

Benjamin Franklin An Enlightened American

Benjamin Franklin was one of the founding fathers of the United States. He is known for being an American statesman, writer, printer, and inventor.

Benjamin Franklin, born to Josiah Franklin and Abiah Folger on January 17, 1706, was the tenth son and fifteenth child of seventeen children in his family. His father, a candle and soap maker had hoped the educate Benjamin with the clergy, but was only able to afford two years worth of schooling. Franklin never attended school again, but became an apprentice to his brother James, a printer. Later in his life, Franklin moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where he worked as a printer. There he established the Junto, a discussion group focused on issues of the day.

Inventions and Innovations:

Franklin invented bifocal glasses for people who are both nearsighted and farsighted, like Franklin in his later life. Tired of switching between two pairs of glasses, Franklin cut the lenses of each pair of glasses horizontally, making a single pair of glasses that focused at both near regions, on the bottom half of the lenses, and far regions, on the top half of the lenses.

He also invented the Franklin stove which was an efficient, cast-iron furnace located in the middle of a room, swim fins, the odometer (mileage recorder), the ladder chair (a chair that converts into a library ladder), the glass armonica (a musical instrument composed of rotating glass cylinders), and the first medical catheter. Active in his community, Franklin started the first American fire company, the first American street-cleaning department, the first city hospital, and the school that would later become the University of Pennsylvania. He also reorganized the American postal system.

Franklin experimented extensively with electricity, determining that there are two types of electricity, positive and negative. In 1752, his experiments with a kite in a thunderstorm led to the development of the lightning rod.

Political Contributions

Franklin was a delegate to the Continental Congress from Pennsylvania (1785-88), and helped write both the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution both of which contain his signature. He also helped negotiate the peace with Britain at the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783. Although Franklin had only one year of formal education, this self-taught man helped the colonies become a nation, was a leading scientist, inventor and author, and taught himself several languages. In addition, he taught himself how to play many musical instruments. Many of his inventions are still used today. Late in his life, Franklin was the President of the "Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery."

Writings and Publications

Franklin started the first circulating library in the colonies in 1731. He had been a writer himself since an early age, ran a printing press, and wrote and published the newspaper The Pennsylvania Gazette and the very popular "Poor Richard's Almanack". This almanac was published annually from 1733 to 1758. This almanac contained useful information, including a calendar, weather information, times of sunrise and sunset, tides, moon phases, recipes, and other interesting facts. Franklin also added memorable aphorisms, or useful sayings, to his almanac, like, "A penny saved is a penny earned," "In this world, nothing is certain but death and taxes," and "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."