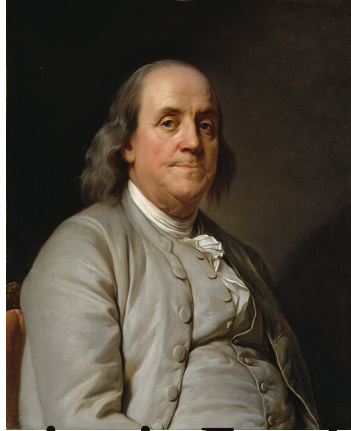




Benjamin Franklin

January 17, 1706 - April 17, 1790

Died: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Interment: Christ Church Burial Ground, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Benjamin Franklin died in Philadelphia on April 17, 1790, in the house on Market Street he had enlarged for a press, a study, and a long old age. He was eighty-four. Born in Boston on January 17, 1706, the fifteenth child of a candle-maker, he left school at ten, taught himself French and a compositor's eye, and ran away to Philadelphia at seventeen with almost nothing but a bread roll and a reputation for being useful.

He made that city his workshop. The Pennsylvania Gazette and Poor Richard were the public face; the Junto, the Library Company, the Union Fire Company, and a hospital were the quieter architecture. He mapped the Gulf Stream on Atlantic crossings, flew a kite into a thunderstorm because he wanted a fact rather than a sermon, and refused to patent the lightning rod. In London he argued the colonies' case until argument failed. In France he wore a fur cap, played the part the salons wanted, and extracted the alliance that kept Washington's army in the field.

He sat in the Second Continental Congress, helped edit the Declaration, and at eighty-one attended the Constitutional Convention as the member most likely to tell a room it was being foolish. He owned enslaved people and later petitioned Congress for abolition - a reversal the record does not allow us to tidy. He left a will that funded tradesmen's loans and a pair of cities that still spend the interest.

Philadelphia buried him at Christ Church Burial Ground. Visitors still leave pennies on the stone, a printer's joke he would have understood and probably billed at a discount.

Services

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