Today if people recognize the name William Temple Franklin (1760-1823), it is probably because of the fact that he was the grandson of the versatile Benjamin Franklin and the illegitimate son of William Franklin who served as royal governor of New Jersey. It is true that Temple Franklin enjoyed the privilege of having grown up under the protection of the famous doctor. But mentally his life was tormented as a result of the estrangement between the royalist father and the revolutionary grandfather. Eventually he became a spoiled Philadelphia dandy with little achievement of his own.\(^1\) This obscure figure, however, had a place in American history because he published his grandfather's works in London during the late 1810s. For the general public, the text of Franklin's autobiography as it appeared in Temple Franklin's edition remained authentic for half a century until John Bigelow's new edition appeared in 1868. Unfortunately, even this accomplishment of Temple Franklin was marred by contemporaries' suspicions that he had been bribed by the British government to prevent the publication of his grandfather's papers. After many decades, indeed until the beginning of this century, no conclusive evi-
dence proved or disproved the theory that Temple Franklin was bribed. Based on more recent scholarship, the present note reconstructs the circumstances under which the rumor emerged and clarifies this controversial episode of Temple Franklin's life.

Benjamin Franklin died on April 17, 1790. Almost immediately, the publication of his works, particularly his memoirs, later known as the autobiography, attracted public attention. Within a month after his death, the *Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine* began to publish Henry Stuber's serialized "History of the Life and Character of Benjamin Franklin." Two months later Mathew Carey, in his *American Museum*, issued the "Memoirs of the Late Benjamin Franklin." It was in this piece that Carey informed the public that the doctor had written an account of his own life. Although few people could then have predicted that this account by Franklin of his own life would one day become the single most popular work of all of his writings, let alone a masterpiece of American literature, many were inclined to think that the doctor's autobiography could be one of his very important legacies. In any event, precisely because of the public's reverence for the doctor as well as their knowledge about the existence of his autobiography, they now eagerly anticipated the publication of his works.

From Franklin's publicized will, people also learned that his grandson, William Temple Franklin, inherited his papers and manuscripts and would thus become his literary executor. Claiming that he would publish the grandfather's works as soon as he could, Temple Franklin nonetheless sold Franklin's library and left the country for England before the end of 1790. For the next twenty years he failed to publish

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2 For instance, W. MacDonald reiterates the charge in his introduction to *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography* (London, 1908) which was reprinted at least six times until the 1920s.


4 Some of Franklin's friends already knew his plans. Thomas Jefferson recalled in his autobiography that "since [Franklin's] return to America [from France in 1785], he had been preoccupied in preparing for the world the history of his own life." Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Thomas Jefferson: Writings* (New York, 1984), 99.

anything. This inaction not only caused deep concern about the fate of one of the nation’s most treasured literary assets, it also led to various speculations about the grandson’s integrity.

The uneasiness of Benjamin Franklin’s admirers was further aggravated when foreign critics began to exploit the situation. In 1791 the first part of Franklin’s memoirs was translated into French by Jacques Gilelin and published by Buisson of Paris. Handsomely bound in hard covers, the Buisson edition was a fine example of French craftsmanship. The text was printed in fine types with generous margins, and the paper was exquisitely white, thin, and veined. Inside the lovely book, the publisher challenged the literary heir of the late doctor. He pointed out that the later part of Benjamin Franklin’s career was closely connected to important political events which, to a large extent, had already made him well known to the general public. He therefore included in his volume “no more than the first period” of Franklin’s life which, he claimed, the doctor’s heirs might not have the courage to publish. “They will never,” the French editor asserted, “be prevailed upon to narrate the humble details of his early days and the simple but interesting anecdotes of his origin, the obscurity of which, although it enhances the talents and the virtues of this great man, may yet wound their own vanity.”

Two years after the first French publication, in July 1793, two English editions appeared in London. Both were retranslations from the French edition. Two American editions were at last printed in 1794. After that numerous versions of Franklin’s life were published almost annually on both sides of the Atlantic. Still, some people realized that none of the editions and reprints was based upon either the doctor’s native tongue or his original manuscript. All were pirated translations or retranslations from the French. By the end of the century, in 1798, a new French collection of Franklin’s writings was published in Paris. The translator, Jean-Henry Castéra, also verbally raised his eyebrows by declaring, “It is not known why M. Benjamin Franklin Bache who has them [the memoirs and other papers] in his possession, and is now residing in London, keeps them so long from the public. The works of a great man belong less to his heirs than to

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the human race.” Castéra, of course, confused grandson Bache with grandson Franklin.

In 1806 London publishers Johnson and Longman issued three volumes of Franklin’s writings. This time, an open attack was waged against Temple Franklin. A prefatory advertisement asserted:

The proprietor, it seems, had found a bidder of a different description in some emissary of government, whose object was to withhold the manuscripts from the world, not to benefit it by their publication; and they thus either passed into other hands, or the person to whom they were bequeathed received a remuneration for suppressing them.8

When Francis Jeffrey (later Lord Jeffrey), the editor of the Edinburgh Review reviewed that edition in a long article, he disagreed with the accusation. He did complain, however, that “nothing, we think, can shew more clearly, the singular want of literary enterprize or activity, in the States of America, than that no one has yet been found in that flourishing republic, to collect and publish the works of their only philosopher.”9 Jeffrey’s review was reprinted and quoted a number of times in many publications throughout the United States.10 Perhaps it was in the mind of William Ellery Channing when in 1815 he lamented the country’s reputation for its lack of literary distinction. He particularly noted that only foreigners succeeded in compiling excellent selections of American writers—“thus England boasts the first and best editions of our own Franklin.”11

Waiting for an authentic edition of Franklin’s works exhausted the patience of potential readers, and frustration led some of them to blame Temple Franklin. In an article printed in a New York newspaper James Cheetham went so far as to assert that William Temple Franklin, “without shame, without remorse, mean and mercenary, sold the sacred deposit, committed to his care by Dr. Franklin, to the

9 Edinburgh Review 8 (July 1806): 327.
10 See, for example, “Character of Dr. Franklin,” The American Register, or, General Repository of History, Politics, & Science 1 (1806-1807): 150-159.
British government! —Franklin’s works are therefore lost, lost to America, lost to the world!” 12 About the same time, a similar charge was brought against Temple Franklin in the *National Intelligencer* of Washington. This paper’s story hinted that Temple Franklin had transferred his copyright to a London publisher who, in turn, sold the copyright to the British government in order to suppress the publication.13

These speculations and allegations were groundless. For one thing, it seemed unnecessary that the British government in the 1790s should feel a paramount need to suppress Franklin’s writings or memoirs, which only dealt with his life up to 1757.14 In fact, during the period from 1790 to the end of the 1820s, a considerable proportion of his work was published in England. For example, fourteen editions of the *Autobiography* (out of a total of forty-one) and forty-one imprints of his works (out of sixty-four) were issued by English publishers. In other words, one-third of the autobiography and more than sixty percent of Franklin’s selected writings were printed in England, not in America. English publishers at this time were, to say the least, as active as their American counterparts in turning out Franklin’s writings. 15 This fact hardly suggests that the British government had adopted a policy of interfering with the publication of his works.


14 Interestingly, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson believed that not all of Dr. Franklin’s papers, particularly his records of foreign negotiations, should be published. While he encouraged Temple Franklin’s endeavor for that enterprise, Jefferson unequivocally indicated also that “I am sure your delicacy needs no hint from me against the publication of such letters or papers from Dr. Franklin as Minister Plenipotioy [sic] of the U.S. as might not yet be proper to put into the possession of everybody.” Jefferson to Temple Franklin, November 27, 1790, *Papers of Jefferson*, 18: 86-87, 89n.

15 Numbers of the American and English editions are based upon the references registered in *The National Union Catalog Pre-1956 Imprints* (London, 1971), vol. 183, 100-181. This catalogue should be read along with Paul Leicester Ford’s still valuable *Franklin Bibliography: A List of Books Written by or Relating to Benjamin Franklin* (Brooklyn, 1889).
Furthermore, few people knew that the reason Temple Franklin promptly left for England in 1790 was because he had been engaged in a private business commission by Robert Morris, a principal financier of the American Revolution. As early as September 1790, Morris approached Temple Franklin and asked him to be his European agent to sell a tract of land (more than one million acres in extent), land he had purchased from Oliver Phelps and Nathaniel Gorham. Within a few months after Temple Franklin’s arrival in England, he succeeded in making the sale. Three British gentlemen, Patrick Colquhoun, William Hornby, and Sir William Johnstone Pulteney, bought the land and agreed to pay a total of £75,000. On February 15, 1791, Colquhoun and Temple Franklin signed the preliminary articles of agreement. A month later a final agreement was reached. According to the terms of his commission, Temple Franklin earned ten percent of the sale or about £7,000.

It should be pointed out that Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson and Gouverneur Morris of New York were among the few who knew of Temple Franklin’s engagement. In fact, when Robert Morris approached Temple, he also contacted Gouverneur Morris, hoping that the latter could represent him in England. Gouverneur Morris declined because he had previously accepted a mission to that country assigned by Jefferson. He felt it would be improper to become a private agent in the same nation at the same time. His decision left Robert Morris with little choice but to rely on Temple Franklin. While in England, however, Gouverneur Morris not only maintained contact with Temple Franklin but advised Robert Morris about the entire transaction. It is very likely that Gouverneur Morris informed Jefferson about Temple Franklin’s activities in London. Thus Jefferson was

able to report to President George Washington on March 27, 1791, "You knew of Mr. R. Morris's purchase of Gorham and Phelps of 1,300,000 acres of land of the state of Massachusetts, at 5d. an acre. It is said that he has sold 1,200,000 acres of these in Europe thro' the agency of W. Franklin, who it seems went on this business conjointly with that of printing his grand father's works."\textsuperscript{18}

In any event, Temple was so excited about his successful business involvement that he wrote a letter from London to Louis-Guillaume Le Veillard in France on June 14, 1791, boasting about his handsome income.\textsuperscript{19} More than half a century later this letter was discovered by John Bigelow. Not knowing of the land transaction in which Temple Franklin had been involved, Bigelow seriously doubted that he could have reaped such a huge amount of money except as a payoff bribe from the British government. Comparing Temple Franklin's situation with his father's acceptance of the royal governorship of New Jersey before the Revolution, Bigelow speculated: "It is not impossible that the grandson, after residing a while in London, succumbed to a similar weakness." He further wrote:

When this [letter of June 14, 1791] was written, Dr. Franklin had been dead but about a year; the writer had been in London barely six months. He never pretended in his correspondence before to have any other business there than to edit his grandfather's works; he suddenly engages himself upon a salary; in less than six months finishes his business, and pockets a profit of £7,000, or say $35,000. While earning this handsome sum he was apparently a free man, constantly writing to M. le Veillard that he was expecting to go in a few days or weeks to Paris, being only detained in London to finish his book. It is not easy to imagine any salaried employment, especially such a profitable one as this seemed to be, which imposed so light a restraint upon the movements of its beneficiary. From whatever source this £7,000 came, and however little or much the acquisition of it had to do with the delay in the publication of his grandfather's works, it is certainly to be regretted that

\textsuperscript{18} Papers of Jefferson, 19: 625-626.
\textsuperscript{19} M. Le Veillard was an intimate friend of Dr. Franklin. He had been mayor of Passy where Franklin resided for many years during his mission to France. In the late 1780s Franklin sent a copy of his memoirs to Le Veillard and to Benjamin Vaughan in England. Le Veillard died on the guillotine during the Reign of Terror in 1794. Leonard W. Labaree, et al., eds., \textit{The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin} (New Haven, 1964), 27, 35.
so little is known of the business engagement which was entered into so suddenly, was of such brief duration, and yet yielded such generous profits.\textsuperscript{20}

It should be noted, however, that three decades before Bigelow, another diligent student of Franklin, Jared Sparks, had been reluctant to follow most of those charges and provided a different interpretation. Although he did not know Temple Franklin's private business at the time, he suggested that, instead of assuming the British government's involvement, readers could find the real reason for the delay in publication within the family itself. He wrote that "[Temple Franklin's] father, William Franklin, died in 1813. He had been a pensioner on the British government, in consequence of the part he had taken in the Revolution; and it is probable that he may have been averse to the publication of his father's papers during his lifetime."\textsuperscript{21} After many years Bigelow was still unable to draw any conclusions for he lacked further evidence. But he seemed to have modified his views. He speculated in 1904:

The £7,000, if he ever received any such sum, may have been the proceeds of some job or contract which his father, towards whom the government no doubt felt kindly, may have procured, and in which he may have given his son an interest to indemnify him for deferring his publication. This, of course, is only conjecture, but it is far more probable than that the British government, several years after the peace, should have paid that or any other sum to stifle the utterances of any rebel American.\textsuperscript{22}

Both Sparks's and Bigelow's skepticism about the father was not all that surprising but two issues remained to be proved: first, William Franklin's unrestrained resentment against the doctor and, second, his extraordinary influence in obtaining profitable positions in England. Little proof has thus far been uncovered to sustain such "conjecture."\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{21} Jared Sparks, ed., \textit{The Works of Benjamin Franklin}, 10 vols., (Boston, 1836-1840), 1: x-xi.

\textsuperscript{22} Bigelow, \textit{The Works of Franklin}, 1: xviii.

\textsuperscript{23} Biographer William Sterne Randall suggests that toward the end of his life William Franklin was delighted when, after a long time of separation, Temple suddenly wrote to him from Paris in 1813, indicating that he would soon return to England to begin editing Benjamin Franklin's papers. Randall, \textit{A Little Revenge: Benjamin Franklin and His Son} (Boston, 1984),
On the other hand, although Temple Franklin was certainly aware of the accusations and was quite frustrated by them, he could not possibly have imagined that one day records of his business income and private correspondence would be exposed as evidence. In the eyes of the public, he failed to make any convincing defense of his inaction, and the rumors continued. When, in 1808, the first volume of a new American edition of Franklin’s works appeared in Philadelphia, edited by William Duane, Temple Franklin realized that, even though he was the literary executor, others possessed a considerable portion of his grandfather’s unpublished manuscripts as well. It also became apparent that, if he still wanted to gain the maximum amount of benefit, he ought to have his edition ready soon, or else the sale of Duane’s selections might greatly decrease his potential profits.

As American book collector Henry Stevens, in London, later pointed out, the real reason for Temple Franklin’s delay was because “he was an unmethodical muddler” and “uncommonly dilatory in his habits.” No matter how much the grandfather had trusted him, “for himself he was not born to finish anything.” Handicapped as an incompetent editor and under the pressure of his publisher Henry Colburn, Temple Franklin later hired a clerk to help him with the task. He and Duane also managed to make an arrangement by which they divided their market between London and Philadelphia.

496. The most recent study of William Franklin is Sheila L. Skemp, William Franklin: Son of a Patriot, Servant of a King (New York, 1990).

24 Sparks, The Works of Franklin, 1: x.

25 Duane had been the foreman and partner in Benjamin Franklin Bache’s print shop in Philadelphia. Two years after Bache’s death in 1798, Duane married his widow, Margaret Markoe, and gained access to some of Franklin’s papers. Claude-Anne Lopez and Eugenia W. Herbert, The Private Franklin: The Man and His Family (New York, 1975), 312. For additional sources of Franklin’s unpublished papers possessed by other people see Leonard W. Labaree, et al., eds., The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, 28 vols. to date, (New Haven, 1959- ), 1: xxi-xxiv.

26 Henry Stevens, Stevens’s Historical Collections (London, 1881), 160f. Albert H. Smyth holds a similar view and points out, “He [Franklin] seems to have entertained an exaggerated notion of Temple’s abilities, and to have believed him capable of properly sorting, arranging, and editing these multitudinous papers and giving them permanent literary form. But Temple Franklin had neither literary faculty or historic sense; he was indolent and timid, and aghast at the magnitude of the task before him.” Smyth, The Writings of Franklin, 1: 3.

27 For the business relationship between Temple Franklin and Colburn see Sparks, The Works of Franklin, 1: xi; and Smyth, The Writings of Franklin, 1: 30.
Franklin's selections finally came out in London in 1817 and 1818. The first edition was in three quarto volumes and the second in six octavo volumes.

However late it might be, many people welcomed the publication, especially the new text of Franklin's memoirs included in the edition, a text believed to have been genuinely based upon the doctor's original manuscripts. John Adams, not previously an enthusiastic advocate of Franklin, wrote a warm note to the editor:

The volume of Dr. Franklin's Correspondence has seemed to make me live over again my Life at Passy. I rejoice that the Publick are to have a compleat Edition of his Works, for there is scarce a scratch of his Pen that is not worth preserving. —I am pleased to see you at length appearing on the stage of human Affairs.

But many others found the editorial style of the latest edition to have little merit. An article in the *North American Review* seemed to suggest that the quality of the new edition was mediocre, for "there was not much to praise—or to censure." It went on to complain that "where Dr. Franklin's own accounts of his life failed him, he had supplied a narrative of his own; and he is but an indifferent writer. The transition to his style from Dr. Franklin's is rather abrupt and unpleasant."

Above all, the old suspicions lingered and men as distinguished as Thomas Jefferson doubted the authenticity of the edition and the reliability of its editor. Jefferson called attention to a missing document that he had once possessed. It was written by Franklin concerning his negotiations in England up to the eve of the Revolution. This document, Jefferson believed, contained reports that revealed the unyielding attitude of the British ministry. Jefferson wrote in his autobiography in 1821:

If this [document] is not among the papers published, we ask what has become of it? I delivered it with my own hands into those of Temple

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28 Temple had the grand idea of quarto form on his mind since the time of Franklin's death. See his letter to Thomas Jefferson from Philadelphia on October 13, 1790. Jefferson's advice, however, was to publish "Dr. Franklin's works in 8vo. otherwise I think you will find fewer purchasers." Temple seems to have been persuaded; see his reply to Jefferson on April 6, 1791, Boyd, *The Papers of Jefferson*, 17: 591; 18: 87; 20: 158.
30 Quoted from Lopez and Herbert, *The Private Franklin*, 309.
Franklin. It certainly established views so atrocious in the British government that it’s [sic] suppression would to them be worth a great price. But could the grandson of Dr. Franklin be in such degree an accomplice in the parricide of the memory of his immortal grandfather? The suspension for more than 20. years of the general publication bequeathed and confided to him, produced for awhile hard suspicions against him: and if at last all are not published, a part of these suspicions may remain with some.\footnote{Peterson, \textit{Jefferson Writings}, 101.}

In fact, Jefferson’s memory deceived him. There was no such record concerning what he believed was the stand of the British ministry in that piece of Franklin’s writing, which Temple Franklin did include in his edition.\footnote{William Temple Franklin, ed., \textit{Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Benjamin Franklin}, 3 vols., (London, 1817-1818), 1: 223-283; Sparks, \textit{The Works of Franklin,} 5: 1-2. For Jefferson’s misunderstandings regarding the said document see Boyd, \textit{Papers of Jefferson,} 18: 87-97n.} Jefferson nonetheless was registering his personal speculation, and he seems to have maintained until the end of his life the position that the grandson had been bribed. He never bought the latter’s American or English edition.\footnote{Boyd, \textit{Papers of Jefferson,} 18: 89n.}

In conclusion, contrary to many people’s suspicion in the past, modern scholarship has clearly indicated that William Temple Franklin was not bribed. The money Temple gained in England legitimately arose from his business transaction with Robert Morris. What really undermined his reputation was his own indolence and incompetence that prolonged for decades the publication of his edition of Franklin’s works. Moreover, his sometimes arbitrary selection and sometimes scissors-and-paste methods of editing opened the door for criticism by subsequent Franklin scholars.\footnote{Lemay and Zall, \textit{Autobiography of Franklin,} xviii-xx, liii-lviii, 199-201.} Temple Franklin never returned to America; he died in Paris in 1823. More than forty years later John Bigelow rediscovered and purchased the original manuscripts of Franklin’s memoirs in France. He found out that when the grandson was preparing his edition for publication, he had exchanged Franklin’s manuscripts of the autobiography with a fair copy.\footnote{Bigelow served as American consul in Paris in 1864 and minister to France in 1865. Once learning that the manuscript of Franklin’s autobiography might be in that country, he looked for it but to no avail. Before he left for home, via England, in January of 1867, he visited his friend Professor Edouard Laboulaye and requested his help. No sooner had Bigelow arrived in London when Laboulaye reported success; the manuscripts were in the hands of}
scholars further learned that Temple Franklin’s widow had left many of Franklin’s papers in the shop of a tailor who was using them as paper patterns, they were astonished by the grandson’s indifference to his grandfather’s legacy. In the end, it was his own actions rather than rumors that ultimately jeopardized his reputation.

In the summer of the same year, Bigelow started collating the manuscript with Temple Franklin’s edition of the autobiography. His oldest daughter read slowly to him from the original so that he could discern any discrepancy between the two documents: he found twelve hundred errors in Temple Franklin’s edition. What is more, Bigelow also discovered that the original draft of Franklin’s memoirs contained a fourth part, which had never been published in English, and an outline, which had never appeared in print. Temple’s edition of the autobiography was, in fact, based not upon the original manuscripts but upon a fair copy, which Dr. Franklin had provided to M. Le Veillard. When Temple Franklin went to Paris in the early 1790s, he exchanged the autograph manuscripts with M. Le Veillard’s copy, which was easier to read and prepare for the press. When Bigelow’s edition of the autobiography was published in the spring of 1868, it was the first time that Franklin’s memoirs had been printed in full. Declaring that Bigelow had rescued the manuscripts of Franklin’s autobiography from foreigners, the New York Times asserted: “Mr. Bigelow is entitled to the warmest gratitude of all Americans—and, indeed, to that of the world.” The most detailed account of this episode is Bigelow’s Retrospections of an Active Life, 5 vols., (New York, 1909-1913), 3: 596-597, 4: 6-30. See also Bigelow, The Life of Franklin, 1: 66-71; Margaret Clapp, Forgotten First Citizen: John Bigelow (New York, 1968), 261; Max Farrand, ed., Benjamin Franklin’s Memoirs: Parallel Text Edition (Berkeley, 1949), xxi-xxxii; and New York Times, June 6, 1868.

37 Labaree, Papers of Franklin, 1: xxi-xxii.