
The tercentenary in 2006 of Benjamin Franklin’s birth was the cause of much celebration, from scholarly conferences to more innovative events like the competition which involved writing imitations of his *Autobiography* in Philadelphia bus shelters. As the Library Company of Philadelphia was one of Franklin’s great ideas (which he came up with at the age of twenty-five), it is fitting that *Benjamin Franklin: Writer and Printer* began as the catalogue to the 2006 exhibition held there in his honour.

Franklin could hardly be better served than by these two “curators” who have assembled a truly impressive record of the most remarkable writerly and printerly life in the 18th century. James N. Green has been Librarian of the Library Company since 1983. Peter Stallybrass is Walter H. and Leonore C. Annenberg Professor in the Humanities at the University of Pennsylvania, yet another institution that Franklin originated. Librarian and academic are well met in this collaboration despite what they may say in their preface about being two “middle-aged pedants.” Together, they cover Franklin’s career as a printer and writer from its humble, if not downright unpropitious, beginnings to its full and extraordinary fruition. While he may have retired mid-way from the day-to-day business of printing, the inky arts stayed with him for the rest of his life. After examining the publication history of *Poor Richard* and *The Way to Wealth*, *Benjamin Franklin: Writer and Printer* concludes with its subject’s afterlife in print.

While Franklin’s career as a printer has been inextricably linked with the making of America, to his father, Josiah, a printing career was a default position. The precocious son was hardly likely to follow in his father’s footsteps as a tallow chandler (the lad had an aversion to vats of animal fat, and as a teenager he became a vegetarian partly to save money for books). University was out of the question: it would hardly seem fair to the others if the youngest of ten sons in a blended family was given such an advantage (the future recipient of honorary degrees and distinctions that no other American contemporary would be awarded never got to go to Harvard). Life at sea was ruled out (although he was destined to spend more time sailing than most of his compatriots). Josiah’s only other option was to have his older
son James take his half-brother under his wing and teach him how to make what he loved best: the printed word.

As Franklin informs us in his rich, yet unfinished Autobiography, which peppers Green and Stallybrass’s book, James proved somewhat less than benign as an employer, tacking an extra two years on to his brother’s indentured servitude (the traditional term of apprenticeship in most trades was seven years, but Franklin was contractually bound from the age of 12 to 21). In any event, Franklin found himself running the printing office when his brother was arrested. The experience proved invaluable: he learned how to perform every task from writing to editing, from typesetting to printing, from proofreading to binding. He could even cast his own pieces of type in a pinch, a useful skill considering the closest foundry was an ocean away. When he ran away before his term expired, in part to escape his brother’s beatings, young Franklin was equipped with marketable skills which kept him in gainful employment on both sides of the Atlantic.

If there is a gap to be filled in this sumptuous catalogue-turned-book, it would be Franklin’s two formative years where he worked for two London printers; Samuel Palmer and John Watt barely get a mention here, although his first employer, the lacklustre Samuel Keimer, who first hired and later re-hired Franklin, gets ample treatment.

Franklin ran away in 1723, first sailing for New York, where no jobs were to be had, then proceeding on to the only other colonial town with a printing press: Philadelphia. There he found work in Keimer’s printing shop. The governor of Pennsylvania, William Keith, sent Franklin on a fool’s errand to London with the false promise of setting him up with his own printing shop. Stranded an ocean away, the runaway found work with Palmer, who was then printing editions of Demosthenes and the Sternhold-Hopkins metrical Psalms. Inspired while typesetting William Wollaston’s Religion of Nature Delineated, Franklin published his first pamphlet, the anonymous Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain, which he later came to regret.

Midway through Franklin's first London sojourn, he found a better-paying job at Watt's printing shop. But in the summer of 1726, now twenty, Franklin set sail for Philadelphia to work for the Quaker merchant Thomas Denham. When his new employer’s health failed, Franklin returned to run Keimer’s shop. By the spring of 1728, he and Hugh Meredith opened up their own printing business.

So successful was Franklin as a printer that he was able to retire at the age of 42. In chapter 3, Stallybrass and Green remind us that
Franklin's success came not from only his own inventive copy and more obvious lines – almanacs, newspapers, government contracts – but also from job printing. Franklin's press ran off any small items of business that required print and paper such as "blank forms, lottery tickets, handbills, and other ephemera."

More might have been made here of Franklin's relationship with the Scottish-born London printer William Strahan which made an impact on both sides of the Atlantic. The two met when Strahan wrote to Franklin's neighbour and kinsman in 1743 asking if anyone in America might be able to employ one of his apprentices who had been struck by wanderlust. This turned out to be David Hall, whose career as a printer in America proved almost as significant as Franklin's. He took over the business in 1748.

When he arrived for his more auspicious second trip to England, now as the agent for Pennsylvania, from 1757 to 1762, Franklin immediately called on Strahan. Franklin visited Strahan in Edinburgh in 1759, at which time he met the crème de la crème of Scottish Enlightenment: Adam Smith, Hugh Blair, William Robertson, and David Hume, amongst others. He visited two type foundries: Baskerville's in Birmingham and Wilson's in Glasgow. Asked by Hall to select a new type for the Philadelphia Gazette, Franklin opted for Caslon's typeface, later used for the Declaration of Independence.

The two men's friendship came close to breaking when war broke out, by which time Strahan had been elected Member of Parliament. The two men resumed correspondence afterwards, but never on quite the same footing.

Franklin's career as a writer has been notoriously tricky for study, given that he wrote under so many pseudonyms, some of which still remain unidentified; his output defies complete certainty. The writer of Poor Richard's Almanac seems to have been more concerned with benefitting mankind than his literary reputation. Franklin as printer was not always astute when it came to matters of business. Pre-paying customers for the four volumes of George Whitefield's Sermons (1740) may have been dismayed by the fact that many of the names on the list had not paid in advance.

James N. Green and Peter Stallybrass have paid fine tribute to Franklin as the best-known American on both sides of the Atlantic. At times, the catalogue vies with the book it has become. The quotation from Franklin's Autobiography, "My Brother, thinking [my poetry] might turn to account encourag'd me, and put me on composing
two occasional Ballads” is repeated on the first page, most likely for emphasis, the text echoing the catalogue.

Starting as a consummate printer’s devil who mastered every detail of the book trade, Franklin would still have been celebrated if he had been content to remain a writer/printer. This beautifully produced book contains a wealth of illustration. Those of us who were unable to attend the exhibition are treated to vividly reproduced leaves of Franklin’s Psalms (1729), Pamela (Richardson’s was the first novel to be published in America in 1742-43), Cicero’s Cato Major (1744), Pennsylvania Gazette, Poor Richard’s Almanac, and much more manuscript material. The final chapter provides a stunning visual and textual survey of early 19th-century American, English, and continental editions of Franklin’s Autobiography which stops short of the outbreak of war. The remaining 42 years of Franklin’s “retirement” from printing were arguably the most significant of any citizen of the transatlantic world. Three hundred years after his birth, we are still learning more about this most remarkable 18th-century transatlantic American.

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The publication of this book is long overdue, since there has been no satisfactory and broad geographical study of book illustration in the early-Victorian period, from 1837 to the Great Exhibition of 1851. John Buchanan-Brown has written an ambitious book, offering readers not only an introductory history of the illustrated book from 1820 to 1860, but also a proficient study of how illustrators, representing the three major languages of northern Europe, influenced each other in their craft. This valuable book, profusely illustrated by some 250 reproductions in black and white, should not be neglected by anyone interested in the immediate post-Bewick period, for they will certainly gain a fresh appreciation of the richness and decorative utility of wood- and steel-engraving, steel-etching, lithography, and chromolithography.

The charting of illustrative activity during this period is a difficult undertaking because artists and engravers did not typically leave a