

Many-Sided American Genius, Benjamin Franklin, Born 250 Years Ago

(Editor's note: The birth of Benjamin Franklin, 250 years ago this month, was little cause for celebration to a poor Boston family which already had 14 children. But in "God helps them that help themselves," Franklin found a way to leave his mark on his own generation and all those which have followed.)

By JOHN B. KNOX

BOSTON (U.S.)—One of the astounding success stories of all time began just 250 years ago in a small house in Boston where, by his own word, Benjamin Franklin was born "in poverty and obscurity."

The 15th of 17 children, Franklin received only two years of formal education. He failed in arithmetic. But regardless of position or education, no child born anywhere in the British Empire in the year 1706 was to have a greater impact upon that empire's destiny.

Records give Franklin's birth date as Jan. 6, but that was by the old Julian calendar. When the new Gregorian calendar was adopted by the British Empire in 1752, the date automatically became Jan. 17 — the anniversary which has been observed since.

Spurred by a boundless curiosity and belief that service to his fellow man was the greatest service to God, Franklin educated himself into a many-sided genius, with an endless zest for living.

Breadth of Interest

Of almost unbelievable breadth of interest, he became:

Athlete, printer, newspaperman, publisher, mechanic, author, civic leader, successful business man, renowned scientist and inventor, patriot, philosopher and a diplomat who helped to shape history.

Dedicated to all human freedoms, he was the first to petition Congress to end slavery. He helped write both the Declaration of Independence and the American Constitution.

Honored in Europe for his scientific achievements, he used this great prestige to win France's assistance when the colonies revolted against the British.

And he used skills and knowledge of men and nations built up

through years as a colonial agent in England to win for his weak country a better peace than either mighty England or powerful France — which had an eye on American expansion — would have desired.

Gave Proverbs

The proverbs Franklin assembled in "Poor Richard's almanack" contributed mightily to building a lasting tradition of individual responsibility and enterprise in the struggling young American nation. They included:

"Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise. . . . God helps them that help themselves. . . . the worst wheel of a cart makes the most noise. . . . a penny saved is a penny got."

Franklin accepted women as persons of independent intellect long before they won the right to vote. And few men in history have so attracted the opposite sex. Most of his feminine friendships were formed from middle age onward, and there was a touching quality in the lifelong affection he inspired in younger women. His friendships with distinguished women of France are matters of history.

Humble Birth

Franklin rushed headlong into life after his humble birth. Apprenticed early to his printer-brother, he spent his spare moments reading and practicing writing. At 16 he was contributing to his brother's "New England Courant."

At 17 Franklin was off on his own—without the family blessing—first to New York and then to Philadelphia. He entered Philadelphia as a hungry runaway, munching one loaf of bread while carrying two others under his arm; but he was to have a mighty influence on that city's history.

To Philadelphia, Franklin brought a Boston-born love of books. And although at odds with the Puritan leadership, he also brought a Puritan conscience and Puritan principles which he found hard to follow. His writings show how hard he struggled against his failings.

Swimming Instructor

At 18, Franklin was in London, pursuing his printer's craft. He almost stayed there as a swimming instructor. But after a year and a half he sailed back to Philadelphia, still torn between his weaknesses and his Puritan background.

On the voyage home, Franklin worked out a code of conduct which he later wrote, he "pretty faithfully adhered to quite thro' old age." He vowed frugality—to pay his debts, truthfulness, sincerity, industry, patience, to speak ill of no man and "upon proper occasion to speak all the good I know of everybody."

Russ Party Arrives at Antarctic Cap

LONDON (U.S.)—Moscow Radio reported Saturday the Soviet Union's crack team of ice explorers and scientists landed Friday on the Antarctic ice-cap and immediately sent off ski teams to explore inland.

The Russians were the second big party to land in the South Polar regions this winter. An American exploration team headed by Rear Adm. Richard E. Byrd already has set up a camp at McMurdo Sound.

The vanguard of a British team in the motorship Theron is moving toward Antarctica.

The Moscow Radio announcement said: "The flagship of the Antarctic expedition of the U. S. S. R. Academy of Sciences has arrived in Depo Bay, its final destination. The ship has penetrated several hundreds of meters inside loose ice and has reached a spot where the thickness of the ice makes it possible to land aircraft, tractors and other material."

"Today group under hero of the Soviet Union Cherevichny landed on the mainland and started assembling aircraft."

The broadcast said a party of Russian scientists also set out on skis to explore the terrain. It added that a final decision on the site of a main camp will not be made until further exploration.

Sailor Lost as Polar Ice Crack Claims Tractor

WASHINGTON (U.S.)—A tractor being used in Antarctic exploration went through a crack in the ice and carried the driver to his presumed death, the Navy reported Friday.

It was apparently the first fatality of this year's expedition to the South Polar region.

A message received from the expedition now at McMurdo Sound said Richard Thomas B. Williams is "presumed dead" after the tractor he was driving went through a crack and disappeared beneath the ice.

He is the son of Mrs. Elizabeth Williams, Ilion, N.Y.

At 22, Franklin was in the printing business with a partner. The next year they were publishing the Pennsylvania Gazette. At 23, Franklin owned the paper outright.

Franklin was 24 when he married Deborah Read, who seven years earlier had laughed at the sight of him eating his loaf of bread on the street. Into the new home he brought a son, William, whose mother's name he never divulged.

Poor Richard's Almanack was launched when Franklin was 26. And the next year he began spare time studies through which he was to improve his latin and master the reading of French, Italian, Spanish and German.

Devised Stove

Turning inventor, he devised the Franklin stove, which brought the fireplace out of the chimney—with vast savings in fuel and increased heating comfort. Then came Franklin's famed kite experiment, which ended the ancient mystery of thunder and lightning, and the lightning rod.

Through the years and in a dozen fields, the inventions continued: Bifocal glasses, a device for removing objects from high shelves, the "armonica" which made music from spinning glasses, a clock, a flexible catheter.

Franklin made studies in the varying heat absorption of colors, formed an explanation of heat conductivity and an insulation of materials. He exchanged trees and seeds between the old world and the new, bringing to America medicinal Chinese herbs, kale and kohlrabi.

He defied night-air phobia by sleeping with open windows, and

concluded that colds were spread by contagion rather than cold air. He diagnosed lead poisoning by observing its prevalence in certain trades.

Fellows Storms

Franklin vastly influenced the meteorological world by plotting the movement of northeast storms from the southwest. He proposed daylight saving time, conservation of agricultural resources and water-tight compartments for ships. He measured the Gulf stream and worked out a navigation system to speed ocean crossings.

Swedish Member of Korean Truce Team Killed by Truck

MUNSAN, Korea (U.S.)—A high ranking Swedish member of the Neutral Korean Truce Commission died Saturday after he "apparently slipped and fell beneath the wheels of a U. S. Army truck" in the demilitarized zone, the allies announced.

Colonel Nore Eriksson was pronounced dead about an hour after the accident near Panmunjom, said a statement from U. N. Military Armistice Commission headquarters.

Colonel Eriksson was commander of the Panmunjom camp of the Swedish detachment of the four-nation Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC), charged with both North and South Korea.

Public service sought him out and devoured the later years. Franklin had planned to devote to science, study and experiments. This phase saw him pioneering in fire prevention and insurance, street paving and cleaning, universal education, hospital planning and postal delivery.

Franklin was 70 as he helped the colonies prepare for the War of Independence. He had steadfastly hoped for American destiny as free states within the British Empire, but he fought against parliamentary interference. He helped to speed repeal of the

Stamp Act, and presented the First Continental Congress petition to the King.

Articles of Confederation

A member of the Continental Congress, Franklin proposed the Articles of Confederation and Union, helped draw up and signed the Declaration of Independence.

With war upon the colonies, Franklin went to Paris, seeking French assistance. Knowing full well what he was doing, he wore a fur cap among the powdered heads of Europe, and his humility added to his tremendous following.

Heavy routines fell upon his aging head. Clumsy colleagues complicated his work. But Franklin's serenity and humor carried him through early ordeal and defeat until his mission was accomplished.

With independence won for his nation, Franklin pleaded, at 78, "to be, for the little time I have left, my own master."

Pain ridden and in failing health, he nevertheless wrote of the first balloon ascension in Paris and foresaw an important future for aviation. At 79, traveling home, he wrote of the cause and prevention of smoky chimneys.

More Writing

To the end of his life, Franklin continued writing on public topics. And during his years of public service, he never took payment for what he wrote, nor did he ever seek patents on his inventions.

Still cheerful and keen of mind, he came to his closing days surrounded by friends and family. Death was near when he wrote to Ezra Stiles, president of Yale University:

"Having experienced the goodness of that being in conducting

me prosperously through a long life, I have no doubt of its con-

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British 'Boom' Slowed by Car Industry Cuts

By JAMES F. KING

LONDON (U.S.)—A slowdown in production by three big automobile manufacturers gave a jolt Saturday to Britons riding a prosperity wave.

For the first time since World War II the slack hit directly home, with an Austin Motor Works announcement that the 18,000 workers in its Birmingham plant were going on a four-day week beginning Monday. Two other manufacturers — Standard Motors of Coventry and the Rootes Humber Hawk plant at Ryton-on-Dunsmore — said they were slowing production largely by eliminating overtime.

Manufacturers were quick to give assurances that the cutbacks were only temporary to give the booming industry a "breather." But these assurances failed to quiet fears in the country, where there are still two vacancies for every jobless person listed at the employment exchange.

Anxious Talk

There was unmistakable anxiety among workers, evidenced by "recession" talk in the pubs over pints of beer.

The Austin Company said the four-day week could be regarded as temporary and "merely reflects current market conditions."

"Indications are that normal working should be resumed in the course of the next few weeks," a company spokesman said. "There is always a recession at this time of year. It is nonsense to talk of shrinking export markets."

Waiting Lists

Most automobile dealers still have waiting lists but the demand has dropped off sharply in recent months. Three factors are blamed for the slump — an increase in the purchase tax on cars from 30 to 60 per cent; a glut of second-hand cars on the market; and tighter restrictions on installment buying, requiring a third of the price down and a maximum of two years to pay.

British automobile production is at a record high. Manufacturers generally dispute any export slump and a spokesman for one company, Jaguar, said "we are going to have to increase production to meet demand."

Five-Day Week

Ford said the assembly lines still were working five days a week — two shifts a day — at the company's big plants in Dagenham and Doncaster.

British manufacturers are keeping an eye on the huge increases in production in France, Italy and Germany, offering stiff competition in the overseas car market. One dealer said the British situation was "a mild reflection of what is happening in America," but emphasized "we do not fear that the position of this country will deteriorate to anything comparable with that."

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