed, he remembered in his autobiography that she had been a "good & faithful Helpmate," and that they had "ever mutually endeavour'd to make each other happy." In addition, Franklin had another incentive for the match; at about the same time, William Franklin had been born. The identity of his mother has never been discovered, but the speculation was that his mother was one of the "low women" whom Franklin admitted he had known before his marriage. Deborah accepted William into the household and raised him as Franklin's son.²⁵

In 1727 Franklin had gathered ten friends and formed the Junto, a club that met frequently for social, practical, and educational purposes. Based on Cotton Mather's call for voluntary societies to promote morality, Franklin substituted civic virtue and self improvement as the Junto's organizing themes. The group promoted mutual aid (all the original members were artisans), pooled their books, and addressed questions at each meeting concerning their immediate circumstances, as well as society in general (for example, "Do you think of any thing at present, in which the Junto may be serviceable to mankind? to their country, to their friends, or to themselves?"). The first of several important results of the Junto's efforts toward self and societal improvement was the establishment of the institution characterized by Franklin as his "first Project of a public Nature," the subscription library that became known as the Library Company. In 1731, at Franklin's suggestion, Junto members contributed toward the purchase of 45 books for the use of library members. Franklin wrote the articles of agreement for the library, served as a trustee for the city lot on Chestnut Street between Eighth and Ninth streets for the construction of the building that served as the library's first home, and, in 1742, signed the charter incorporating the Library Company.²⁶ In 1754 he also served as one of the trustees for the newly established, but short-lived, Loganian Library.²⁷

A paper about the prevention of house fires, written by Franklin for a Junto meeting and later published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, led to the organization in 1736 of the province's first fire company. Under Franklin's guidance about 30 city residents joined together to form the Union Fire Company "for the more ready Extinguishing of Fires, and mutual Assistance in Removing & Securing of Goods." As long as he resided in Pennsylvania, Franklin was an active member of the organization, which quickly inspired the creation of additional fire companies throughout the city. Late in life Franklin declared that, since the creation of the various fire companies, Philadelphia had "never lost by Fire more than one or two Houses at a time." In 1751 he presented a proposal to the Union Fire Company that led to the creation the following year of the first fire insurance company in Pennsylvania, the Philadelphia Contributionship for Insuring Houses against Losses by Fire. Franklin was elected a director of the new organization in 1752 and 1753; he also printed the first policies and, of course, insured two of his own properties.²⁸

In 1743, perhaps at the urging of botanist John Bartram, Franklin drafted a proposal for the establishment of a learned society in Philadelphia to correspond with other philosophical and scientific societies and publish reports of discoveries, inventions, and observations. The first meetings of the American Philosophical Society probably were held in 1744, but by the next year Franklin was complaining to Cadwallader Colden of the lack of interest by the "very idle Gentlemen" who were members of the society. The society ceased to function by 1747, if not sooner. In 1767 and 1768, while Franklin was in England, suddenly not one but two learned societies were active in Philadelphia, the American Society held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge (1767), led by Charles Thomson,* and a reborn American Philosophical Society (1768), led by Doctor Thomas Bond. In November 1768 Thomson wrote Franklin of the latter's election both as a member of the American Society and as its president. By the beginning of 1769 the two organizations had merged under the name American Philosophical Society, held at Philadelphia, for Promoting Useful Knowledge, and Franklin, though in England, was elected its president.²⁹ He continued in that post until 1776, and again from 1780 to 1790, although for five of those years he was in France, and in 1786, when the Assembly granted the society a lot of ground on which to erect a building, he donated £100 for that purpose. Franklin's organizational impulses were not restricted to those organizations devoted to improving the province's civic and intellectual life; he was also a member of St. John's Lodge of Freemasons, joining in 1731 and serving at various times as warden, deputy grandmaster, secretary, and grandmaster.³⁰

Franklin was the mainspring (or, as Richard Peters phrased it, "the Soul of the whole") of the Academy of Philadelphia (later the University of Pennsylvania), proposing the creation of an academy in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on 24 August 1749 and in a pamphlet published that year, *Proposals Relating to the*

Education of Youth in Pennsylvania.³¹ He and Tench Francis drew up the proposed educational institution's constitution, which was adopted in November 1749 and named 24 trustees, Franklin among them (he continued to be a trustee for most of the rest of his life). He subscribed at the rate of £10 per year for the first five years and was instrumental in convincing the Philadelphia Common Council to give £200 outright and to provide additional financial support for the first five years. Franklin served as president of the board from 1749 to 1756 and facilitated the acquisition of a building and the improvement of the school's facilities. When the institution was incorporated in 1755 its breadth had grown and the name expanded to "The College, Academy and Charitable Schools of Philadelphia." Franklin also served as a manager of two lotteries to raise funds for the support of the institution.³² In the mid-1750s he also supported a scheme "for the Instruction of Poor Germans," an effort of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge Among the Germans Settled in Pennsylvania.³³

When his friend Doctor Thomas Bond came to Franklin in 1751 with a proposal for the establishment of a hospital in Philadelphia "for the Reception and Cure of poor sick Persons," Franklin subscribed £25 and threw his support behind the project, soliciting subscriptions and endeavoring "to prepare the Minds of the People by writing on the Subject in the Newspapers." When initial subscriptions proved insufficient, Franklin proposed to the Assembly that he draft a bill to incorporate the contributors to the hospital; under the bill, the Assembly also would provide £2,000 for the hospital when the same amount had been subscribed by others. Although many legislators were skeptical of Franklin's ability to raise such a large sum, the Assembly passed the legislation. Thereafter subscriptions were easily raised, observed Franklin, because "every Man's Donation would be doubled." The resulting law "to encourage the establishing of an hospital for the relief of the sick poor of this province and for the reception and cure of lunatics" was enacted on 11 May 1751. Many years later Franklin recalled with pride his innovative plan for using matching funds to encourage donations: "I do not remember any of my political Maneuvres, the Success of which gave me at the time more Pleasure." He was elected one of the hospital's managers in 1751 and continued in that capacity until his departure for England in 1757; he also served the institution as secretary in 1751, and as president in 1755 and 1756.³⁴

In addition to his impulse for civic improvement, Franklin had a profound love of science. In 1747 he turned his enormous energies and intellectual genius on the little understood, but popularly discussed, phenomenon of electricity. Running experiments out of his house, he concluded that electricity flowed as one body and consisted of positive and negative properties; he determined to prove that lightning, as others had suspected, was electricity. In June 1752 he and his son, William, conducted the famous kite experiment, which demonstrated that lightning was electricity, and he subsequently proposed the use of pointed metal rods to draw off the dangerous effects of lightning. He solicited reports from readers of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1753 on their observations of "the Effects of Lightning on Houses, Ships, Trees, &c." in regard to "its Course, and Deviation from a strait Line, in the Walls or other Matter affected by it, its different Operations or Effects on Wood, Stone, Bricks, Glass, Metals, Animal Bodies, &c. and every other Circumstance that may tend to discover the Nature, and compleat the History of that terrible Meteor." His study of lightning and electricity earned him international renown, with his various treatises on the subject being read before the Royal Society in London and translated into French. Franklin's interest in science was unlimited, and during his life he made observations on such diverse topics as light, geology, ocean temperature and currents, tornadoes, and agriculture. He also invented the stove that bears his name, which heated rooms more efficiently, and, late in life, two tools to help accommodate the physical losses of age: bifocal glasses and a device for easily taking books down from high shelves, because "Old men find it inconvenient to mount a ladder or steps . . . , their heads being sometimes subject to giddinesses, and their activity, with the steadiness of their joints, being abated by age."³⁵

Franklin's political resourcefulness was tested during the final stages of King George's War. Reports in 1747 of French and Spanish privateers off the Delaware Capes, and a raiding party that landed in New Castle County panicked Philadelphia merchants and officials who demanded prompt defensive action. The Assembly demurred and, motivated by the pacifist sentiments of the Quaker party, refused to become involved. In November 1747 Franklin responded to the crisis with his pamphlet *Plain Truth*, which promised the public a plan for the voluntary association of those who were willing to bear arms in defense of the province. "The Pamphlet had a sudden & surprizing Effect," Franklin noted in his autobiography, and he responded by drafting the "Form of Association," which was signed by more than 1,200 men who

volunteered, formed themselves into companies, and chose their officers. Franklin proposed a lottery to raise £3,000 to erect a battery at Wicaco, downriver from Philadelphia, and he traveled to New York City with three others (including William Allen*) to plead successfully with Governor George Clinton for the loan of 14 cannon to be placed at the battery. The Associators shared the responsibility of guarding the outpost; Franklin remembered that he took his “Turn of Duty there as a Common Soldier.” In fact, Franklin had been offered the colonelcy of the Philadelphia regiment by the Associators but refused it, encouraging instead the election of a member of the Provincial Council. Franklin’s efforts earned him the respect and confidence of the general population (including pacifist Quakers) and of members of the proprietary government. There was, however, one voice of opposition. Pennsylvania proprietor Thomas Penn condemned Franklin’s pamphlet, the Association, and the election of officers by the volunteers. The establishment of “a Military Common Wealth” was “little less than Treason,” he warned. As for the instigator of the Association, Penn believed Franklin “a dangerous Man” and “a very uneasy Spirit” and declared he would “be very Glad he inhabited any other Country.”³⁶ The end to the war in 1748 brought the matter to a close.

Franklin’s rising prominence within the city and province led to his election to the city’s common council on 4 October 1748; on 1 October 1751 he was named an alderman. Moreover, on 30 June 1749 he was named a justice of the peace for Philadelphia County by Governor James Hamilton.* Of greatest significance was his 11 May 1751 election by the voters of the city of Philadelphia to fill the vacated Assembly seat of the deceased William Clymer.* “This latter Station was the more agreeable to me,” Franklin admitted many years later, “as I was at length tired with sitting there to hear Debates in which as Clerk I could take no part.” Franklin happily resigned his position as clerk of the Assembly and took his seat when the House returned to session on 13 August after its summer break, William Franklin having been appointed clerk in his father’s stead on 13 May. The senior Franklin was reelected to the Assembly for an uninterrupted twelve terms.³⁷

In his first seven terms in the Assembly Franklin emerged as one of its leaders; with an average of 21.57 assignments per term, he received nearly twelve and a half more assignments than the average assemblymen (9.14) per term. Moreover, in the 1751 to 1756 terms he served on the standing committees of grievances, of correspondence, and to revise the minutes, and in the 1751, 1752, and 1753 Houses on the standing committee of accounts. For the assemblies of 1752 to 1755 he was also a member of the annually appointed committee that reported on the laws that had or were set to expire.³⁸

In addition, during his first seven terms Franklin helped to draft 16 of the 45 bills enacted into law, including legislation that revised regulations on the weight and price of bread; increased from £2 to £5 the amount of small debts to be recovered by attachment; established a new schedule of fees to be charged by officers of the government; and extended for another three years the act for choosing election inspectors in six of the province’s eight counties. He also worked on bills that did not become law, such as proposed measures to tax dog owners, to amend various regulatory acts, and to revive the provincial supreme court’s circuit in order to have those cases heard throughout the province, instead of only in Philadelphia.³⁹ The essence of Franklin’s legislative career, however, was not his involvement in drafting legislation but his growing skill in the direction of provincial politics.

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1. Van Doren, *Franklin*, 7. The editors have relied heavily in this essay on J.A. Leo Lemay’s genetic text edition of Franklin’s autobiography. However, when quoting from that edition, words crossed out in Franklin’s manuscript have been omitted without the use of ellipsis, except in cases where the change is considered significant by the editors for the purposes of this essay (Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*).

2. Although elected a delegate in 1777, Franklin did not attend after 1776.

3. PAG, 19 Feb. 1756, 1 Nov. 1764, 22 Oct. 1767, 5 May, 20 Oct. 1768, 6 July, 30 Nov. 1769, 13 Sept., 18 Oct., 8 Nov. 1770, 14 March, 17 Oct. 1771, 21 Oct. 1772, 3 March, 20 Oct. 1773, 13 April, 19 Oct., 28 Dec. 1774, 10 May, 9, 23 Aug., 8 Nov. 1775, 21 Feb., 10, 24 July, 4 Sept. 1776, 12 Feb. 1777, 24 Oct. 1787, 21 April 1790; FP, i:liiii, lvi, lxii-iii, 2:178-79, 5:18, 6:347-48, 15:95-96, 16:253, 17:257, 21:142-44, 534-35, 22:9n, 143; Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 71; Van Doren, *Franklin*, 359, 476; *Votes*, 3:285, 318, 320, 352, 425, 445, 497, 536, 4:2, 22, 48, 65, 92, 116, 151, 681, 759, 5:1, 86, 128, 188, 382, 433, 499, 6:3, 111, 193, 264, 336, 421, 485, 547; JCC, 2:12, 183, 208-9, 4:151-52, 5:596, 827, 10:908, 27:377; LDC, 4:xx, 6:xx, 7:169, 8:xxi, 9:1027; MPC, 4:306, 5:388, 572-73, 665-86;

Statutes, 5:201, 243, 6:311, 344, 9:13, 468; *MCS*, 10:280-452 passim; *MPCSP*, 3; *MSEC*, 14:556-15:563 passim; *MCCOC*, 5 June, 15 July, 19, 20 Sept., 4, 31 Oct., 6, 7 Dec. 1752, 6, 8, 31 March, 3, 4 April, 17 Dec. 1753, 4, 6 Sept. 1754; *MCC*, 504-89, 810.

4. In 1712 the Franklins moved to Union and Hanover sts.

5. Tourtellot, *Franklin*, 10, 26, 43, 53-55, 90, 107-9, 130; *FP*, 1:lvi, lxxiii-lxxv; Sparks, *Franklin*, 546; *PCSM*, 10:228 (facing).

6. Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 8-11.

7. The letters were printed in the issues of 2, 16, 30 April, 14, 28 May, 11, 25 June, 9, 23 July, 13, 20 Aug., 10, 24 Sept., and 8 Oct. 1722.

8. *FP*, 1:8-44; Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 18.

9. "His harsh & tyrannical Treatment of me," Franklin remembered later, "might be a means of impressing me with that Aversion to arbitrary Power that has stuck to me thro' my whole Life" (Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 18-19).

10. Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 19; Tourtellot, *Franklin*, 391-93.

11. Years later Franklin in his autobiography reflected on the manner of his departure and, calling it "one of the first Errata" of his life, he regretted that he had taken advantage of his circumstances; James was "otherwise not an ill-natur'd Man," and the younger Franklin may have been "too saucy & provoking" (Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 20).

12. Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 20. Franklin contrived with a friend to convince a captain of a sloop to allow passage for Franklin, who pretended that he had to leave the city quickly and stealthily in order to avoid a forced marriage to a pregnant "naughty Girl."

13. Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 21, 24-25; Van Doren, *Franklin*, 38.

14. Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 26-29; Roach, "Franklin," 131; Van Doren, *Franklin*, 42.

15. Van Doren, *Franklin*, 42, 44-45, 48; Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 30-31, 33-34, 36-37, 41; Roach, "Franklin," 133.

16. Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 41-42.

17. While in England Franklin wrote the pamphlet *A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain*, a response to William Wollaston's *The Religion of Nature Delineated* and its defense of organized religion supported by the force of natural reasoning, regardless of the existence of divine revelation. In his essay, however, Franklin was more interested in asserting that the imposition of God's will excluded the possibility of free will, thus denying the existence of vice or virtue, leaving only the justifiable behavior of avoiding pain and seeking pleasure. Franklin printed 100 copies and distributed a few to his friends, but he destroyed the rest; in later years he considered his printing of this pamphlet "another Erratum" (Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 43). However, the pamphlet was read by others and led to introductions to a number of English writers, including Bernard Mandeville, author of *The Fable of the Bees* (Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 43-44; Van Doren, *Franklin*, 51-52; *FP*, 1:57-61).

18. Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 45, 47, 50-52; Van Doren, *Franklin*, 55, 69.

19. For a time Franklin was also ill, but he recovered and had left Denham prior to the latter's death on 4 July 1728 (Roach, "Franklin," 135), although in Franklin's autobiography he implies that he left afterward. Denham's illness, remembered Franklin, "held him a long time" (Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 52). When employed with Denham, Franklin was undoubtedly residing with him at his store on Front St., but where he lived after that time is unknown (Roach, "Franklin," 134-35).

20. Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 52-57.

21. Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 59-60, 64-66, 93, 95; *PMHB*, 114:241, 244-45; *FP*, 3:51, 165, 263-67; Van Doren, *Franklin*, 123, 125.

22. Although in his autobiography Franklin remembered that he had been appointed to print Pa.'s paper money issue of 1729 as a result of his popular pamphlet in support of paper money, *The Nature & Necessity of a Paper Currency*, in fact Andrew Bradford printed that emission (*Votes*, 3:118).

23. The House minutes for the 1737 term make no mention of Franklin's reappointment as clerk; however, at the end of the term he was paid £38 "as Clerk of this House, and for Printing" (*Votes*, 3:318).

24. *Votes*, 3:72, 103, 117, 218, 245, 284-85, 320, 351-52, 424-25, 443, 445, 496-97, 535-36, 563, 4:2, 20, 22, 47-48, 64-65, 90, 92, 115-16, 150-51; Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 67-68, 100-101; Van Doren, *Franklin*, 102. The "new Member" has not been definitively identified, but most likely it was Isaac Norris* (1701-1766), who was actually a returning member, rather than a new member; he had not served the year that Franklin first began as clerk. Moreover, Norris was Hamilton's political opponent, and he may have seen Franklin as a Hamilton protégé.

25. Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 70-71; *PA*, 2nd ser., 8:221; Van Doren, *Franklin*, 93; Wright, *Franklin*, 41-44; Skemp, *William Franklin*, 4.

26. In 1792 William Bingham* presented the Library Company with a marble statute of Franklin wearing a Roman toga, "one arm resting on a pile of books, and the right hand holding a sceptre reversed, an emblem of Franklin's Anti Monarchical principles" (*PAG*, 11 April 1792).

27. Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 61, 71-72; Gilbert, *Club Life*; Wright, *Franklin*, 37-39; *FP*, 1:208-10, 255-64, 2:207, 346-47, 5:424-25; *ACR*; Van Doren, *Franklin*, 105; *OR*, D, 89:228-29.

28. *FP*, 2:112-15, 150-53, 4:282-95; *PAG*, 4 Feb. 1735, 12 April 1735; Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 102-3; *MUFC*, 7 Dec. 1736-29 March 1784 passim; Van Doren, *Franklin*, 196-97.

29. He sent the society various learned publications from Europe (PAG, 16 Sept. 1772).
30. *FP*, 1:202-4, 231-33, 274-75, 2:378-83, 406-7, 3:36, 15:259-62, 16:46, 155; Bell, *Patriot-Improvers*, 1:21-23; *PAG*, 28 Jan. 1768, 12 Jan. 1769, 11 Jan. 1770, 10 Jan. 1771, 9 Jan. 1772, 12 Jan. 1774, 11 Jan. 1775, 10 Jan. 1776, 12 Jan. 1780, 17 Jan. 1781, 7 Jan. 1784, 12 Jan. 1785, 11 Jan., 1 Nov. 1786, 10 Jan. 1787, 20 Jan. 1790; Van Doren, *Franklin*, 132.
31. The pamphlet was printed by Franklin & Hall (Evans, 6321).
32. At the end of his life Franklin was still active in his support of the educational institution; in 1790 he was listed as the president of the trustees in a publication of the rules relating to the medical education provided by the college (*PAG*, 13 Jan. 1790).
33. *PPOC*, 4:195, 243; *PAG*, 24 Aug. 1749, 3 Oct. 1754, 25 Feb., 11 March 1755; *FP*, 3:385-88, 422-29, 435-36, 5:427, 6:29n-37; Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 117-19; *MCC*, 526-29; Van Doren, *Franklin*, 192-93; *COMBk. A*, 2:193. The plan to instruct poor Germans was also known as the German Free School movement; this project to establish schools for German immigrants was led by the Rev. William Smith in the mid-1750s (see *APS*, ms. coll. #1158).
34. *PHMR*, 1 July 1751-25 Sept. 1775 passim; Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 122-23; *FP*, 4:108-11, 5:283-330; *Statutes*, 5:128; Morton, *Hospital*, 6-39; *PAG*, 7 May 1752, 10 May 1753, 16 May 1754, 8 May, 3 July 1755, 6 May 1756.
35. Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 116, 119, 315-16, 360-69, 390-92; *FP*, 3:110-11, 118, 126-34, 157-64, 352-77, 482, 4:18-21, 139, 217, 302-10, 5:126-34; *PAG*, 19 Oct. 1752, 21 June 1753; Van Doren, *Franklin*, 176-78, 637, 736; Hindle, *Science*, 183-84, 345, 351; Smyth, *Writings*, 9:265, 483-85; Cohen, *Franklin*, 206-24.
36. *RPLBk.* 1747-50, 4b-5a; *Votes*, 4:57-59, 66-67; *MPC*, 5:55, 89-93, 96-99, 119, 124-26, 158-62, 168, 174-75, 207; *FP*, 3:189-212, 223-24; Evans, 5949; Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 109-11; *PPOC*, 4:93; *TPP*, 2:223-25, 231-36. With the declaration of peace, Penn relented somewhat in his criticism of the Association, satisfied by the fact that the volunteers were under the ultimate direction of the Provincial Council and, without mentioning Franklin by name, concluding: "it was with reluctance that we objected to any thing done by persons that in general might intend nothing more than to defend themselves under their legal Commanders" (*TPP*, 2:242).
37. *MCC*, 502, 550; *MPC*, 5:388; Franklin, *Autobiography/Lemay*, 119-20; *Votes*, 4:188; *JSD*, 11 May 1751; *PAG*, 3 Oct. 1751, 2 Nov. 1752, 4 Oct. 1753, 3 Oct. 1754, 9 Oct. 1755, 7 Oct. 1756, 6 Oct. 1757, 5 Oct. 1758, 4 Oct. 1759, 9 Oct. 1760, 8 Oct. 1761, 7 Oct. 1762, 6 Oct. 1763.
38. *Votes*, 4:203-4, 235, 271-72, 329, 398, 490, 626-27.