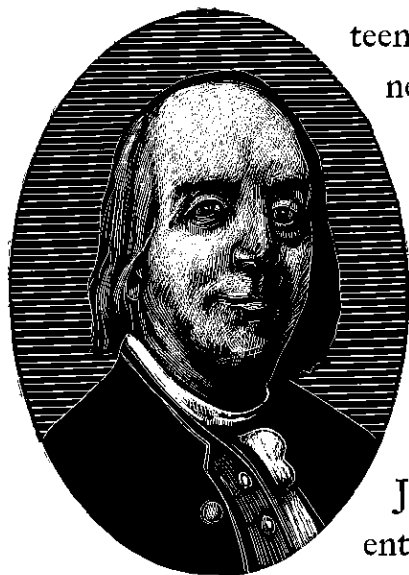# BENJAMIN FRANKLIN:
"We Must All Hang Together"

Beny. a Franklin

THANKS TO HIS INVENTIONS, discoveries, and other achievements, the oldest of the fifty-six signers was also the most famous American of his time.

Born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1706, Benjamin Franklin was the fifteenth in a family of seventeen children. From childhood, he looked for new ways to do things. One windy day he was flying a kite when he came to a pond. Ben took off his clothes, lay back in the water, and held onto the kite string. As the wind blew the kite, Ben was towed across the pond!

After just two years of school, ten-year-old Ben was put to work making candles in the family shop. He hated it. At twelve, he became an apprentice to his older brother James, who was a printer.

Ben learned the printer's trade, but when he made mistakes, James hit him. Tired of the beatings, Ben ran away from home at seventeen and settled in Philadelphia.

Ben set up a printing business and in 1729 began his own newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette.* A few years later he founded *Poor Richard's Almanac,* which he published between 1733 and 1758. In his almanac, he popularized many sayings, such as "Haste makes waste" and "Early to bed, and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."
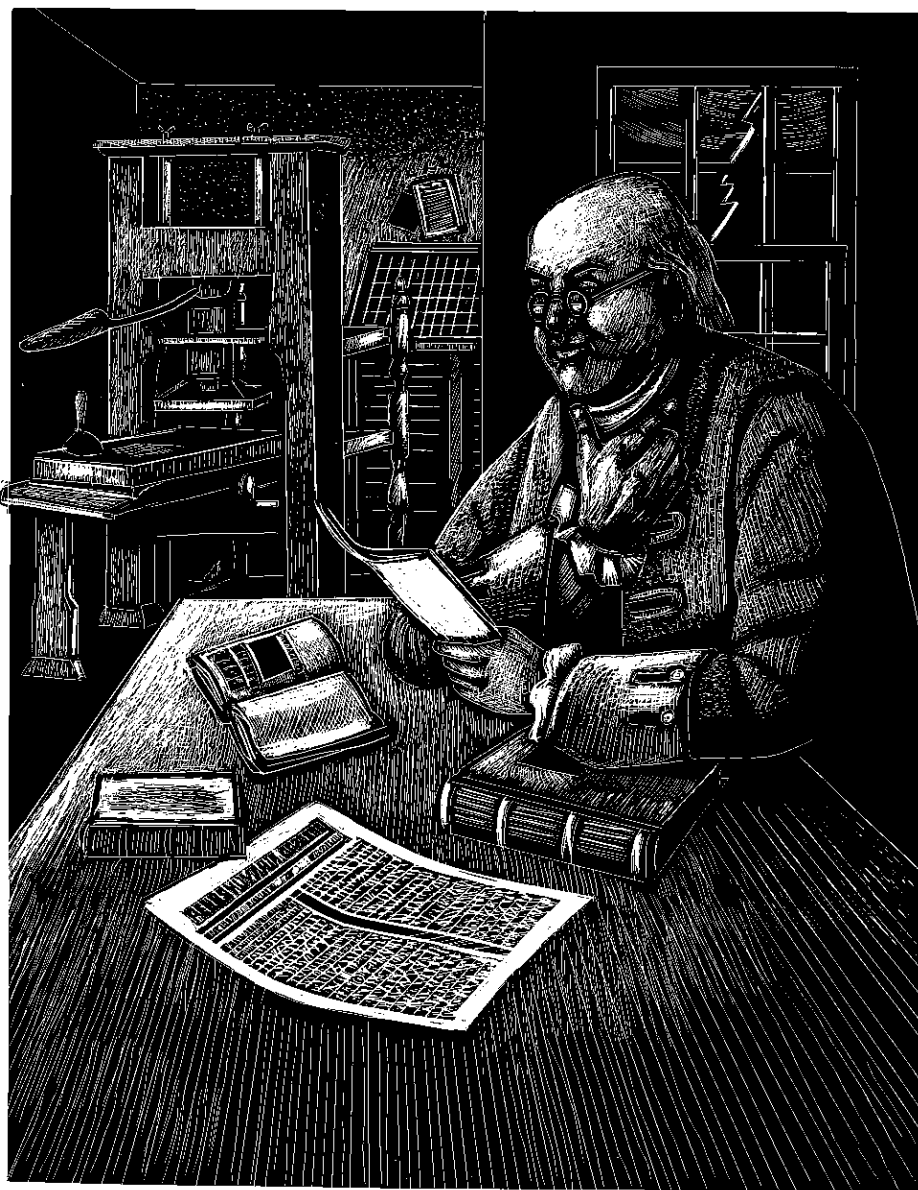
Ben had married Deborah Read in 1730. Ben and Debby had a daughter, Sally, and a son, Franky, who died of smallpox when he was just four. By another woman Ben had a son named William, whom Debby treated as her own child. Debby assisted Ben with his printing business. With her help, he became America's largest bookseller, and the *Pennsylvania Gazette* became the leading newspaper.

Printing was just one of Ben's interests. Science was another. In June 1752 Ben and his son William performed a famous but risky experiment. They flew a kite in a storm. Lightning hit the kite and zoomed down the string to a key, where it

made a spark. This proved that lightning was electricity. Another time, while riding through Maryland, Ben and William spotted a tornado and galloped toward it, backing away only when tree branches nearly hit them. Ben's observations provided people with a better understanding of tornadoes.

"What good is science that does not apply to some use?" Ben once asked. He invented many devices to help people. To protect human beings and property from lightning, he created the lightning rod. In addition, he invented a heating device called the Franklin stove and a type of eyeglasses called bifocals that millions of people wear today.

Ben also helped make Philadelphia a great city. He founded the Library Company of Philadelphia (a step in building America's public library system), the

Union Fire Company (America's first volunteer fire department), the Pennsylvania Hospital (the country's first general hospital), and the school that is now the University of Pennsylvania.

He found time for politics, too. Franklin served in the Pennsylvania Assembly and in the Second Continental Congress, where he helped Thomas Jefferson a little with the writing of the Declaration of Independence. At seventy, Ben was the oldest signer. He reportedly made a famous remark at the signing. John Hancock, president of Congress, said, "We must all hang together," meaning they must cooperate. "Yes," responded Ben. "We must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately!"

During the war, Ben went overseas and convinced France to fight on his country's side, which helped turn the tide in America's favor. But the war brought a great personal blow to Ben. His son William was New Jersey's royal governor, running the colony for the king. Ben begged his son to quit and side with America. William refused and was kicked out of office by American patriots and jailed.

"Nothing ever hurt me so much," Ben said about his son siding with Britain. He and his son never made up.

In 1787, eighty-one-year-old Ben Franklin helped create the U.S. Constitution, which he also signed. He served as Pennsylvania's governor in his last years and died in 1790. After the age of seventy, Benjamin Franklin had decided that he wanted to get younger, so he had begun counting backward with each new birthday. By the usual counting system he was eighty-four, but by his own method he was only fifty-six years old when he died in 1790!