

## “Benjamin Franklin-More Than A Revolutionary”

### ~IMPACT~

“If you can tell me who is on the \$100 bill, you can have it!” Gramps Z. challenged me. This four year old didn’t know the value of “A penny saved is a penny earned”, but I *did* know who was on the \$100 bill, thanks to my Dad’s coaching! “Benjamin Franklin!” I shot the answer back at Gramps! With a look of astonishment, he gladly delivered the promised reward. Gramps passed away five years ago, but I continue to feel his impact and influence on my life, as well as Benjamin Franklin’s impact, long after they are gone.

Could someone that I never knew have an **impact** on me now? I will start by defining “**Impact**”. Some call it “influence”, or “effect”. One dictionary definition is, “...**4. the force exerted by a new idea, concept, technology, or ideology.**”

Benjamin Franklin implemented many ideas that changed life in his time. As a giving citizen, he wanted to bring about positive, meaningful changes to life. He wanted to “multiply the conveniences and pleasure of life.” He was more than a revolutionary; he had an impact on all of us.

In 1717, Ben was my age, 11; he designed a pair of swim fins for his hands. He loved swimming so much that for the rest of his life, he would say it was “going swimmingly” when something went well. I have also benefited from using swim fins.

When Ben was 12, (1718) he was apprenticed without pay to his brother James’ printing shop. Since he was not allowed to write for James’ newspaper, Ben wrote under the pseudonym, Silence Dogood; sending her letters to The New England Courant, his brother’s paper. James was furious when he discovered that Ben was the author. Ben ran away to New York City after his brother gave him a beating.

Ben became a vegetarian in 1722, as a 16 year old, thinking saving money for food meant more to spend on books. In 1727, Ben wound up in Philadelphia to become a printer. He formed a club he named “Junto”. The 21-year-old Ben wondered, “Can you think of anything in which the Junto may be of service to mankind, to their country, and to their friends?” He thought the Junto members could gather their books in one place. He decided next to include all the other people of Philadelphia, for a small fee, to be able to buy more books. By 1731, Ben had established the first public library in America. It was a huge success, “Reading became quite fashionable,” he said. The public library impacts avid readers such as myself. The impact of Junto continues through the active membership of the American Philosophical Society. I have visited their website.

This good citizen type of thinking, led Ben to consider other ways of sharing resources for the common good. His ideas originated with practical things, but had an economic impact as well. In 1735, Ben wrote articles about preventing fires, and said, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” He formed the first volunteer fire brigade in December of 1736, called the Union Fire Company. Public safety through the fire department impacts me today, and is a valuable community benefit. He implemented paved streets in Philadelphia; he also hired a man to sweep and clean the streets. Hauling away trash came next, then sanitation departments and garbage collection. All of us know the impact of these services in our daily lives. He developed ideas for better police forces, improved lighting for safer streets; and promoted higher education. He also helped form the first hospital in America. Benjamin Franklin’s impact is felt through all of these community-minded ideas.

Ben considered the way homes were heated in his day; his practicality again sprang into action. It was 1742, Introducing: The Pennsylvania Fireplace. He said, “My common room is made twice as warm as it used to be, with a quarter of the wood I formerly consumed there.” Although he named it the Pennsylvania Fireplace, most of the people called it the Franklin Stove. Ben could have patented this idea and made a fortune on it, but he said, “As we enjoy great advantage from the inventions of others, we should be glad of an opportunity to serve others by any invention of ours, and this we should do freely and generously.” This invention impacts me today through central heating, and modern day stoves, but I am also impacted by his generous thoughts and attitudes.

Ben was bothered by having to wear two pairs of spectacles for seeing things close by or far away. It was 1784, and he invented the first pair of bifocal eyeglasses; a practical, convenient solution for those who must wear bifocals today.

In 1785, he designed a long pole with an artificial hand on the end to reach books from high shelves. Grocers adapted it to reach their goods. It was an early form of robotics, conveniences that help me in various ways today.

An odometer was his practical solution to measuring out postal routes and distances covered by the carriages of his day. Today, the odometer helps to answer that age-old question, “Are we there yet?” on long car trips.

These examples show how this inventor, economist, philosopher, and businessman’s thoughts and practicality impact my life. I did not even mention his impact as a writer, publisher, scientist, humorist, politician, poet, and musician. Benjamin Franklin’s life had an impact on me when I was only four, as I gladly took the money from my Gramps. In the nearly three hundred years since Benjamin Franklin’s birth in Boston, on January 17, 1706, I realize that there are many ways I have been impacted and influenced by this great American. A picture paints a thousand words, and in this brief picture of Benjamin Franklin, I hope you will continue to be intrigued to explore and learn more about the impact of this extraordinary American.