

# BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

## AS A ROSICRUCIAN

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*Orval Graves served as the Research Librarian at the Rosicrucian Research Library in San Jose for many years and later as the Dean of Rose Croix University International (RCUI). He was a prolific author, historian, and alchemist. In this article, a reprint from the Rosicrucian Digest June 1939, Frater Graves shares some of the extraordinary achievements of Benjamin Franklin, who was closely associated with the Rosicrucians of his day.*



Thanks to the national transfiguration wrought by the American Revolution, our Colonial period seems more remote from us than it really is. It is a measure of the greatness of Benjamin Franklin that he bridged the gulf between the colonies of the eighteenth century and the United States of the nineteenth. Also, he seems to have bridged the gulf between the nineteenth century and the twentieth, for we of today find him as modern as ourselves.

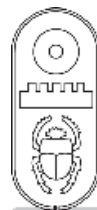
“But he lived two hundred years ago!” someone sardonically replies. In this article we shall realize that the thoughts of the Rosicrucian of yesterday are precisely those of the Rosicrucian of today—skillful in knowledge and practical, revolutionary in service and feasible, intent upon enlightening, elevating, and progressing, and furthermore from the opinion of the strict conservatives, dissentive in principle.

Few people have lived so full a life as Franklin. To say of a person that he occupied high positions in times of misgovernment, of corruption, of civil and religious factions and that, nevertheless, he contracted no great stain, and bore no part in any crime; that he won the esteem of profligate courts and of a turbulent people without being guilty of being a two-edged sword to either, is very high praise; and all this may with truth be said of Franklin.



Portrait of Benjamin Franklin. 1767.

Born the son of a poor candle maker in Boston, after two years schooling, and two more in his father's shop, where he read what books he could get hold of, he was bound apprentice at the age of twelve to his brother James, a printer; and by the time he was fifteen, he was writing the “Dogood Papers” in *The New England Courant*, modeling his style on that of Addison. A quarrel with his brother caused him to go to Philadelphia, and there (after a short trip to London) he started a printing office, established the *Pennsylvania Ga-*



*zette*, and finally, in 1732, began to issue *Poor Richard's Almanac*.

Ten years later his political life began: he wrote pamphlets and essays on the burning questions of the day; and by the time he was forty-two, he had founded the University of Pennsylvania, sold his printing-house and newspaper, acquired a comfortable competence, and became interested in the study of electricity. He had lived just half his life, and now his name began to be heard beyond the limits of his own country.

Politics, science, and diplomacy occupied the rest of his career. He pleaded his country's cause abroad; fought the malcontents, persuaded the ignorant, and encouraged the faint-hearted at home; was insulted, slandered, and idolized; wrote satires, protocols, addresses, and catechisms; analyzed lightning, invented the lightning rod, and the stove; and at length, on the outbreak of the Revolution, was sent as ambassador to France, whither his fame had preceded him. The value of his services to the struggling Colonies while in that position can *never* be estimated; his sagacity, his tact, his unswerving purpose, and patriotism, the unstudied dignity and charm of his manners, were only less effective than the armies of Washington in bringing the war to a fortunate close.

In 1785 Congress reluctantly permitted him to return from France to the country he had done so much to create and preserve; he was then in his *eightieth* year. Europe followed him with farewells and compliments; America welcomed him with triumphs and celebrations. He was the "Friend of the People," the "Father of American Independence." He was made President of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. His name was already signed to four of the most important documents of the century: the Declaration of Independence; the Treaty of Alliance; the Treaty of Peace; and the Constitution. He had been

faithful and successful in all the duties of life. Of all the patriots, Franklin was the only one who signed all four of these great papers. His essays, his apothegms, and his Autobiography will never be effaced from the pages of American literature. In his inventiveness, thrift, common sense, and practicality, he started out as the primal Yankee. He was great in more ways – more many-sided in his greatness – than any other American before or since his time. His character is still the prototype of our most solid virtues. Few people in their lifetimes have been so honored as he; and the century that has elapsed since his death has but deepened and broadened the respect and affection inspired by the memory of Benjamin Franklin.

In common language Franklin was a Jack-of-all-trades. He was in part an artist. The Continental Congress secured his aid in the design of their currency. As a mechanic and inventor, he perfected new stoves, lamps, double spectacles (bifocals), and from his musical ability resulted a new musical instrument.

Franklin was also engaged in foreign exportations, was at one time a swimming teacher, and was also a shrewd business person and executive. He was an officer and diplomat and served his country in the three great wars of his time.

A few more professions of which Franklin was master are scientist, politician, writer, printer, and publisher, as well as one of America's greatest educators.

Here follows a small number of his achievements resulting from his versatility.

1. Franklin organized our postal system and was our first postmaster general.
2. Franklin established the first successful circulating library.
3. Franklin was the first to propose daylight savings time.
4. Franklin was the originator of the modern art of ventilation.

5. Franklin started the first thrift campaign which is still going on, it seems.
6. Franklin made a comfortable fortune in the printing business in twenty years and retired at forty-two years of age to devote the remainder of his life “to doing good.”
7. Franklin devised the first scheme for uniting the colonies.
8. Among the curious things known of Franklin is the fact that he offered to pay personally for the tea dumped in Boston Harbor in order to secure the repeal of the Stamp Tax. This would have cost him \$75,000. Money was harder to get then than now.
9. Franklin taught himself Italian over chess games, and became a writer by rewriting great masterpieces of literature.

These many achievements taxed Franklin’s physical body, and it was his constitutional and muscular vigor that contributed in a large measure to his success. In appearance he was of middle stature, well set and very strong.

His intellectual character changed during his lifetime. Young Franklin was remarkable for observation, memory, desire to acquire knowledge, especially of an experimental character, and facility of communication; while old Franklin was all reason and philosophy, rich in ideas, full of pithy, sententious proverbs, and always tracing everything up to its causes and laws, but less inclined to observe and remember facts as such.

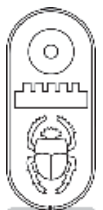
Historical evidence indeed shows young Franklin to have been what his portrait evinces, a great observer, but old Franklin to have been a profound reasoner.

Franklin’s name is linked inseparably with that quaint and original literary work *Poor Richard’s Almanac*. Although few people owned libraries in the eighteenth century, practically everyone possessed

two books, the *Bible* and the *Almanac*. The *Bible* told what to worship and what to do, and the *Almanac* dealt with when and how to proceed. A certain passage in the *Rosicrucian Manual* reads somewhat in this manner – that every student of philosophy should possess some knowledge of that ancient and profound science known as astrology. Franklin did possess this knowledge. His *Almanac* was a complete ephemeris, noting the planets’ positions, the phases of the moon, the changes in season, the length of days, and information on tides. Furthermore, it predicted weather, foretold the future, and gave data on the constellations, their courses and influence as well as portending catastrophes. Franklin goes on record as an astrologer of attainments and history records that the predictions thus publicly announced were born out in fact.

Here are a few of the potent sayings from the *Almanac*.

1. Pay what you owe and you’ll know what you own.
2. Let every new year find you a better person.
3. Many would live by their wits, but break for want of stock.
4. No gains without pains.
5. Necessity never made a good bargain.
6. Tell me my faults and mend your own.
7. Who has deceived you so often as yourself?
8. Who is powerful? One who governs one’s passions.
9. Who is rich? One who is content.
10. Who is strong? One who conquers one’s bad habits.
11. Who is wise? One who learns from everyone.



By looking at the signatures of the signers of the Declaration of Independence one finds a paragraph for the Graphologists. Franklin's handwriting shows gentleness, amenity, composure, and refinement. Franklin's unusual terminal curls convince one of his inventiveness and ingenuity. The forward slope of his writing indicated he was of a loving and sympathetic nature.



But let us get down to the genuine occult connections of Franklin. Few great humans have been honored with more biographies than he, and yet one is impressed with the fact that the man is pictured very differently by practically each writer, and that there are many traditions greatly entangled in mystery surrounding his life.

However, allow me to quote verbatim from a communication that was received from our Imperator.

“The truth of the matter is that Franklin did establish a secret group of Rosicrucians that met as a separate body in Philadelphia just as many members of the Rosicrucian Order today who are members of one lodge or another come together to establish a new Rosicrucian lodge. In the case of Rosicrucianism, however, a single individual can be a founder, as well as a prime mover, in contradistinction to the customs in Freemasonry. After the first Rosicrucian foundation in Philadelphia beginning in 1694-5 the activities remained as a community nucleus for many, many years, and it was not until after 1720 that enough members had been attracted to the nucleus from various parts of the eastern seaboard and small lodges could be formed. The one started by Franklin was one of the

earliest of the typical, modern forms of lodges that were in communities where the members lived together in a sort of secret community life.”

Franklin's occult work remains with us in part in the United States Seal and Coat of Arms. He directed the committee in charge.

What were his beliefs, opinions, and philosophy that they could give such a poor boy such success and achievements? These were only the outward clothes of his inner life.

Some have called Franklin Christian, others Atheist. Both judgments are equally unjust. He was originally intended for the ministry but, because of the turbulent times, outgrew this vocation. Documents of Franklin's private life enable one to see that he was a follower of the seventeenth century English Pythagoreans. He believed in a metempsychosis (a form of reincarnation), and in a supreme Deity, who was surrounded with innumerable inferior deities, with Christ for one of His prophets.

Franklin's Gospel was “to do well.” He always attributed his usefulness to Cotton Mather's *Essays to do Good*. Cotton Mather was one of a long line of celebrated divines, and was noted for his marvelous learning and his eccentric taste.

All know these memorial words of Franklin spoken during the forming of the Constitution of the United States. “I have lived, sir, a long time: and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men. And, if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid?”

In his own words Franklin “regularly paid my subscription for the support of the only Presbyterian minister or meeting” in that city (Philadelphia); yet, while “I had still an opinion of its propriety and its util-

ity I seldom attended any public worship.”

One of his remarks in *Poor Richard's Almanac* was: “Many have quarreled about religion that never practiced it.”

While still in his teens Franklin practiced vegetarianism. He continued to turn from the common diet to the vegetarian and back again, without the slightest inconvenience.

In later years Franklin gathered together all his proverbs scattered throughout the previous issues of his *Almanac* and published them under a new title. This title *The Way to Wealth* suggested much worldly wisdom. Franklin's real secret of success, writes one of his recent biographers, Fay, “was his memory and his shrewd cleverness.”

Franklin received much aid from joining the aristocratic Masonic group of his day. This gave his business a lift that he never would have had.

On the other hand, he organized a little club of workers and employees that met every Friday to discuss books and events, and ways and means of assisting each other. So Franklin had enlisted the aid of both classes on his behalf.

Franklin was continually changing his religious denomination and became distinctly a latitudinarian later in life. However, he always recognized and gave proper weight to the value of religion.

Franklin set up a system of morals early in life, for his own use. It consisted of a list of virtues which he believed—if practiced rigidly—would make him perfect. They were: Temperance, Moderation, Silence, Order, Tranquility, Frugality, Cleanliness, Chastity and Humility, Resolution, Industry, Sincerity, Justice.

He always carried a little notebook ruled with a virtue for each week. At the end of every day he would review his acts and put down black marks where he had

fallen from his particular virtue. He continued this practice all his life. It held a great place in his life.

Thus, he became a great human being. He was like a being of a superior sphere, sent for his sins to spend a season on this earth. He yielded his feebler companions such aid as they required, but with the air of the elder brother helping the younger. He returned to his own higher affairs on April 17, 1790, a resplendent Testimony to the Order of the Rose and Cross.



*Young Benjamin Franklin. ca. 1748.*

