The Enlightenment Education of Benjamin Franklin Bache

Unlike the newspaper writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, early American journalists were sporadic writers. A few sought publicity for themselves, but most preferred to be anonymous or used pseudonyms. They thus avoided possible embarrassment or legal retribution and left their publishers to face any consequences from their articles. As partisan journalism intensified in the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary periods, however, journalism moved closer to being a recognized, full-time profession for some Americans. If their work did not make them wealthy, it could at least bring them notoriety and the satisfaction of airing their views, especially when their abrasive writings challenged the leaders of the early republic.

No journalist provoked more wrath in the administrations of the first two presidents than did Benjamin Franklin's grandson, Benjamin Franklin Bache. Known as "Lightning Rod Jr." to his detractors, Bache enraged Federalists by revealing the contents of the Jay Treaty, by republishing letters forged by the British to discredit Washington during the Revolution, and by tirelessly condemning what he saw as

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aristocratic and monarchical tendencies in the federal government. Washington, for one, expressed amazement at the "malignant industry, and persevering falsehoods" with which he was attacked in Bache's Philadelphia Aurora.

Bache did have personal reasons to dislike George Washington and John Adams. His father, Richard, was humiliated when Washington did not nominate him to regain the office of Postmaster General in 1789. A visitor to the Richard Bache home a decade later found the entire family still "very embittered against Gl. Washington." Adams believed Benjamin Franklin Bache's treatment of his administration was the result of "an irreconcilable hatred" Benjamin Franklin had developed for Adams during their diplomatic negotiations in Europe.

Bache's journalism, however, was not merely sustained by any private animosities. More militant than any other Democratic-Republican editor of the 1790s, he was a determined advocate of Enlightenment republicanism, egalitarianism, and economic liberalism.

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2 The most detailed account of Bache's journalistic career is James D. Tagg, "Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora" (Ph.D. diss., Wayne State University, 1973). On the letters, see Worthington C. Ford, ed., The Spurious Letters Attributed to Washington (Brooklyn, 1889).


4 Richard Bache had a troubled tenure as the head of the post office during the Revolution, but had hopes of returning to the position after making a personal appeal to Washington. Richard Bache to Sally Bache, Sept. 18, 1789, Franklin Papers (Yale University). On Bache's post-office career and his difficulties, see Tagg, "Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora," 23-25, 32.

5 Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, Under Their Vine and Fig Tree, Travels through America in 1797-1799, 1805, With Some Further Account of Life in New Jersey, trans. and ed. by Metchie J.E. Budka (Elizabeth, 1965), 61.


7 "Enlightenment" thought is here defined broadly as those conceptions of the world which recognized the imperfect state of human affairs and advocated libertarian remedies. These remedies included the schools of thought which historians have called "republican," "egalitarian," and "liberal." For contrasting use of such terms, see the thirteen essays in The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787, A Symposium of Views and Reviews, William and Mary Quarterly 44 (1987), 549-640. See also James T. Kloppenberg, "The
He aligned himself with Jefferson, promoted the works of Thomas Paine, and championed the ideals of revolutionary France. Competing editors claimed that Bache was an incendiary in the pay of the French, but the content of his newspaper reveals a familiarity with a wide array of contemporary thinkers and may well indicate the influence of the man—Benjamin Franklin—who had guided his education and business affairs for fifteen years.

Franklin was an active proponent of an Enlightenment vision for America, one that mixed strains of libertarian thought. In his writings, especially his autobiography and Poor Richard almanacs, he encouraged his readers to embrace the republican virtues of industry, frugality, vigilance, and public-spirited political independence. Also evident in his public discourses was an adherence to egalitarianism and economic liberalism. Much of what he said was simply aimed at persuading his readers and listeners to behave well for their own benefit and the benefit of society. Accordingly, when faced with the task of schooling his grandson and preparing him to make a living, Franklin followed his own educational doctrine that it was necessary to "supply the succeeding Age with Men qualified to serve the Publick with Honour to themselves, and to their Country."

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8 See, for example, [Philadelphia] Gazette of the United States, June 3, 1796, and [Philadelphia] Porcupine's Gazette, Nov 16, 1797


10 See Drew R McCoy, "Benjamin Franklin's Vision of a Republican Economy for America," William and Mary Quarterly 35 (1978), 605 28

11 See David M Larson, "Franklin on the Nature of Man and the Possibility of Virtue," Early American Literature 10 (1975), 111 20, and Norman S Fierng, "Franklin and the Way to Virtue," American Quarterly 30 (1978), 199 223 Bache's views on the importance of "doing good" were virtually identical to Franklin's See [Philadelphia] Aurora, May 19, 1795

Franklin was one of many Americans in the late eighteenth century who believed that republics could only survive where liberal education made citizens conscious of their political rights and moral duties. His approach followed the methods for producing rational, serious-minded adults endorsed by Locke and adopted by education theorists in Europe and the United States. These prevailing views were based on the assumption that a child would learn self-discipline and be prepared for public-spirited behavior through denial of immediate pleasures and strict subordination to adult authority. "Let thy Child’s first Lesson be Obedience," said Poor Richard, "and the second may be what thou wilt." Such habits were to be taught by the parent or teacher bestowing the satisfaction of "esteem" or the shame of "disgrace" on the child. Benjamin Franklin Bache, whose identity in the world was tied to one of the most prominent and dynamic men of the age, experienced such emotional dependence and, evidence would suggest, at least some degree of ideological training.

When Bache was born to Franklin’s daughter Sarah in 1769, Benjamin Franklin was in the middle of a ten-year residence in England, where he served as an agent for American causes. Letters from Philadelphia gave him pleasing descriptions of his first legitimate grandson’s affectionate nature and resemblance to him. Franklin sent presents for “Benny-boy” and, having lost his own four-year-old son Francis to smallpox, he forwarded expert medical advice on inoculation. “All who have seen my Grandson, agree with you in their Accounts of his being an uncommonly fine Boy,” Franklin wrote to his sister Jane, “which brings often afresh to my Mind the Idea of my Son Franky, tho’ now dead 36 Years, whom I have seldom since seen equal’d in every thing, and whom to this Day I cannot think of without a Sigh.” Franklin gradually found himself

15 See, for example, Deborah Franklin to Benjamin Franklin (hereafter, BF), Oct. 4, 1769, Labaree, et al., eds., Papers of Benjamin Franklin, 16:213; Deborah Franklin to BF, Aug. 16, 1770, ibid., 17:205-7.
16 BF to Deborah Franklin, June 10, 1770, ibid., 17:166.
becoming quite attached to the child he had never seen. "'Tis a precious little Fellow!" Franklin wrote to his wife Deborah after she related a tale of Benny's generosity. "How much I long to see him!"¹⁸

When he returned to Pennsylvania in 1775, Franklin finally met his grandson. At his arrival, however, he also learned of the battles of Lexington and Concord. He was chosen the next day to be a delegate to the Second Continental Congress and was soon preoccupied with the business of the Revolution. He found time to express an often whimsical delight with the boy in letters to friends and relatives,¹⁹ but by the autumn of 1776, at the age of seventy, he was dispatched on what was to be a nine-year diplomatic mission in France. With his wife Deborah having died in 1774 and his son William, the royal governor of New Jersey, taking the loyalist side, Franklin might have faced another long separation from his family, but travelling with him aboard the American warship *Reprisal* were his two grandsons, sixteen-year-old William Temple Franklin and seven-year-old Benjamin Franklin Bache.

While Temple was to serve as Franklin's secretary, the grandfather's intention for his "special good Boy" Benny was to give him "a little French Language and Address."²⁰ Bache's parents were grateful for the opportunity to have their son receive a European education. Their initial worry was that Benny might prove to be too much of a burden for the family patriarch. "We used to think he gave little trouble at home," Sarah wrote to her father after their departure, "but that was perhaps a Mothers partiality."²¹ She had long thought that he was easily governed and would "do a great deal out of affection."²² Richard Bache later instructed him to "pay strict attention to everything your Grandfather says to you and you will draw down the Blessings of Heaven, with those of Your affectionate Father."²³

¹⁸ BF to Deborah Franklin, Sept. 1, 1773, ibid., 20:383.
¹⁹ See, for example, BF to Mary Hewson, July 8, 1775, ibid., 22:100; and BF to William Temple Franklin, Sept. 19, 1776, ibid., 22:612-13.
²⁰ BF to Mary Hewson, Jan. 12, 1777, ibid., 23:156. See also, BF to Silas Deane, Dec. 7, 1776, ibid., 23:30.
²³ Richard Bache to Benjamin Franklin Bache (hereafter, BFB), Nov. 5, 1783, Benjamin Franklin Bache Papers (American Philosophical Society).
After his arrival in Paris, Franklin arranged for Benny to attend the Le Coeur boarding school in nearby Passy, a pleasant village by the Seine where Franklin himself decided to live. Bache was also taken to meet Voltaire who, in the presence of twenty witnesses (including Franklin), was asked to give a benediction to the boy. Speaking in English and using a blessing he thought would be appropriate for Franklin's grandson, the aged philosopher placed his hands on Benny's head and said, "God and liberty." 

Bache, equipped with a wig and black silk breeches, started learning French and took lessons from a dancing master. Franklin reported to Benny's parents that their son was doing well and coming for dinner on Sundays. Still, Franklin, who was receiving adulation as the New World man "appearing under a Martin Fur Cap, among the Powder'd Heads of Paris," thought that an American boy's character should not be shaped by French refinement and beliefs. After two years in the Passy school, Bache was sent to Geneva. "As he is destined to live in a Protestant Country, and a Republic," Franklin explained, "I thought it best to finish his Education where the proper Principles prevail." 

Franklin did not doubt his decision. Already proud of having removed Temple from the loyalist influence of his father, Governor William Franklin, and having "fixed him in honest republican Whig principles," he believed that Temple would "in time become of great service to his country" and that Benny too would be "a valuable man." He dispatched his grandson with Philibert Cramer, a Genevan diplomat and publisher of Voltaire, who was returning to Switzer-

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25 A Owen Aldridge, *Voltaire and the Century of Light* (Princeton, 1975), 400
26 For a description of Bache's early years in Europe, see Claude Anne Lopez and Eugenia Herbert, *The Private Franklin, The Man and His Family* (New York, 1975), 216-32
28 BF to Mary Hewson, Jan. 12, 1777, ibid., 23:155
30 BF to Richard Bache, June 2, 1779, Smyth, ed., *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, 7:345
land. Benny was a “good, honest lad” who “went very cheerfully,” Franklin assured Richard Bache. He told others that the French nobility sent their sons to Geneva despite the difference in religion because the education was better and the morals safer than in Paris.

During his four years in Switzerland, Bache attended the college and academy founded by Calvin, a school largely devoted to education in the classics. Long hours were spent translating Latin and Greek. He lived in the home of Gabriel Louis Galissard de Marignac, a poet who served as his tutor. Marignac saw in Benny a boy with an “observant eye” and “a good heart and good character,” but he informed the grandfather that he was “taking criticism hardly” and being “courageous enough to defend himself against anyone who should attack him unjustly.” Indeed, when a cat carried off one of three newborn guinea pigs he kept in his room, Bache displayed a fierce sense of justice in resolving with a friend, as he noted in his diary, “to punish some Cat, innocent or guilty.” They later executed a cat neighbors had seen walking across a roof with the pig in its mouth.

If Bache lacked the irenic element in Franklin’s character, he nevertheless had a strikingly similar capacity to be a calm and methodical observer of society. After witnessing a thief being shot, for instance, Bache recorded a straightforward, journalistic description in his diary. “The priest continued to speak as he retired, the officers give the sign,” he wrote, “the soldiers fire, the regiment marched around the dead body, and they carry it away.” Catherine Cramer, the wife of the man who brought Benny to Geneva, found the boy’s composure almost unnerving. He was, she wrote to Franklin, a reasonable, but cold and serious young man.

31 Lucien Cramer, Une Famille Genevoise, Les Cramers leurs relations avec Voltaire, Rousseau et Benjamin Franklin Bache (Geneva, Switzerland, 1952), 60.
33 BF to Sally (Sarah) Bache, March 16, 1780, Franklin-Bache Family Papers (American Philosophical Society); BF to Samuel Cooper, Dec. 9, 1780, Franklin Papers.
34 Gabriel Louis Galissard de Marignac to BF, Nov. 20, 1781, Franklin Papers.
35 Entry for April 4, 1783, in Benjamin Franklin Bache Diary, August 1, 1782-September 14, 1783, manuscript translation, B.F. Bache Papers.
36 Ibid., April 6, 1783.
37 Ibid., Oct. 9, 1782.
38 Catherine Cramer to BF, May 15, 1781, Franklin-Bache Family Papers.
Serious behavior was clearly what the grandfather expected. Although he never visited Benny in Geneva, his letters made certain the boy knew that he was to obey and be thankful to his masters so that "good People" would "esteem you for your dutiful Behavior." He was also to acquire the "Knowledge & Virtue" necessary "to become an honourable Man in your own Country." In one letter he told Benny how his mother had organized women in Philadelphia to sew 2,000 shirts for Washington's soldiers. "Be diligent in your Studies," he wrote, "that you also may be qualified to do Service to your Country, and be worthy [of] so good a Mother."

Bache replied dutifully to Franklin's pronouncements on republican industry, virtue, and public service. "M. Marignac gives his compliments to you and says that I am a good boy," Bache said on one occasion. "I will do all that [I] can for to be the first of the class." Bache routinely assured Franklin that he would do all he could to satisfy his grandfather and that he would always keep the memory of his generosity in his heart, but Franklin was blunt enough to avoid any misunderstanding. "I shall always love you very much if you continue to be a good Boy," he told Benny in 1779. A year later Franklin gave his grandson a graphic description of two sorts of people in the world: those who were sensible, prosperous, and respected for their virtue, and those who were "poor and dirty, and ragged and ignorant, and vicious." The difference, Franklin said, was "a good Education."

Long adept at psychological manipulation, the venerable, sagacious Franklin had little difficulty impressing his expectations on his young grandson with techniques of esteem and disgrace coupled with reward and denial. In one letter, for instance, he dispensed praise of

\[39\] BF to BFB, Aug. 19, 1779, Smyth, ed., *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, 7:368. See also, BF to BFB, May 3, 1779, Franklin Papers.

\[40\] BF to BFB, April 16, 1781, Franklin-Bache Family Papers.

\[41\] BFB to BF, May 30, 1779, ibid.

\[42\] See, for example, Bache's letters of Dec. 21, 1779; May 6, June 5, 1780, ibid.

\[43\] BF to BFB, Aug. 19, 1779, Smyth, ed., *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, 7:369.

\[44\] BF to BFB, Sept. 25, 1780, as quoted in Lopez and Herbert, *The Private Franklin*, 228.

\[45\] Ibid.

drawings Bache had sent and recognized the achievement with a guinea for books, but also said he expected improvement and that his young correspondent should learn to write in "a fair round Hand." Referring to Benny’s younger brother William in a not-too-subtle comparison, he added, “It is surprising what a Progress your Brother has made in such Writing,—considering his Age.”

A recurring topic was the boy’s finances. Franklin approved a request that Benny be given money for a traditional party when the boy received an award for Latin translation. He did not, however, allow Bache to purchase a gold watch. Bache thought a Swiss time piece would be practical, but Franklin said it would be “of little or no Service” and too expensive for a child. “When you are more of a Man, perhaps, if you have behaved well,” he said, “I may give you one or something that is better.”

In overseeing the education of his grandson, Franklin followed the principles he had outlined in 1749 when he wrote a pamphlet proposing the founding of the institution that became the University of Pennsylvania. Believing that a “good Education” was “the surest Foundation of the Happiness both of private Families and of Common-wealths,” Franklin argued that to make the best use of their limited time students should be taught what is “most useful and most ornamental.” In addition to exercise and a temperate diet, he suggested a curriculum that would include the skills of writing, drawing, speaking, mathematics, agriculture, and engineering, as well as the study of English, history, geography, logic, and ancient and contemporary languages. The great aim of education, he maintained, was to promote “an Inclination join’d with an Ability to serve Mankind, one’s Country, Friends and Family.”

With Bache’s school in Geneva stressing the ornamental, Franklin

47 BF to BFB, Jan. 25, 1782, Smyth, ed., Writings of Benjamin Franklin, 8:372-73.
48 BF to BFB, June 5, 1780, Franklin-Bache Family Papers; BFB to BF, July 18, 1780, ibid.; BFB to BF, January 30, 1783, Franklin Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania); BF to BFB, May 2, 1783, Franklin-Bache Family Papers.
50 Ibid., 404.
51 Ibid., 402-18.
52 Ibid., 419.
insisted that Benny also learn the useful. He urged him, in particular, to improve his drawing, an ability Franklin thought was a universal language for ideas, and to keep an account of his expenses, which he believed would teach frugality. Bache worked to fulfill the expectations of his grandfather and the demands of the school, but seemingly at the expense of his health and his ability to use English. After four years in Geneva, Bache told his parents, who thought that he had forgotten his native language, that he still knew enough English to understand and be understood. His health proved to be a greater concern. Hearing that Benny was not well and was dejected at having been away from his relatives so long, Franklin asked him to return to Passy during summer vacation in 1783. After making his decision, Franklin received a letter from Robert Pigott, a wealthy Englishman living in Switzerland, who told him that Benny was being given an improper diet and a room no better "than that of a Prisoner."

After Bache arrived in Passy, Franklin declared himself satisfied with the education Benny had received in Geneva and noted that he was still "docile and of gentle Manners." Franklin had thoughts of sending him to a school in England where he could regain his English, but he did not. "He gains every day upon my Affections," Franklin observed. Benny was delighted to find his grandfather, who was completing his peace treaty negotiations, so cheerful and so young for his age. "I am now at Passy with my grandpapa, and my cousin, who are both very kind to me," Bache reported to his parents. "I learn to fence, to dance, and study mathematics and Latin, which, together with writing, entirely fills up my time."

53 Ibid., 404.
54 BF to BFB, Jan. 25, 1782, Smyth, ed., Writings of Benjamin Franklin, 8:372-73.
55 Sarah Bache to BFB, Oct. 1, 1782, Franklin Papers; Richard Bache to BFB, Nov. 5, 1783, Franklin-Bache Family Papers.
56 BFB to Richard Bache, Dec. 27, 1783, Franklin-Bache Family Papers.
57 BF to Richard and Sarah Bache, July 27, 1783, Franklin Papers.
58 Robert Pigott to BF, June 27, 1783, ibid.
59 BF to Mary Hewson, Sept. 7, 1783, Smyth, ed., Writings of Benjamin Franklin, 9:89.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Dorcas Montgomery to Sarah Bache, July 26, 1783, Franklin-Bache Family Papers.
Over the course of the next year, however, Franklin decided that his grandson should begin training for a specific career. Not surprisingly, he chose his original occupation, printing, which had been profitable for him in America and which he had continued to practice in Passy in order to produce diplomatic materials, propaganda for the American cause, and entertaining literature for his friends. In France, where even royalty received training in setting type and operating presses, printing was regarded as a fine art and Franklin had marvelled at how it was seeming to reach “a high Pitch of Perfection” with the Didot family in particular. Having been deeply angered by critics of his performance in public service, Franklin had hopes that Bache would have a less painful and more independent way to be useful to his country. “I have determin’d to give him a Trade that he may have something to depend on,” he wrote to Benny’s father, “and not be oblig’d to ask Favours or Offices of anybody.”

Bache received his initial instruction from the printers employed in Franklin’s household. His first piece of printing was “An Ode in Imitation of Alcaeus,” a poem written by Franklin’s English acquaintance William Jones as a protest against oppressive British policies. The ode, which was presumably selected by Franklin as a proper sentiment for the boy to imbibe, praised “high-minded MEN” who knew their duties and rights and were able to “crush the tyrant while they rend the chain.” Bache sent his printed version to his parents as an example of the tasks he was beginning to perform.

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64 Norma S Summers, “Benjamin Franklin—Printing Entrepreneur” (Ph D diss, University of Alabama, 1979)
65 Luther S Livingston, Franklin and His Press at Passy (New York, 1914)
66 Albert J George, The Didot Family and the Progress of Printing (Syracuse, 1961), 10-13
67 BF to William Strahan, Dec 4, 1781, Smyth, ed, Writings of Benjamin Franklin, 8 336
68 See, for example, BF to Robert Morris, July 26, 1781, ibid, 8 288
69 BF to Richard Bache, Nov 11, 1784, ibid, 9 279 Both Franklin and his son in law had had unhappy experiences with appointments to office. Franklin was dismissed as deputy postmaster general in 1774 and Richard Bache, who served as postmaster during the difficult years of the Revolution, lost his job in 1782, but hoped as late as 1789 to return to the position. See Wesley E Rich, The History of the United States Post Office to the Year 1829 (Cambridge, 1924), 48-67
70 Livingston, Franklin and His Press at Passy, 75
71 Bache’s printing of the ode is reproduced in ibid between pages 72 and 73
72 BFB to Richard Bache, Dec 27, 1783, Franklin Bache Family Papers
When Franklin’s London friend Polly Hewson came to visit, she found Benny working “with uncommon diligence” from dawn until evening. He was a tall, dark-haired young man who “with the simplicity of his dress retains a lovely simplicity of character.” His cousin Temple, on the other hand, was vain and “just fit to be employed in a court and to be the galant of the French ladies, nothing else.” Temple resembled Franklin in appearance, she thought, while Benny was like him in mind.

Indeed, while Franklin raised Bache, a source of pride, to be the model American citizen, Temple, whose illegitimate birth in England was an embarrassment, had lived a virtually unrecognized life in British homes and boarding school for fifteen years until brought to America by his grandfather in 1775 and acknowledged as William’s son. In France, where he fathered a third-generation illegitimate boy, Temple gained experience in public affairs as an aide to Franklin, but he never seemed prepared for any of the hopes Franklin had that he would become a lawyer, live as a gentleman farmer, or be appointed to an office. “His understanding is good enough for common uses but not great enough for uncommon ones,” Thomas Jefferson observed in 1785. “The doctor is extremely wounded by the inattention of congress to his applications for him.”

Benny was brought up with more precise expectations and more exacting methods. Franklin decided his namesake would serve the public as a printer-publisher and the grandson—who was being given clear objectives, necessary training, and periodic praise by a skilled manager—showed every sign of contentedly complying with his guardian’s wishes. By April 1785 Bache was considered ready to receive expert tutoring in typefounding. “My grandfather has induced Mr. Didot, the best printer of this Century, or that has ever been

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73 Mary Stevenson Hewson to Barbara Hewson, Jan. 25, 1785, Miscellaneous Manuscript Collection (American Philosophical Society).
74 Ibid.
75 On Temple’s life, see Lopez and Herbert, The Private Franklin, 93, 98, 151-53, 213-14, 233-48, 272-73, 307-10. On Franklin’s refusal to send Temple to the more expensive and less austere schools in England and America that William preferred, see William Randall, A Little Revenge: Benjamin Franklin and His Son (Boston, 1984), 315-17.
seen," Benny wrote in his diary, "to take me into his house for a time to teach me his art."\(^{77}\)

With the cavalier, wayward Temple removed from his company by an extended illness, Franklin, now seventy-nine years old, faced a loneliness he had long feared as a sojourner in Europe. "I have found it very triste breakfasting alone, and sitting alone, without any Tea in the Evening," Franklin told one of his correspondents.\(^{78}\)

Franklin was left with two personal hopes in his eightieth year. One was to see his relatives in America before his death. The other was to help Benny, who, unlike Temple, seemed capable of the kind of upright, republican spirit Franklin admired. "He is a very sensible and a very good Lad," Franklin observed, "and I love him much."\(^{79}\)

When the news arrived in May 1785 that he had been granted permission to leave his post, Franklin immediately began making plans for his return to Pennsylvania. Benny was recalled from the Didot establishment and placed in charge of dismantling the press and packing boxes for the voyage home.\(^{80}\)

As he and his grandsons arrived in Philadelphia after nine years in France, Franklin was greeted by ringing bells, firing cannons, and cheering crowds that accompanied him to his door. "The joy that I received at the acclaim of the people; in seeing father, mother, brothers and sisters can be felt, not described," Bache wrote at the end of his diary. "Behold me at last returned to my native country where more serious occupations prevent my continuing this journal."\(^{81}\)

Bache's occupations included enrolling in the University of Pennsylvania, an institution Franklin thought had made a number of its graduates "serviceable in public Stations, and Ornaments to their Country."\(^{82}\)

Bache was still determined to be a printer, but was interested in being exposed to a wider range of academic disciplines than he had found

\(^{77}\) Bache Diary, April 5, 1785.  
^{78} BF to Mary Hewson, May 5, 1785, Smyth, ed., *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, 9:323.  
^{79} BF to Richard Bache, Nov. 11, 1784, ibid., 9:279.  
^{80} The departure and sea voyage are described in Bache's diary and in Charles F. Jenkins, "Franklin Returns From France—1785," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 92 (1948), 417-32.  
^{81} Bache Diary, Sept. 13, 14, 1785.  
in Europe.\textsuperscript{83} Franklin was pleased to see that Bache proved to be “very diligent in his Studies.”\textsuperscript{84}

After receiving his bachelor’s degree in 1787, Bache was able to devote himself to printing, but he did not immediately begin a newspaper. Believing that newspapers should be vehicles of enlightenment for the ordinary citizen,\textsuperscript{85} Franklin was thoroughly frustrated with what he felt was the growing tendency of political journalists to indulge in “false Accusations of the fairest Characters among ourselves” and he used part of his memoirs to warn young printers “not to pollute their Presses and disgrace their Profession by such infamous Practices.”\textsuperscript{86} Bache was, accordingly, directed into the more placid but less lucrative enterprises of typefounding and publishing books, particularly ones which taught reading and moral reasoning.\textsuperscript{87}

“I am too old to follow printing again myself,” Franklin told one of his correspondents, “but, loving the business, I have brought up my grandson Benjamin to it, and have built and furnished a printing-house for him, which he now manages under my eye.”\textsuperscript{88} Bache also undertook such tasks as making hand-written copies of his grandfather’s autobiography\textsuperscript{89} and helping him to establish the Franklin Society, a mutual aid organization for printers.\textsuperscript{90}

In the last years of Franklin’s life, Bache and his grandfather grew even closer, and he attended Franklin in his final illness. “Whenever

\textsuperscript{83} BFB to Robert Alexander, Oct. 16, 1786, Franklin-Bache Family Papers.
\textsuperscript{84} BF to Jane Mecom, June 3, 1786, Smyth, ed., \textit{Writings of Benjamin Franklin}, 9:515.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Autobiography}, 95. On Franklin’s feelings about American journalism during and after the Revolution, including attacks on himself, see Smith, \textit{Printers and Press Freedom}, 150-53.
\textsuperscript{88} BF to Catherine Greene, March 2, 1789, Smyth, ed., \textit{Writings of Benjamin Franklin}, 10:4.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Autobiography}, xxii, xl, xlii-iv, xlvi.
I approached his Bed,” Bache wrote, “he held out his Hand & having given him mine he would take & hold it for some time.”91 Beyond the emotional attachment fostered by years of mutual dependence, however, was Franklin’s apparent success in imprinting his fundamental principles on the young man’s mind. Like his grandfather, Bache supported the ratification of the Constitution,92 but, as his journalism later demonstrated, he also shared a fear of what Franklin at the Convention of 1787 called “a natural Inclination in Mankind to kingly Government.”93 To avoid the eventual enslavement of the people, Franklin told his fellow delegates, it would be of crucial importance to select wise and virtuous individuals dedicated to serving the public.94

In October 1790, six months after Franklin’s death, Bache founded the General Advertiser, and Political, Commercial, Agricultural and Literary Journal, a newspaper that indicated how well he had acquired a spirit of public service and how much he accepted the kind of Enlightenment libertarian thought his grandfather espoused. The twenty-one-year-old editor began the publication, as he said in the first issue, with the intention of following advice he had received from his late grandfather and giving not only political news, but also coverage of the sciences, literature, and the useful arts.95 “In a Commonwealth, the PEOPLE are the Basis on which all power and authority rest,” Bache wrote, discussing the importance of a free and vigorous press. “On the extent of their knowledge and information the solidity of that Foundation depends. If the PEOPLE are enlightened the Nation stands and flourishes: thro’ ignorance it falls or degenerates.”96

The newspaper not only honored Franklin’s memory from time to time97 and cited his writings as authoritative on public issues,98 but

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91 BFB to [Margaret H. Markoe], May 2, 1790, Franklin-Bache Family Papers.
92 BFB to Robert Alexander, Oct. 21, 1787, ibid.
94 Ibid., 590-95.
96 Ibid.
97 See, for example, ibid., Oct. 2, 6, 11, Nov. 4, 1790; June 7, 1791; Feb. 16, 1793; and Aurora, June 9, 1796.
98 An example is a running debate over Franklin’s true opinion of poor relief. General Advertiser, Jan. 15, 18, 24, 27, 1791.
also promoted—particularly in its early years—the late philosopher’s more uncommon egalitarian ideas. Like Franklin, for example, Bache pointed to the democratic advantages of unicameral legislatures and argued that the differences between the attainments of blacks and whites was due to environment rather than innate intelligence. Also like Franklin, as well as the Jeffersonians, Bache had favorable attitudes about agricultural development and the principle of free trade. At the very outset, Thomas Jefferson expressed a wish “to serve” Bache and to see “a purely republican vehicle of news established between the seat of government and all it’s parts.”

Bache’s newspaper started out by concentrating on informative essays and an array of Enlightenment theory, ranging from Paine’s radicalism to ideas that point to the possible influence of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Condorcet. The newspaper, however, was gradually transformed into the kind of political weapon Jefferson thought necessary as the nation faced a series of crises in domestic and international affairs in the 1790s. Although his initial treatment of both the Washington and Adams administrations was favorable, Bache concluded along with other Jeffersonian Republicans that the nation’s Federalist leaders had monarchical designs, and he often used the kind of personal attacks his grandfather had loathed in order to argue his case. Washington, the paper said at the first president’s retirement,

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99 *Aurora*, April 14, 1795. Franklin, the paper said, had considered bicameralism “absurd and prejudicial.” Ibid. On Franklin’s opinion, see Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1938), 554, 745.

100 *General Advertiser*, Aug. 18, 1791. For Franklin’s views, see, for example, BF to John Waring, Dec. 17, 1763, Labarce, et al., eds., *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, 10:395-96; BF to the Marquis de Condorcet, March 20, 1774, ibid., 21:151.


104 See, for example, *General Advertiser*, Nov. 27, 1790; and *Aurora*, Dec. 21, 1796.

had "debauched" the nation and worn a mask of patriotism "to conceal
the foulest designs against the liberties of a people." Bache's por-
trayal of Adams as a despised "Duke of Braintree" brought Abigail
Adams to her husband's defense. "In short we are now wonderfully
popular except with Bache & Co who in his paper calls the President
old, querulous, Bald, blind, crippled Toothless Adams," she wrote to
her sister. "Thus in Scripture was the Prophet mocked, and tho no
Bears may devour the wretch, the wrath of an insulted people will
by & by break upon him." Bache acknowledged that he was making enemies, but he suggested
that those who castigated him had never tried to edit a newspaper.
"Public men are all amenable to the tribunal of the press in a free
state," Bache insisted, "the greater, indeed, their trust, the more
responsible are they." In the middle of his eight-year journalistic
career, he changed the name of his newspaper to the Aurora and gave
it the motto: "I rise to be useful." His usefulness was in publishing
what James Monroe called the "best political paper" for the Jeff-
ersonian Republicans as they combatted what they perceived as her-
ies in Alexander Hamilton's "system" and serious miscalculations
in the country's bellicose relations with France.

By 1798, when the Federalist majority in Congress passed its
Sedition Act to employ against the opposition press, Bache already
had been subjected to an economic boycott, mob threats, physical
assaults, and federal common law charges for libel of the president
and the executive branch in "sundry" publications. He told his
friends and readers that he had worked for the good of his country

106 Aurora, Dec. 23, 1796.
107 Abigail Adams to Mary Cranch, April 28, 1798, in Stewart Mitchell, ed., New Letters
of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801 (Boston, 1947), 167.
108 General Advertiser, Jan. 1, 1794.
109 Ibid.
110 James Monroe to ?, April 23, 1794, Simon Gratz Collection (Historical Society of
Pennsylvania).
111 For background, see Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., The Jeffersonian Republicans: The
of Benjamin Franklin Bache," PMHB 77 (1953), 3-23.
113 See, for example, BFB to Louis Gabriel Cramer, June 27, 1798, in Cramer, Une Famille
Genevoise, 71.
and that neither persecutions nor prosecutions could make him aban-
don the cause of republicanism.\textsuperscript{114} Before he could be brought to trial, however, he refused to leave the city during a yellow fever epidemic and he died at the age of twenty-nine. Realizing death was near, Bache wrote a simple will in which he asked his wife Margaret to give their children “a suitable and enlightened Education, such as shall be worthy of us, and advantageous to themselves, and render them virtuous, generous, and attached to the immutable principles of Civil Liberty.”\textsuperscript{115}

A fervent libertarian to the end of his short career, Bache promoted the ideals and conduct Franklin had believed would be necessary to preserve the nation under its new Constitution. Thus, a Federalist detractor could say after his death that Bache had an “extravagance of mind” attributable to having “had a philosopher for a grand-
father.”\textsuperscript{116} Thomas Jefferson, on the other hand, was among those who recognized that the editor had been a forceful supporter of his party in some of its most disheartening days. Bache was not only “the grandson of Dr. Franklin, the greatest man & ornament of the age and country in which he lived,” Jefferson observed, but was himself a man “of abilities, and of principles the most friendly to liberty & our present form of government.”\textsuperscript{117}

Bache was exposed to any number of intellectual influences in his lifetime, but an early and powerful one was an aging man whose name was nearly synonymous with the American Enlightenment. In educating his grandson to have self-discipline and to serve libertarian causes, Franklin may have accomplished as well as anyone in the United States a goal Benjamin Rush described in an essay on how the children of the new nation should be raised to subordinate personal will and private interest to the public interest. “From these obser-
vations that have been made it is plain that I consider it as possible to convert men into republican machines,” Rush said. “This must

\textsuperscript{114} Aurora, June 27, 30, 1798.
\textsuperscript{115} Will of Benjamin Franklin Bache, Sept. 7, 1798, Franklin-Bache Family Papers.
be done if we expect them to perform their parts properly in the great machine of the government of the state.”

Benjamin Rush, *A Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools and the Diffusion of Knowledge in Pennsylvania; To Which Are Added Thoughts upon the Mode of Education, Proper in a Republic* (Philadelphia, 1786), 27. “Let our pupil be taught that he does not belong to himself, but that he is public property,” Rush said. “Let him be taught to love his family, but let him be taught, at the same time, that he must forsake and even forget them, when the welfare of his country requires it. He must watch for the state as if its liberties depended on his vigilance alone. . . .” Ibid., 20-21.