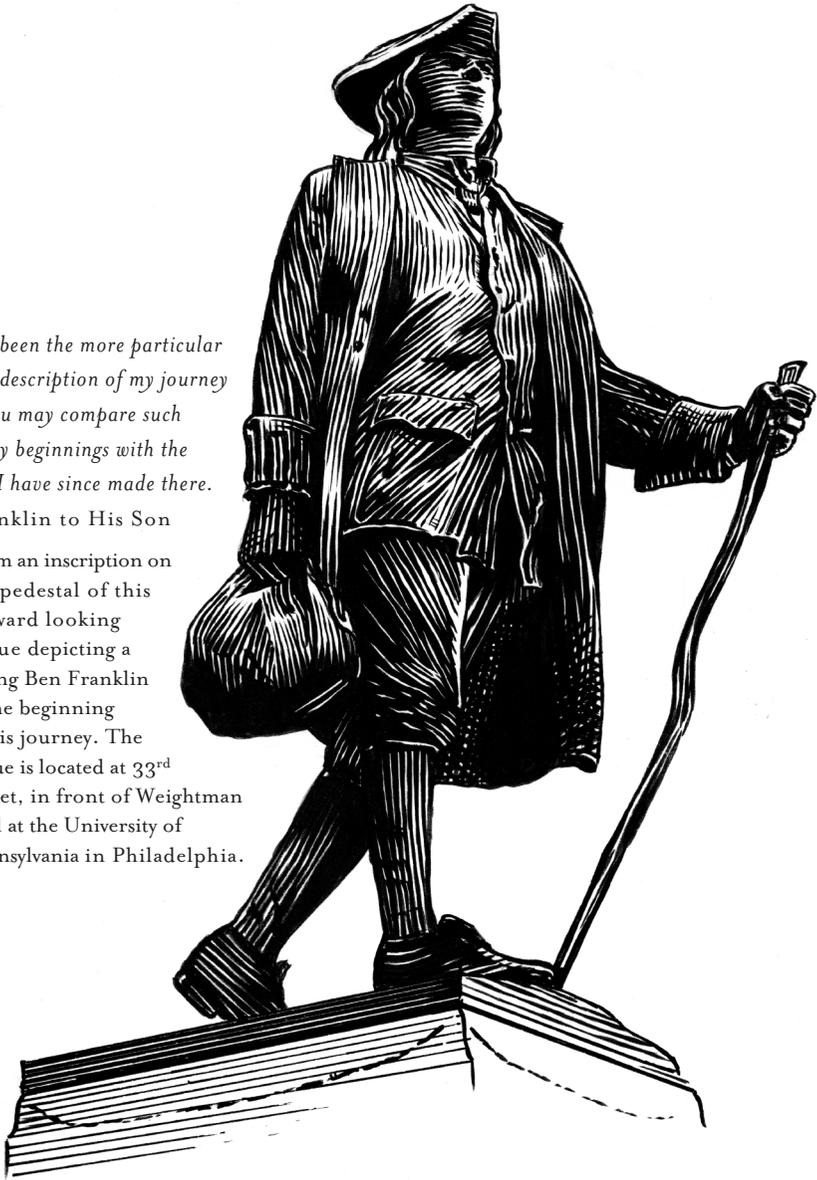


*I have been the more particular
in this description of my journey
that you may compare such
unlikely beginnings with the
figure I have since made there.*

– Franklin to His Son

From an inscription on
the pedestal of this
forward looking
statue depicting a
young Ben Franklin
at the beginning
of his journey. The
statue is located at 33rd
Street, in front of Weightman
Hall at the University of
Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.



Youthful Franklin
sculpture by R. Tait McKenzie, 1914

B E N J A M I N *and* B E G I N N I N G S

Benjamin Franklin was born on January 6, 1706 (or January 17, 1706 as it would later become) in Boston. He was the fifteenth of seventeen children growing up in the crowded Milk Street home of Josiah and Abiah Franklin.

Josiah Franklin had wanted young Ben to become a minister since he was his tenth son and, hence, his “tith” (defined as “a tenth part of something paid as a voluntary contribution or tax to the church”) to the Lord (which Benjamin Franklin would one day recall with his tongue firmly in cheek). Josiah had determined that Ben would ultimately attend Harvard for his studies. Ben was sent to Boston Latin School for preparatory school. But there was just something about that



The Franklin family hung their many hats in this house on Milk Street in Boston.

A new calendar system was introduced in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII as a means to replace the Julian calendar. The new Gregorian calendar eliminated the leap year (years with February 29) from years that were divisible by 100, except for years divisible by 400 (therefore the years 1800 and 1900 would not be leap years, but the year 2000 would be).

The United Kingdom and her colonies adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1752, so ten days were removed from that year in the process of moving from the former Julian calendar system.

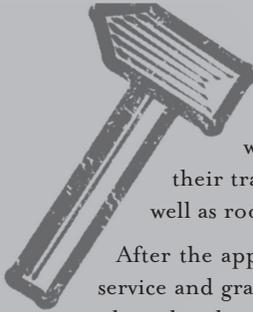
boy that did not seem well suited for the clergy, so Josiah eventually pulled young Ben from Boston Latin.

Josiah began to prepare the boy to be his apprentice and teach him the skills of candle and soap making. The strong-willed Ben was not particularly enthusiastic about this line of work and agitated for another profession. Josiah knew that Ben could run away as he had a “strong inclination for the sea” (as he had phrased it years later in his famous autobiography). The family was still reeling from Josiah Jr. being recently lost at sea. This caused Josiah to relent and assist his son in finding a discipline to which Ben was better predisposed.

Josiah took young Ben on a tour of trades. Ben observed cutlers, mechanics, bricklayers, and joiners, among others. Finally, Ben was apprenticed at age 12 to his older brother James in the printing trade.

James Franklin had returned from London in 1717 where he presumably worked as a journeyman printer. He brought back a press as well as collections of movable type and printing blocks and set to business with the backing of his father. The relationship between Ben and his older brother was not smooth. Benjamin was bright and headstrong and often clashed with his older brother and master. He considered him a bully and a harsh taskmaster. Many of the disputes were often presided over by their father in order to come to an accommodation between the belligerent brothers.

A breaking point occurred when James Franklin stirred up trouble with the newspaper that they produced, *The New England Courant*.

Many trades with highly refined skill sets required a route to reach the level of competency and mastery of a craft. Typically, a master craftsman would take on an apprentice. The apprentice usually would work for a period of 7 years in the service of their master as they learned their trade. An apprentice’s compensation was generally their trade training as well as room and board.

After the apprentice has completed their service, they are then released from their service and graduate to the status of journeyman. A journeyman was free to seek work where he chose and would receive wages for his labor. The journeyman could also ultimately go on to set up his own shop and become a master himself.

The nature in which the paper challenged local authority caused the Boston government to issue an edict that barred James Franklin from publishing *The New England Courant*. The two brothers decided that Ben would publish *The New England Courant*. However, Ben needed to be freed of his indenture as an apprentice in order for him to officially become the paper's publisher. This was done, but Ben was made to sign a new, secret indenture to his brother that committed him to his original term of indenture until he was twenty-one years old.

Ben expected that with his official release from indenture that James would not try to enforce a secret agreement. At seventeen, Ben decided to skip town... but only after his brother had warned other Boston printers not to hire Ben should he come looking for work.

Ben's inclination for the sea took him to the docks, and he conducted his departure from Beantown by boat. Franklin's fast-talking friend, John Collins had convinced the captain of a New York-bound sloop that Ben was on the run after getting a naughty girl in the family way and needed to get out of town (quietly).



Boston was nicknamed "Beantown" due to the fact that baked beans were a hometown favorite and widely available. The abundance of molasses in Boston was an integral ingredient in Boston Baked Beans.

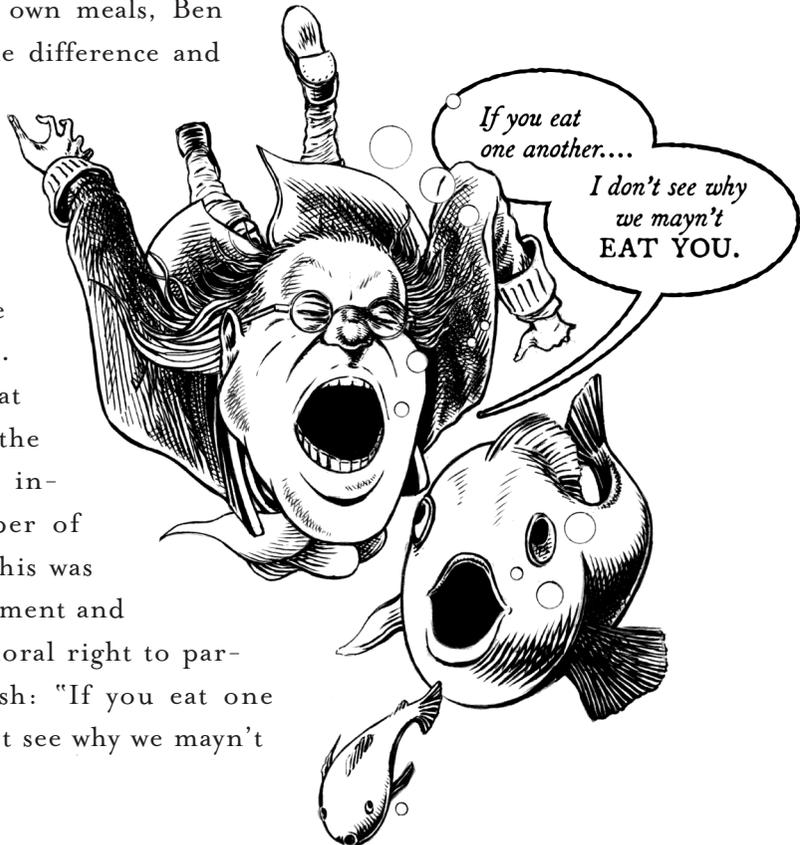
Boston was home of the largest seaport in America and the free flow of molasses occurred as part of the triangle trade which was defined as hard goods from Europe were shipped to and traded for slaves from Africa and on to the West Indies where the slaves were sold and sugar cane was bought and shipped to Boston to be fermented into rum. From Boston, Newfoundland Salt Cod and corn would be shipped back to Britain.

★ A BRAND NEW START OF IT ★

During the journey to New York, the sloop's progress was hindered by weak winds and the sailing trip was slowed. Ben soon found himself running out of his provisions. He began to hungrily eye the cod being pulled from the seas by his fellow travelers. As Ben was a vegetarian, he found the situation increasingly bothersome and found that his feelings of hunger were stronger than his sense of conviction.

Vegetarianism was one of Franklin's earliest self-improvement schemes. He had embraced the doctrine of vegetarianism while in the charge of his brother James. It was only in part a moral conviction to not eat of the flesh. His primary reason for not eating meat was that it was a really way to save money. A diet made up mainly of fruits and vegetables was far cheaper than the carnivorous kind. Since Ben had asked his brother to let him be responsible directly for his own meals, Ben could pocket the difference and buy books.

Ben noted some of his fellow travelers preparing a dinner from the ocean's bounty. He observed that the content of the fish's stomachs included a number of smaller fish. This was a revelatory moment and gave Ben the moral right to partake of the flesh: "If you eat one another, I don't see why we mayn't eat you."



PART ONE: BENJAMIN AND BEGINNINGS

Three days and 300 miles after putting Boston behind him, Franklin found himself in New York looking for work. He had difficulty finding employment, prospective or otherwise. Finally, William Bradford (1663-1752), a printer formerly of Philadelphia, told him to proceed there and seek out his son Andrew Bradford (1686-1742) for a solid job prospect.

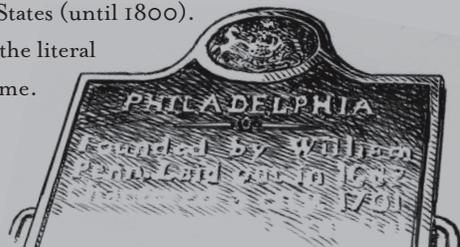
★ PHILADELPHIA FLUNG ★

Philadelphia, which would become the world-renowned birthplace of American Independence and the cheese steak, became Ben's ultimate destination. Franklin's autobiography famously recounts his arrival in the City of Brotherly Love on October 6, 1723. He writes about the sight he made as a seventeen-year-old runaway walking down Philadelphia's Market Street with two large puffy rolls under each arm while somehow managing to eat the third. He also writes that he must have made a comical sight as he strolled by his future wife, Deborah Read, standing in the doorway of the rooming house of John Read where he would soon take up boarding.

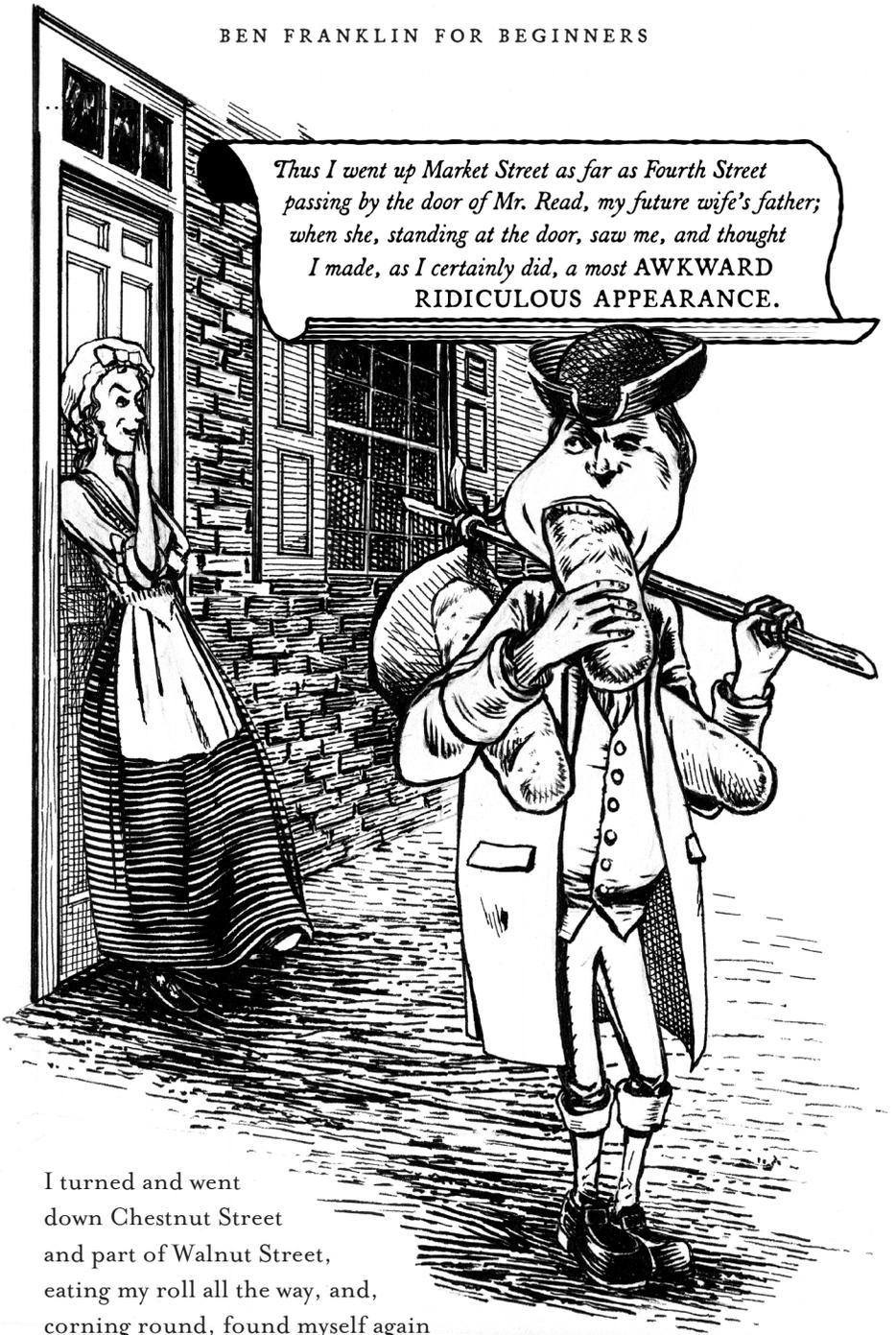
Then I walked up the street, gazing about till near the market-house I met a boy with bread. I had made many a meal on bread, and, inquiring where he got it, I went immediately to the baker's he directed me to, in Second Street, and ask'd for bisket, intending such as we had in Boston; but they, it seems, were not made in Philadelphia. Then I asked for a three-penny loaf, and was told they had none such. So not considering or knowing the difference of money, and the greater cheapness nor the names of his bread, I made him give me three-penny worth of any sort. He gave me, accordingly, three great puffy rolls. I was surpriz'd at the quantity, but took it, and, having no room in my pockets, walk'd off with a roll under each arm, and eating the other.

Philadelphia, founded in 1682 by William Penn (1644-1718), was the capital of Pennsylvania (until 1799) and the United States (until 1800).

Philly's nickname of "The City of Brotherly Love" is the literal translation of the Greek words that comprise its name.



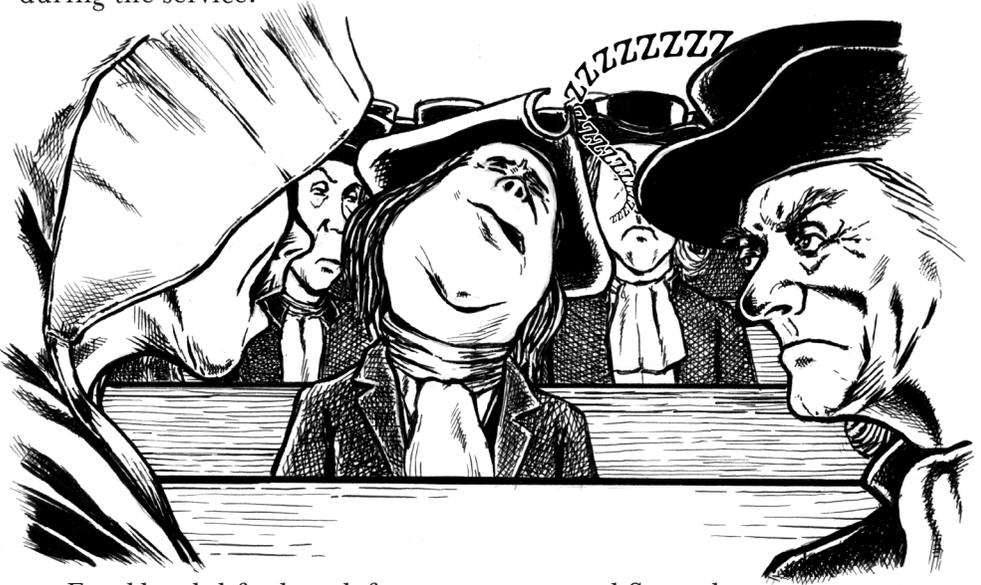
Thus I went up Market Street as far as Fourth Street passing by the door of Mr. Read, my future wife's father; when she, standing at the door, saw me, and thought I made, as I certainly did, a most AWKWARD RIDICULOUS APPEARANCE.



I turned and went down Chestnut Street and part of Walnut Street, eating my roll all the way, and, corning round, found myself again at Market Street wharf, near the boat I came in, to which I went for a draught of the river water; and, being filled with one of my rolls, gave the other two to a woman and her child that came down the river in the boat with us, and were waiting to go farther.

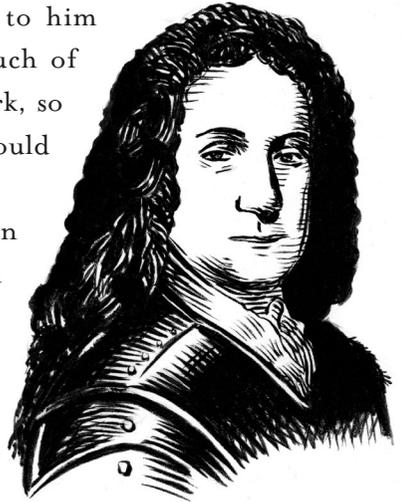
PART ONE: BENJAMIN AND BEGINNINGS

Franklin's follies upon coming to Philadelphia didn't end there. He wandered into a crowd, entered a Quaker meeting house, and sat among them. In short order, the road-weary Ben promptly fell asleep during the service.



Franklin did find work for a printer named Samuel Keimer (1689-1742) after being referred to him by Andrew Bradford. Ben didn't think much of Keimer's operation or the quality of his work, so he kept an eye out for other opportunities should they arise.

Young Franklin did come to the attention of Pennsylvania Governor Sir William Keith (1669-1749). This occurred because a concerned family friend of Franklin's wanted to convince the young man to return home. Keith took a liking to the industrious and ambitious young Franklin upon seeking him out at Keimer's. As he wanted to have a good printer in Philadelphia, Keith offered to help the lad set up shop and see to it that government business came Franklin's way.



Sir William Keith's place in posterity – for better or worse – has been permanently defined by the recollections of Benjamin Franklin in his autobiography.

At first, Keith provided Ben with a letter of endorsement and sent him back to Boston to get money from his father to purchase the essentials of the craft. Josiah Franklin denied his son the backing unless he could prove that he could save much of the necessary money by the age of twenty-one. His father then would only then lend him the balance to allow him to pursue this enterprise.

Josiah's decision didn't stop Ben, and Governor Keith took it upon himself to bankroll the operation. The governor promised to send letters of credit for passage and expenses. Ben would set sail for London in November 1724 to buy the presses, fonts, and other equipment needed for the printing profession.

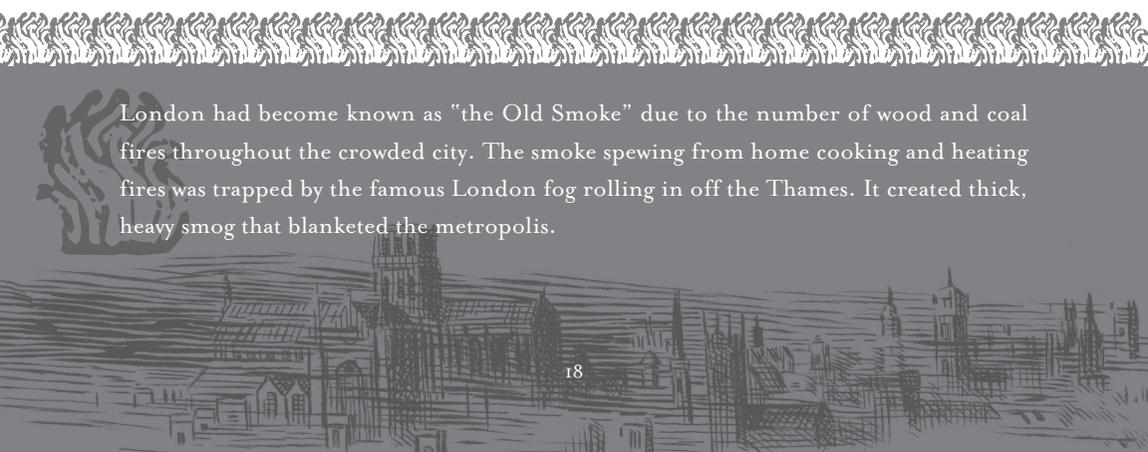
Meanwhile, Franklin had begun courting Deborah Read, daughter of his landlord. He had also begun to discuss getting married. Deborah's mother wasn't entirely agreeable to this proposed union of her fifteen-year-old daughter and this eighteen-year-old. She thought that it may be best that any marriage be delayed until Ben's return from London.

★ L O N D O N T I M E S ★

Upon Franklin's arrival in the London in December, he learned that there was no letter of credit forthcoming from his presumed patron. He also learned but that the well-meaning and impulsive Sir William Keith had no credit. Thus, without the money to pay for a return Atlantic trip, Benjamin Franklin, eighteen years old, was stranded in the Old Smoke.

As Franklin would one day write under the name Richard Saunders, "Diligence is the mother of good luck." Ben made the best of his

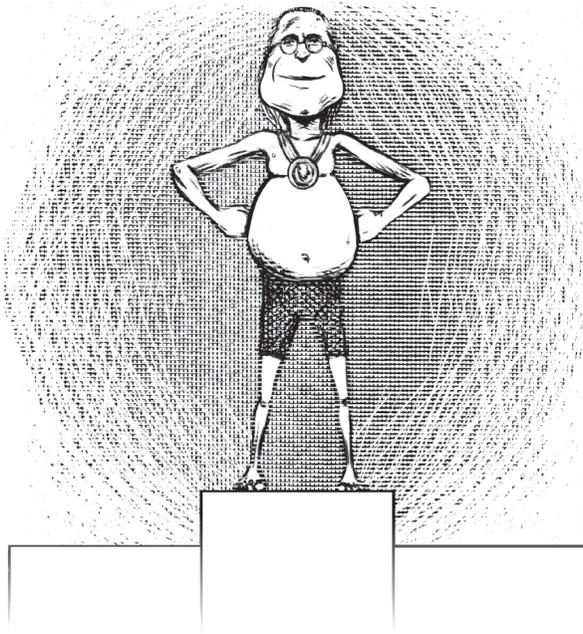
London had become known as "the Old Smoke" due to the number of wood and coal fires throughout the crowded city. The smoke spewing from home cooking and heating fires was trapped by the famous London fog rolling in off the Thames. It created thick, heavy smog that blanketed the metropolis.



circumstances. Thomas Denham, a Quaker merchant and a man who had traveled with Franklin on the *London Hope* across the Atlantic, recommended that Franklin seek out work at the prestigious Palmer's printing house.

Ben quickly was hired and became quite popular with his fellow pressmen at Palmer's. His colleagues valued him for his skills and his work ethic but perhaps more so as a practitioner of the art of frugality. Ben Franklin — who became known as the "Water American" due to the fact that he did not drink alcohol during working hours — made it a point to pinch his pennies and, thus, typically had ready coins in his pockets to lend for beer.

Interestingly enough, the "Water American" seemed to make quite a splash during his time across the Atlantic. He made it a daily task to swim in the Thames. He even gave an exhibition for his friends where he performed a series of strokes that would amaze and awe the onlookers. This "ornamental" swimming became a storied event and had Londoners seeking him out as a swim instructor.



Ben Franklin was inducted into the International Swimming Hall of Fame in 1968 for his contributions to aquatics including his "ornamental" swimming as well as his invention of swim fins in 1717.

Ben took to the cosmopolitan lifestyle and fast living of old London Town. He went to the theater, met with men of letters, loitered at cafés, and was making a name for himself among his fellow Londoners. Some of Franklin’s friendships were of a less than noble nature. Franklin had later lamented in life of what he characterized as “intrigues with low women” during his days of London living. Benjamin Franklin would ultimately gain the reputation as a notorious womanizer. A number of biographers have, however, done some investigating to right the record and clean up Ben’s image for posterity. The question of Franklin’s flirtations and what is fact and what is fiction is somewhat inconclusive.

With all of Ben’s bustling in far-away London, his letters home to Deborah amounted to just one. Meanwhile, because Ben’s affections seemed to be engaged elsewhere, Deborah met and married a potter named John Rogers.

Thomas Denham, Franklin’s shipmate from the *London Hope*, convinced Ben to return with him to Philadelphia. The Quaker merchant offered to pay for Ben’s return passage as well as an annual stipend for his work as a clerk at Denham’s general store. They had also discussed an arrangement that would ultimately sell the store to Ben in the future.

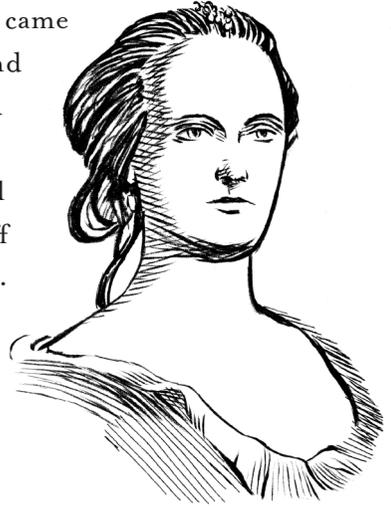
★ B A C K T O P H I L A D E L P H I A ★

Ben returned to Philadelphia in July 1726 and went to work straight away for Thomas Denham. Their plans made in far-off London didn’t prove to bear fruit in the short run. Denham took ill within a few months and died. This unfortunate development left Ben without the means to take ownership of the store and to continue operations.

Franklin reluctantly went back to work for Keimer as manager in 1727. But when Ben eventually learned that Keimer had intended to let him go once he had trained his subordinates, he decided to finally make his move. He would pursue a partnership in the establishment of a printing business with a fellow Keimer employee, Hugh Meredith, in June 1728. The path that Franklin would pursue from this point forward would prove to bear considerable fruit for many years to follow.

Ben was also in negotiations to establish another partnership. He was courting the daughter of a fellow boarder of his rooming house (and client of his printing business). In the discussions of the prospects of marriage with the Godfrey family, Ben was insisting on a dowry (presumably to aid him in paying off his debts). The romance was ended as was as their friendship (which also resulted in the loss of a considerable printing job for Thomas Godfrey).

Ben's past love, Deborah (Read) Rogers came back into his life in due course. Ben and Deborah began living together (that would become a common-law union) at 139 Market Street in September 1730. Deborah's lawful husband, John Rogers, had reportedly run off to Barbados in 1728 to escape his creditors. Because it was unclear where Rogers was, there would have been some difficulties in enjoining a marriage in the event that he ever returned.



Deborah Read Rogers Franklin

Two was company, but a third came to make a crowd in short order. Franklin presented Deborah with a baby boy from another mother.

Things didn't get much better between Deborah and her stepson, William Franklin. Deborah's relationship with the lad could be characterized as one of grudging acceptance and was at times hostile. In fact, she at one time reportedly referred to William (who would one day become Royal Governor of New Jersey) as "the greatest villain upon the earth."

The Franklin home began to buzz and bustle even more when Deborah's mother joined the household in June 1731. Deborah and Ben did have a son of their own on September 20, 1732, Francis Folger Franklin. (He was a delight to his proud father, but tragically died from smallpox in November 1736). Ben's nephew, James Franklin, also joined the family after the untimely death of his father and Ben's brother James in 1737. The Franklin family would be further fortified with a daughter, Sarah, in 1743.

★ FRANKLIN FORWARD ★

Ben's journey from boy to man took lots of twists and turns: from Boston to New York to Philadelphia to London and back again to Philadelphia. From bold lad to runaway to self-made man and from rags to riches, the path of Benjamin Franklin would become the template for the American success story.



Franklin would make eight transatlantic journeys in his lifetime. He would return to London in 1757 under much better circumstances acting as agent for a number of American colonies as well as scientific celebrity. He would depart in 1762 and return in 1764 for an eleven year stay. Ben would also travel to Paris and remain there as an American Ambassador from 1776 to 1785. In all, Ben Franklin would spend some twenty-seven years overseas.

BENJAMIN AND BEGINNINGS:

A CHRONOLOGY

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1657 | Josiah Franklin (father) born in Ecton, Northamptonshire, England |
| 1667 | Abiah Franklin (mother) born in Nantucket, Massachusetts |
| 1683 | Josiah Franklin emigrates to Boston, Massachusetts |
| 1689 | Josiah Franklin and Abiah Folger marry |
| 1706 | Benjamin Franklin born in Boston, Massachusetts |
| 1718 | Begins apprenticeship to James Franklin (brother) |
| 1723 | Runs away from Boston, Massachusetts
Arrives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Enters the employ of Samuel Keimer |
| 1724 | Sails to London, England |
| 1726 | Returns to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania |
| 1727 | Returns to the employ of Samuel Keimer |
| 1728 | Enters partnership with Hugh Meredith
to establish printing business |
| 1730 | Benjamin Franklin and Deborah Read Rogers Franklin
enter a common law marriage |
| 1731 | William Franklin (son) born |
| 1732 | Francis Folger Franklin (son) born |
| 1736 | Francis Folger Franklin (son) dies |
| 1737 | James Franklin (brother) dies
James Franklin, Jr. (nephew) joins the Franklin household |
| 1743 | Sarah Franklin (daughter) born |