

Benjamin Franklin Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress

Prepared by Division Staff
Revised and expanded by Donna Ellis



Manuscript Division, Library of
Congress

Washington, D.C.

2000

Contact information: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/mss/mss.contact>

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Congress Manuscript Division, 2003

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Latest revision: 2012 February

Collection Summary

Title: Benjamin Franklin Papers

Span Dates: 1726-1907

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1770-1789)

ID No.: MSS21451

Creator: Franklin, Benjamin, 1706-1790

Extent: 8,000 items; 40 containers; 12 linear feet; 12 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

Repository: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Abstract: Statesman, publisher, scientist, and diplomat. Correspondence, journals, records, articles, and other material relating to Franklin's life and career. Includes manuscripts (1728) of his *Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion*; negotiations in London (1775); letterbooks (1779-1782) of the United States legation in Paris; records (1780-1783) of the United States peace commissioners, including journals kept by Franklin and Richard Oswald; and papers (1781-1818) of Franklin's grandson, William Temple Franklin (1760-1823).

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

People

Adams, John, 1735-1826--Correspondence.

Bache, Richard, 1737-1811--Correspondence.

Carmichael, William, d. 1795--Correspondence.

Cushing, Thomas, 1725-1788--Correspondence.

Dumas, Charles Guillaume Frédéric, ca. 1725-1780--Correspondence.

Franklin, Benjamin, 1706-1790.

Franklin, Benjamin, 1706-1790. Articles of belief and acts of religion. 1728

Franklin, William Temple, 1760-1823. William Temple Franklin papers.

Hartley, David, ca. 1731-1813--Correspondence.

Hewson, M. S. (Mary Stevenson)--Correspondence.

Ingenhousz, Jan, 1730-1799--Correspondence.

Jay, John, 1745-1829--Correspondence.

Jones, John Paul, 1747-1792--Correspondence.

Lafayette, Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert Du Motier, marquis de, 1757-1834--Correspondence.

Lansdowne, William Petty, Marquis of, 1737-1805--Correspondence.

Laurens, Henry, 1724-1792--Correspondence.

Morris, Robert, 1734-1806--Correspondence.

Oswald, Richard, 1705-1784. Richard Oswald papers.

Sartine, Antoine de, comte d'Alby, 1729-1801--Correspondence.

Vergennes, Charles Gravier, comte de, 1719-1787--Correspondence.

Washington, George, 1732-1799--Correspondence.

Whitefield, George, 1714-1770--Correspondence.

Williams, Jonathan, 1750-1815--Correspondence.

Organizations

Great Britain. Treaties, etc. United States, 1783 Sept. 3.

United States. Continental Congress.

United States. Legation (France) U.S. Legation (France) letterbooks. 1779-1782.

United States. Postmaster General.

Subjects

Diplomatic and consular service, American--France.
Postal service--United States.

Places

France--Foreign relations--United States.
Great Britain--Foreign relations--United States.
United States--Foreign relations--1775-1783.
United States--Foreign relations--France.
United States--Foreign relations--Great Britain.
United States--History--Revolution, 1775-1783--Peace.
United States--History--Revolution, 1775-1783.

Occupations

Diplomats.
Publishers.
Scientists.
Statesmen.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of Benjamin Franklin, statesman, publisher, scientist, and diplomat, were given to the Library of Congress by transfer, gift, and purchase, 1903-1968. An addition was transferred from the Library of Congress archives to the collection in 1989.

Processing History

The papers of Benjamin Franklin were arranged and described in 1968 and prepared for microfilming in 1972. The finding aid was revised in 2000.

Additional Guides

The papers have been described in *Benjamin Franklin, A Register and Index of His Papers in the Library of Congress* (Manuscript Division Reference Department: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 1973) and in the Library's publication *List of the Benjamin Franklin Papers in the Library of Congress* compiled in 1905 by Worthington C. Ford. An index of selected correspondence is available in the Manuscript Division Reading Room and as a [PDF](#) document.

Related Material

Franklin correspondence can also be found in other collections in the Manuscript Division of the Library, including the Peter Force Collection and the papers of [George Washington](#), [Thomas Jefferson](#), [Edmond Charles Genet](#), [James McHenry](#), Silas Deane, and [Andrew Ellicott](#). Other Franklin items in the Library are in the Mrs. Archibald Crossley Autograph Collection, the J. Pierpont Morgan Book of Signers, the [Gaston Tissandier Collection](#), and the reproductions from archives in Great Britain (Public Record Office) and France (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères).

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Benjamin Franklin is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Benjamin Franklin are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Microfilm

A microfilm edition of part of these papers is available on twelve reels. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition as available.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, Benjamin Franklin Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1706, Jan. 17	Born, Boston, Mass.
1718-1723	Apprenticed as a printer to his brother James Franklin
1725-1726	Journeyman printer, London, England
1727	Founded the Junta, a debating club, Philadelphia, Pa.
1728	Wrote <i>Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion</i>
1729	Purchased <i>Pennsylvania Gazette</i>
1730	Married Deborah Read Rogers (died 1774)
1731	Established the Library Company of Philadelphia, Pa.
1732-1758	Published <i>Poor Richard</i> , 1732-1747, and <i>Poor Richard Improved</i> , 1748-1758, commonly known under collective title <i>Poor Richard's Almanack</i>
1736-1751	Clerk, Pennsylvania Assembly
1740	Invented the Pennsylvania fireplace (Franklin stove)
1743	Proposed formation of the American Philosophical Society
1751	Founded with others, the Academy for Education of Youth (now University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa.) Founded Philadelphia City Hospital, Philadelphia, Pa. Published letters to Peter Collinson, <i>Experiments and Observations on Electricity</i> . London: Printed and Sold by E. Cave
1751-1764	Represented Philadelphia at the Pennsylvania Assembly
1754	Represented Pennsylvania at the Albany Congress
1757-1762	Political agent of the Pennsylvania Assembly, London, England
1766	Reappointed as agent for Pennsylvania, London, England

1771	Began autobiography
1775	Left London, England, for Massachusetts Elected member of the Second Continental Congress Named postmaster general
1776	Served on committee to draft the Declaration of Independence Went to France as one of three American commissioners to negotiate a treaty
1778	Negotiated treaties of commerce and defense with France Appointed sole plenipotentiary in France
1781	Appointed with John Jay and John Adams to negotiate a peace with Great Britain
1783	Signed Treaty of Paris with Great Britain and asked Congress for his recall
1785	Returned to the United States
1785-1788	President, Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania
1787	Represented Pennsylvania at the Constitutional Convention
1790	Signed memorial to Congress as last official act as president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery
1790, Apr. 17	Died, Philadelphia, Pa.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) span the years 1726 to 1907, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period 1770-1789. Consisting of correspondence, journals, records, articles, and other material, the collection reflects Franklin's many interests and activities.

Series I relates chiefly to Franklin's mission to France to obtain diplomatic recognition of the rebellious colonies as well as financial and military aid and to participate in the peace negotiations in Paris and London preceding the Treaty of Paris in 1783. The series contains seventeen interrelated volumes chiefly pertaining to Franklin's years in France. Six are letterbooks of the United States legation in Paris, 1779-1782. Other volumes include letters in French to Franklin, 1777-1780; records of the peace commissioners, 1780-1783; negotiations in London, 1775 (original and Franklin's corrected transcript); and Franklin's correspondence with David Hartley, 1775-1781. Single volumes include the Craven Street, London, letterbook, 1772-1773, one of the few pre-Revolutionary Franklin letterbooks to survive; the signed Petition of the First Continental Congress to the King, 16 October 1774; and Richard Oswald's journal concerning the peace commission, 1782.

Series II has been described in the Library's publication *List of the Benjamin Franklin Papers in the Library of Congress* compiled in 1905 by Worthington C. Ford. Of the fourteen volumes in this series, eleven represent a selection of Franklin's correspondence, 1726-1790 made by William Temple Franklin prior to his departure for London in 1791. The letters bear many editorial annotations, deletions, and other changes made by William Temple Franklin before publication of

his three-volume work. This series also contains a volume of notes entitled “Medical, Nature Printing and Addenda” and two volumes of William Temple Franklin's papers.

Series III represents a miscellaneous group of Benjamin Franklin items gathered by the Library. It includes the original manuscript of Franklin's *Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion*; his correspondence with M. S. Hewson, 1760-1779; a facsimile copy of his ledger as postmaster general, 1775-1778; his correspondence with Jan Ingenhousz, 1777-1785; and other papers, 1728-1841 and undated.

Series IV includes copies of items held by other institutions and transcripts of material from Series I and II which is not on the microfilm of the Library's Benjamin Franklin Papers.

The Addition consists of a letter, 1753, from Franklin to George Whitefield concerning the importance of “good works” in the Christian faith. The letter written in an unknown hand is a print made from a microfilm in the American Philosophical Society Library, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Organization of the Papers

The collection is arranged in five series:

- Series I, 1772-1783
- Series II, 1726-1818
- Series III, 1728-1841
- Series IV, 1744-1907.
- Addition, 1753

Description of Series

<i>Container</i>	<i>Series</i>
BOX 1-16 REEL 1-4	<u>Series I, 1772-1783</u> Letterbooks, journals, records of negotiations, a petition, and correspondence. Indexed by name of writer or recipient.
BOX 17-30 REEL 5-12	<u>Series II, 1726-1818</u> General correspondence and miscellaneous papers of Benjamin Franklin and correspondence and other papers of William Temple Franklin. Indexed by name of writer or recipient.
BOX 31-32 REEL 12	<u>Series III, 1728-1841</u> Literary and scientific articles, memoranda, correspondence of Benjamin Franklin and William Temple Franklin, and miscellany. Arranged chronologically and indexed by name of writer and recipient.
BOX 33-39 not filmed	<u>Series IV, 1744-1907,</u> Copies of correspondence and miscellaneous material from collections outside the Library of Congress. Arranged chronologically and indexed by name of writer and recipient. Transcripts of material from Series I and II are unarranged and unindexed.
BOX 39	<u>Addition, 1753</u> Copy of a letter from Franklin to George Whitefield.

Container List

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1-16 REEL 1-4	Series I, 1772-1783 Letterbooks, journals, records of negotiations, a petition, and correspondence. Indexed by name of writer or recipient.
BOX 1 REEL 1	Records of the United States legation, Paris, France Letters in French to Franklin, 1777-1780 (1 vol.)
BOX 2 REEL 1	Letterbooks 1779 (1 vol.)
BOX 3 REEL 1	1779-1780 (1 vol.)
BOX 4 REEL 1	1780 (1 vol.)
BOX 5 REEL 2	1781 (1 vol.)
BOX 6 REEL 2	(1 vol.)
BOX 7 REEL 2	1782 (1 vol.)
BOX 8 REEL 2	Peace commissioners 1780-1783 (1 vol.)
BOX 8a REEL 2	(1 vol.)
BOX 9 REEL 2	Commissioners to France, 1776-1779 (1 vol.)
BOX 10 REEL 3	Petition of the Continental Congress to the King, Philadelphia, Pa., 1774, Oct. 26 (1 vol.)
BOX 11 REEL 3	Craven Street letterbook, London, England, 1772-1773 (1 vol.)

Series I, 1772-1783

Container

Contents

BOX 12 REEL 3	Oswald, Richard, journal, peace commission, 1782 (1 vol.)
BOX 13 REEL 4	Franklin's journal, peace commission, 1782 (1 vol.)
BOX 14 REEL 4	Negotiations in London, England, 1775 Original autograph (1 vol.)
BOX 15 REEL 4	Transcript corrected by Franklin (1 vol.)
BOX 16 REEL 4	Correspondence with David Hartley, 1775-1781 (1 vol.)
BOX 17-30 REEL 5-12	Series II, 1726-1818 General correspondence and miscellaneous papers of Benjamin Franklin and correspondence and other papers of William Temple Franklin. Indexed by name of writer or recipient.
BOX 17 REEL 5	1726, July 22-1774, May 21 (1 vol.)
BOX 18 REEL 5-6	1774, June 10-1778, Oct. 9 (1 vol.)
BOX 19 REEL 6	1778, Oct. 20-1781, May 1 (1 vol.)
BOX 20 REEL 7	1781, May 4-1782, Jan. (1 vol.)
BOX 21 REEL 7	1782, Jan.-1784, Jan. 6 (1 vol.)
BOX 22 REEL 8	1784, Jan. 12-1785, May 23 (1 vol.)
BOX 23 REEL 8	1785, May 26-1786, Dec. 10 (1 vol.)
BOX 24 REEL 9	1786, Dec. 15-1789, Mar. 2 (1 vol.)
BOX 25 REEL 9	1789, Apr.-1790, undated (1 vol.)

Series II, 1726-1818

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 26 REEL 10	Undated (1 vol.)
BOX 27 REEL 10	Miscellaneous material in French, 1778-1786, undated (1 vol.)
BOX 28 REEL 10	Medical, Nature Printing and Addenda, 1781-1785, undated (1 vol.)
BOX 29 REEL 11	Franklin, William Temple, papers Correspondence, 1781-1818, undated (1 vol.)
BOX 30 REEL 11-12	Correspondence and miscellaneous material, 1814-1818, undated (1 vol.)
BOX 31-32 REEL 12	Series III, 1728-1841 Literary and scientific articles, memoranda, correspondence of Benjamin Franklin and William Temple Franklin, and miscellany. Arranged chronologically and indexed by name of writer and recipient.
BOX 31 REEL 12	Miscellaneous material 1728-1783
BOX 32 REEL 12	1784-1841, undated
BOX 33-39 not filmed	Series IV, 1744-1907, Copies of correspondence and miscellaneous material from collections outside the Library of Congress. Arranged chronologically and indexed by name of writer and recipient. Transcripts of material from Series I and II are unarranged and unindexed.
BOX 33	Reproduction and miscellaneous material 1744-1775
BOX 34	1776-1907, undated
BOX 35-39	Unarranged transcripts
BOX 39	Addition, 1753 Copy of a letter from Franklin to George Whitefield.
BOX 39	Letter (copy), Benjamin Franklin to George Whitefield, 1753