

ESSAY REVIEW

Recent Franklin Scholarship, with a Note on Franklin's Sedan Chair

The Papers of Benjamin Franklin. Volume 35: May 1–October 31, 1781. Edited by Barbara B. Oberg. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. lxi, 742p. Illustrations, chronology, notes, index. \$80.)

My Life with Benjamin Franklin. By Claude-Anne Lopez. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. xxii, 261p. Notes, index. \$25.)

The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin. By H. W. Brands. (New York: Doubleday, 2000. vii, 760p. Notes, index. \$35.)

EACH VOLUME OF *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* contributes important knowledge of Franklin's writings, his life, and his times. Volume 35, covering six months while Franklin was minister plenipotentiary to France, mainly chronicles his official duties, especially diplomatic and financial affairs. The latter were Franklin's despair. He alone was able to borrow money for the colonies in Europe. Franklin financially supported the American prisoners in England and, if they escaped, afterward in France. He paid the salaries of all of the other American ministers and secretaries in Europe. He begged and borrowed money from France to buy supplies for the Continental Congress and its army and navy. The volume contains one of Franklin's rare displays of anger, expressed in a letter (not sent!) to Major William Jackson, who thought his mission should be funded in preference to Franklin's orders from Congress (242–44). He also allowed his irritation to show in a letter to "Pothonnier & Cie" refusing to pay their demands "for Expenses I never ordered" (101).

Not all his time was consumed with official duties. Two flirtatious letters appear, both to Madame Brillon. One opens with Franklin's "petit Conte" of the bishop and the beggar (208–9). The second, addressed to Monsieur and Madame Brillon, begins with a few short paragraphs directed to the husband. Franklin then says that

since the rest of the letter is for his wife and since he intends to be courtly, Monsieur Brillon should courteously read no further (671).

The best-known letter in the volume is to William Nixon, September 5, 1781. The Irish Episcopal minister had written to Franklin in financial distress. Franklin replied by giving, not lending, him five louis d'ors, together with the following request: "Sometime or other you may have an opportunity of assisting with an equal sum a stranger who has equal need of it. Do so. By that means you will discharge any obligation you may suppose yourself, under to me. Enjoin him to do the same on occasion. By pursuing such a practice, much good may be done with little money. Let kind offices go round. Mankind are all of a family" (445). Also oft reprinted is the letter to Count de Gébelin, May 7, 1781, with Franklin's acute observations on the Indian languages and on translations (34-36).

Franklin's boldly treasonous "Remarks on Judge Foster's Arguments in Favor of the Right of Impressing Seamen" (491-502) circulated clandestinely. Though the "Remarks" are here dated "Before September 17, 1781," the editors speculate (492) that they were actually written about 1770. I agree. They were well known before July 9, 1778, when John Adams mentioned them. Adams reproachfully referred to Franklin's "habitual Accrimony against his Majesty."¹ It is surprising that Adams was still respectful toward George III in 1778, and amazing that Franklin wrote such boldly treasonous remarks and evidently circulated them among a radical circle while he was in England. In the "Remarks," Franklin ridiculed Sir Michael Foster's defense of impressment; criticized his logic; idealistically claimed that "Inconvenience to the whole Trade of a Nation will not justify Injustice to a single Seaman" (495); lampooned Foster's favoring the rich over the poor (498-99, 501); suggested that judges (especially Foster), rather than seamen, should be impressed (499-500); and concluded that the King should be impressed rather than a poor seaman, for "I am not quite satisfied of the Necessity or Utility" of the "Office" of King "in Great Britain" (500).

Franklin's perceptive observations turn up in numerous letters. He wrote the Marquis de Lafayette on May 14, 1781, about England: "Thus Empires, by Pride & Folly & Extravagance, ruin themselves like Individuals." In a letter to his son-in-law, Richard Bache, he echoed his early comments on "What is True?" (Feb. 24, 1742/3): "moral and political Right sometimes differ; and sometimes are both subdued by Might" (471). Two sententiae occur. Franklin (Oct. 2, 1781) wrote: "Whatever some may think & say, it is worth while to do Men Good, for the Self Satisfaction one has in the Reflection" (545). Here Franklin echoed Bernard de Mandeville, now supporting a position he had rejected in his essay "Men are Naturally Benevolent as Well as Selfish" (Nov. 30, 1732). The second appears in a letter

¹ John Adams, *Diary and Autobiography*, ed. Lyman H. Butterfield (4 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1961), 4:150.

of June 21, 1782, concerning personal disputes: "You can always employ your time better than in Polemics" (550).

As always, the Franklin editors have done an excellent job. Their notes illuminate all the multifarious characters and subjects in the volume. The introductions are often brilliant, like that on the financial troubles of John Shaffer (440–42) or on the kinds of ink used for copying machines (249–53). Every volume in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* is an important achievement.

My Life with Benjamin Franklin gathers together seventeen of Claude-Anne Lopez's fascinating essays bearing upon Franklin.² In contrast, W. H. Brands, in *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*, has written a comprehensive biography, the largest since Carl Van Doren's *Benjamin Franklin* in 1938. Some subjects appear in both Lopez and Brands. Both treat Franklin's relations with three charming younger women. All three knew him long after he was married, and after he was a famous scientist and politician. He flirted with Catherine Ray Greene—but made sure she understood that he would remain faithful to his wife Deborah. He was a mentor in science and a father-figure for Mary ("Polly") Stevenson Hewson. And he was a loving, close family friend and an avuncular advisor to Georgiana Shipley. Lopez has the more engaging treatment of the relationships because she considers them together and contrasts them in "Three Women, Three Styles."

Lopez's treatment of Franklin's swimming, "The Only Founding Father in a Sports Hall of Fame," presents material that only partially appears in Brands (18, 75). Lopez and Brands both deal with Franklin as a chess player and with his essay "The Morals of Chess." Lopez (105–13) also considers his interest in Wolfgang von Kempelen's chess-playing automaton and in Jacques Barbeu-Dubourg's attempted refutation of Franklin's "Morals of Chess." Lopez has a chapter on "Franklin and Slavery: A Sea Change," a topic that appears in scattered places in Brands (e.g., 118–19, 246–47, 354–55, 514, 688–89, 703–4).

In 1784, Franklin and a committee of the French Académie Royale des Sciences investigated Frantz Anton Mesmer and animal magnetism. Wonderful cures were claimed for animal magnetism, and some seemed authentic. King Louis XVI appointed Franklin to a committee to investigate Mesmerism. Lopez (114–26) and Brands (630–33) take up the subject. Both quote Franklin's letter before the commission began its investigation, March 19, 1784, in which he said that he thought animal magnetism would prove to be a delusion that

² Lopez has worked on the *Papers* since the beginning of the project. Not until volume 15 (1972) was she finally listed as an assistant editor, after William B. Willcox took over the editorship from Leonard W. Labaree. She was named an associate editor in volume 23 (1983), and became the editor for volume 27 (1988). Beginning with volume 28, she has been listed as a consulting editor. She is well known for her previous Franklin books, *Mon Cher Papa: Franklin and the Ladies of Paris* (1966), and, with Eugenia Herbert, *The Private Franklin: The Man and His Family* (1975).

may however in some cases be of use. . . . There are in every great rich City a Number of Persons who are never in health, because they are fond of Medicines and always taking them, whereby they derange the natural Functions, and hurt their Constitutions. If these People can be persuaded to forbear their Drugs in Expectation of being cured by only the Physician's finger or an Iron Rod pointing at them, they may possibly find good Effects tho' they mistake the Cause.

Both also quote his letter to his grandson after the commission's report concerning the wonderful amount of "Credulity in the World." Lopez and Brands also differ. Brands valuably connects the theory of animal magnetism with Franklin's discoveries in electricity (630-31). Lopez quotes the commission's report that animal magnetism seemed to be nonexistent but that the belief in it and some of its effects suggested that the spiritual could influence the physical (123), or, as we might otherwise express it, the mind could influence the body.

I might note that the commission's report seems to echo a Franklin saying. William Godwin noted in *Political Justice* (3d ed., 1798) that Franklin often remarked that there will come a day when "mind would become omnipotent over matter." Godwin's daughter, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley, no doubt knew that saying, as well as Immanuel Kant's famous tribute to Franklin as "Prometheus der neuen Zeiten," when she entitled her masterpiece *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818).

Lopez's chapter "Outfitting One's Country for War: A Study in Frustration" tells the story of Congress's enormous 1779 order of clothing and military supplies for the Continental army. With a herculean effort, Franklin raised the funds. With the help of his nephew Jonathan Williams, Franklin shipped off the supplies in 1780 aboard the ship *Lafayette*—only to have it captured at sea. Though Brands writes about Franklin's raising money and sending supplies during the war, he does not mention Congress's largest order or the ship *Lafayette*.

Both Brands (563-65) and Lopez (148-57) discuss Franklin's connections with the Masonic Lodge of the Nine Sisters, in which Franklin was made Venerable on May 21, 1779. To my surprise, both also deal with a minor episode, Franklin's attempt to help Mlle Desbois with her love for the American whaling captain John Locke (Brands 585-86; Lopez 164-67). Franklin was touched by her declarations of love and tried to aid the lovers. He wrote that he wished "that there were a great many more Matches made between the Two Nations, as I fancy they will agree better together in Bed than they do In Ships."³ Unfortunately for Mlle Desbois, Locke was already married in Massachusetts, though the cad was happy to overlook that detail. Franklin emerges from the incident seeming rather innocent.

³ *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard W. Labaree et al. (35 vols. to date, New Haven, 1959-), 31:170-71. Hereafter cited as *P* within parentheses in the text.

Though the correct biographical information appears in the *Papers*, Brands spells his name "Lock," mistakes Locke's nationality as British, and portrays Franklin as "embarrassed" at having defended an Englishman (586).

A number of Lopez's subjects do not appear in Brands's biography, and I would not expect them to. It would have been useful, however, if Brands had noticed one topic that Lopez treats. In his 1938 biography, Carl Van Doren mentioned the false charge that Franklin was anti-Jewish, but this bit of Nazi propaganda frequently turns up. No doubt some readers who do not know the truth will fruitlessly check Brands's biography about it. In her essay on "Franklin, Hitler, Mussolini, and the Internet," Lopez documents numerous recent appearances of the false charge and refutes them.

"Grandfathers, Fathers, and Sons" compares the relationships between the grandparents and parents of four boys who were in Franklin's circle in France: Samuel Jonhnot, Benjamin Franklin Bache, John Quincey Adams, and Robert Montgomery. I would not expect Jonhnot or Montgomery to appear in Brands's biography, and they do not. "The Man Who Frightened Franklin" tells of the New York merchant Peter Allaire. The French authorities suspected him of spying for the British (he did) and warned Franklin against him. When Franklin drank from a bottle of old Madeira that Allaire gave him, he became sick and thought Allaire had tried to poison him.

Other essay topics in Lopez that I would not expect to find in Brands include "Franklin and the Unfortunate Divine." Lopez hypothesizes that the notorious Rev. William Dodd, who wrote to Franklin on January 29, 1777, three days before a forgery for which he was hanged, was attempting to raise money to go to America to join his mistress and child. "Franklin's Most Baffling Correspondent" investigates d'Eon de Beaumont, the most famous transvestite of the day, the person from whose name the word *eonism* derives. "Innocents on the Ohio: The American Utopia of Dr. Guillotin" tells of two young Frenchmen who came to America to establish a utopia. They brought a recommendation to Franklin from Dr. Guillotin (whose attempt to devise a more humane method of execution made him infamous). They hired guides and journeyed down the Ohio River, looking for an ideal place to settle, but all but two of the party, one Frenchman and a Virginia frontiersman, were promptly killed by Indians.

Lopez has two essays on Franklin and material culture. "Franklin's Choice of a Dinner Set" identifies the first chinaware bought by the United States government (i.e., by Franklin) for official State Department functions. It was "white, simple, and modestly priced," contrasting with the fine china that Jefferson later bought (147). "The Duchess, the Plenipotentiary, and the Golden Cap of Liberty" traces two bequests by Franklin: a tea set that Dr. John Fothergill gave him, which Franklin in turn left to an executor of his will, Henry Hill; and the walking stick with the golden cap of liberty given Franklin by the Duchess de Deux-Points, which Frank-

lin bequeathed to George Washington. "Was Franklin too French?" considers Franklin's attitudes toward France and America in his last years.

My Life with Benjamin Franklin contains a series of fascinating essays, many solving puzzling questions, most with a strong story line, and all providing insights into the life, taste, and times of Franklin.

In *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*, W. H. Brands has written a lively, engaging, often excellent, and unreliable biography. One excellent passage concerns the unknown mother of Franklin's illegitimate son, William. A recent biographer of William Franklin noted that "Historians today lean toward the theory that William's mother was one of the 'low women' whose company Franklin admitted frequenting" as a young man.⁴ Brands, however, observes that "Because there evidently was no question as to Franklin's paternity, she must not have been a prostitute or someone otherwise particularly promiscuous" (110). Brands's independence of thought and common sense are refreshing. He gives good contexts for key events in Franklin's life, including Queen Anne's War, the War of Jenkins' Ear, King George's War, the Stamp Act, etc. The biographical sketches of Franklin's friends and contemporaries, like Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, George Washington, John Paul Jones, and Edward Bancroft, are interesting and vivid. Brands tells excellent anecdotes by and about Franklin, and gives splendid quotations from Franklin, Adams, Jefferson, and others. Brands appreciates Franklin's character and complexities. Franklin as tradesman, merchant, businessman, entrepreneur, and yet as altruistic citizen, patron, philanthropist, and idealist—all are present, along with appreciations of Franklin's various roles as politician, publicist, scientist, and statesman. The biography is a good read.

There are also, however, numerous errors.

In the prologue, Brands wrote that when Franklin arrived in Britain, "the Royal Society embraced him and provided a venue through which he communicated with the most learned and ingenious men of Britain and Europe—the Scotsman Hume, the Irishman Burke, the German Kant, the Italian Beccaria, the Frenchman Condorcet" (6). But David Hume, Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, and the Marquis de Condorcet were not members of the Royal Society. Franklin never corresponded with Immanuel Kant. The statement is true of Giambattista Beccaria.

According to Brands, two years before Franklin was born, his elder brother Josiah Franklin, Jr., "shipped out on a merchantman bound for the Indies." No one knows when sailor Josiah went to sea. Franklin recalled in the *Autobiography* that Josiah's return visit occasioned a feast where thirteen of the Franklin siblings were present. Brands continues, "in 1715, when Ben was nine years old, the grim word arrived that Josiah's vessel had been lost at sea" (17). So far as is known, no grim word ever came about sailor Josiah's fate. In listing his siblings after 1759, Franklin

⁴ Sheila L. Skemp, *William Franklin* (New York, 1990), 4.

recorded that Josiah, Jr., "Went to Sea, never heard of" (P8:454). Further, the date 1715 seems too early for the dinner or for the supposed "grim word." Uncle Benjamin Franklin composed an imitation of the "Third part of the 107 psalm" to sing "at First meeting with my Nephew Josiah Franklin."⁵ The only likely time for Uncle Benjamin to have met his nephew Josiah was during the sailor's visit to Boston. Since Uncle Benjamin did not come to Boston until October 10, 1715, the sailor's visit must have been later.

Franklin mentioned that when he was a boy, Matthew Adams allowed him to borrow books from his library.⁶ Brands says that the Adams family library was "an impressive if quirky collection" (22). No one knows anything about Matthew Adams's library. Brands is probably thinking of John Adams's library, which has no known connection with Matthew Adams.

Brands writes that "Teague's Advertisement" compared "Bradford to the infamous pirate" (164). "Teague," however, is a cant name for an Irishman; Brands probably has in mind Teach or Blackbeard the pirate. On the next page, the biographer suggests that Franklin, in sponsoring James Parker as a printer in New York, might be suspected of ingratitude to the old New York printer William Bradford. If Franklin had any reason to be grateful to Bradford, he canceled the feeling when Bradford criticized him during the 1730s. Brands suggests that Franklin hired James Parker when he was a runaway apprentice and that he then sent him back to New York in competition with Bradford. In fact, Franklin talked Parker into going back to New York to finish out the apprenticeship with William Bradford. It was years later that Franklin sponsored Parker as his printing partner.

Though Franklin printed *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons* in 1734, it was not "formally sponsored" by Masons (113). Franklin did not help "arrange the construction of a new building . . . for the express purpose of hosting preachers unwelcome in the regular pulpits" (149). That was not the purpose of George Whitefield's "New Building," and Franklin did not help with its construction. He remodeled it as a school after 1748 (A 118). Brands writes that the Union Fire Company "members pledged to protect their own houses, not those of non members" (137). Though the earliest articles did not say that the members would fight other fires in the city, they did so; and the 1743 articles stated "when a Fire breaks out in any part of this City," the members would "give our utmost Assistance to such of our Fellow Citizens as may stand in need of it, in the same Manner as if they belonged to this Company" (P2:375). "Jemmy" was about three years old, not ten, when James Franklin, Sr., "implored Ben to look after his ten-year-old son and namesake when he was gone" (156). Franklin did not know Cadwallader Colden

⁵ James Parton, *Benjamin Franklin* (2 vols., Boston, 1864), 1:41-43.

⁶ *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Genetic Text*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall (Knoxville, 1981), 11-12. Hereafter cited as *A* within parentheses in the text.

just "by reputation" (170) when Colden wrote; they had met in Connecticut in 1743 (*P* 2:386). Franklin did not query Peter Collinson concerning electricity (191); unasked, Collinson sent news of the experiments and a glass tube (*P* 3:118). Joseph Priestley was not gathering information for his history of electricity in 1752 (205); he started doing so over a dozen years later (*P* 13:185). Contrary to James Logan's being "no mathematician" (208), he corrected Colden's mathematics (*P* 3:152-53) and read, annotated, and corrected Newton's *Principia*.⁷ Strahan had known Franklin—from a distance—even longer than Collinson had" (279): Franklin and Collinson corresponded in the 1730s; correspondence with Strahan began in the 1740s (*P* 1:248-49; 2:383-84). Brands labels Dr. John Fothergill "one of the Honest Whigs" (280), thus saying that Fothergill belonged to that informal club. Though Fothergill, along with Franklin, urged Priestley to publish American propaganda in 1774, Fothergill is not known to have attended any meetings of the "Honest Whigs."⁸ Brands calls Franklin's 1757 illness "the second noteworthy illness of Franklin's life, lasting two months" (282). It was the third. Brands omits the 1735 illness, which lasted on and off for five months (*P* 2:38, plus attendance records of Library Company directors).

The errors continue. Only if a reader were concerned about the topic where an error occurs would any of the above be considered important. Every author who deals in facts makes an occasional error. But errors occur throughout Brands's biography. Even if none were major, I would nevertheless judge the biography unreliable.

Dubious statements and interpretations also exist.

It seems unlikely that Franklin "almost certainly expected" his son Francis Folger Franklin "to enter the printing trade" (154). Franklin did not raise his older, illegitimate son William Franklin as a printer. He gave William a horse when the boy was young, had him well educated, kept him in school when Franklin took out and apprenticed James Franklin, Jr., as a printer, paid for William to join the dancing assembly, and prepared him to study the law. William was raised as a gentleman's son. When Franklin was older and wealthier, would he have done less for his younger, legitimate son, Francis Folger Franklin?

Brands says that Isaiah Thomas (1749/50-1831) knew both Franklin and David Hall, whom Franklin took on as a partner in 1748. I know of no evidence that Thomas personally knew either one. Thomas wrote, had Hall "not been connected with Franklin he might have been a formidable rival to him." Brands goes further and says, "Franklin thought so too, and determined to keep Hall from becoming a rival by making him a partner" (188). Actually, like Franklin's other partners, Hall did not have the funds to start a printing shop on his own. Without financial help,

⁷ Edwin Wolf 2d, *The Library of James Logan* (Philadelphia, 1974), 337-51.

⁸ Verner W. Crane, "The Club of Honest Whigs," *William and Mary Quarterly* 23 (1966), 210-33.

Hall could not have become Franklin's rival. In proposing partnerships, Franklin was generously helping other young printers. Franklin hoped, of course, that the young printers he helped would be successful, and that he and they would make money from the partnership. Some succeeded; some failed. Brands credits David Hall with editorials in the *Gazette* after 1747, even with the reflections preparing for Franklin's famous satire "Rattlesnakes for Felons" (Brands 215-16). I believe they were by Franklin. Though Hall was a good businessman and printer, he was not a gifted writer and is not known to have contributed editorial matter to the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.

"Ben Franklin, printer, was a man who generally kept his politics to himself, lest politics interfere with the printing business. With exceptions—his advocacy of paper currency, his defense of Samuel Hemphill—few enough merely to prove the rule, Franklin left political questions to the politicians" (Brands 209). The greatest single issue in colonial Pennsylvania politics concerned support for the military. Franklin was the major spokesman in favor of a militia (a position opposed to the Quaker or popular party). He was, however, primarily identified with the popular party and on numerous occasions while a printer editorialized in its favor. It was a rare year in the 1730s and 1740s that Franklin was not embroiled in politics.

Brands writes that the Pennsylvania assembly sent Franklin to General Braddock for "a personal assessment from one of their own of this officer. . . . Rather than acknowledge his role as eye of Assembly, though, Franklin wore his postmaster's hat and averred his desire to facilitate the general's communications" (248). Assembly members asked Franklin to go, but not for a personal assessment of Braddock. The purpose was to try to remove the "violent Prejudices" the members feared Braddock had against them.

Brands sometimes creates details to make the biography more interesting. Franklin states in the *Autobiography* that he went to London in 1724 because Gov. William Keith encouraged him and promised letters of credit and introductions. Franklin sailed from Philadelphia without the letters, but expected the governor to give them to him in New Castle, Delaware. When the ship stopped there, Franklin called on Keith, but his secretary said the governor was engaged and would send the letters to Franklin on board the ship (A 39-40). Brands makes the story more dramatic: Franklin boarded at Philadelphia "at the last moment only on the express assurance of the governor's personal secretary that the letters would be supplied at New Castle . . . Even as the ship was tying up at New Castle, Franklin leaped ashore in search of the governor." Brands then has the ubiquitous secretary, now in New Castle (61), tell Franklin the governor was too busy to see him.

Like some previous scholars, Brands presents Franklin's relationships with several women as serious attempts to have sexual affairs. I sometimes wonder if these scholars do not know that playful flirtation is among the delightful pleasantries of life. He says that Catharine Ray's first letter to Franklin "is lost—doubtless partly

because Franklin did not desire it to fall into the hands of Debbie." "Doubtless"? Well, perhaps, though I doubt it. Brands adds, "Apparently at some point on his journey he attempted to trade the role of chaperone for one more passionate; she rebuffed him" (259). "Apparently"? It's not apparent to me. Though playful flirtations are a delight, serious sexual proposals are often not. Yet every one of the women with whom he had these pleasantries remained a good friend. Biographers who read Franklin's flirtations as serious attempts to have sexual affairs seem to me to be either unsophisticated about human psychology or as prudish as John Adams in Paris.

Like a number of earlier scholars, Brands believes Franklin to be an Anglophile who loved England more than America (3-7, 403, 425). Supposedly, only such events as being insulted in the Cockpit during early 1774 drove him to become a revolutionary American. Supporting this view, scholars usually cite Franklin's letters expressing his admiration and love of England. They ignore the fact that these sentiments occur in letters to Englishmen, that Franklin expressed similar views to Scotsmen concerning Scotland, and to Frenchmen (and Frenchwomen) concerning France. They also ignore Franklin's assertions of Americanism, though they occur frequently throughout his life. He has more declarations of love for and identification with America than any other person during the colonial and pre-revolutionary period. Only by ignoring dozens of Franklin's writings—and by ignoring an important recurring characteristic of Franklin's publications for more than forty years before 1774—can one believe that Franklin was really an Anglophile.

A few errors seem important. Brands says that Deborah (Read) Franklin was "two years younger" than Franklin (59) and was "born in Philadelphia" (341). He follows the information in volume one (1959) of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (P 1:lxii), but that scholarship is out of date. The following year, 1960, Francis James Dallett published "Dr. Franklin's In-Laws" identifying Deborah's mother's family and Deborah's relations. He guessed that Deborah was born in Birmingham, England, about 1705. The *Papers* discussed Deborah's mother's family and referred to Dallett's article in 1965 (P 8:139-41). In *Notable American Women, 1607-1950* (1971, 1:663-64), Leonard W. Labaree, first editor of the *Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, again corrected the statement in volume 1, writing that Deborah was born about 1705, probably in Birmingham. Franklin himself wrote that in 1724 they were "both very young, only a little above 18" (A 29). Lacking information to the contrary, I would accept Franklin's statement regarding their ages. According to him, Deborah was probably also born in 1706. I would accept Dallett's belief that she was probably born in Birmingham.

Brands dates William Franklin's birth as "late 1730 or early 1731." Then he speculates for a paragraph on the implications of Franklin's knowing that his "child was on the way" when he and Debbie "decided to marry" (110). The date of birth

again follows the information given by the editors of the *Papers* (1: lxii), where it is said that he was born "c. 1731." It too is a mistake. The editors revised their opinion in volume 3 (published in 1961) because William "received an ensign's commission in . . . 1746" which would have been "unusually young" (P 3:474, n. 1), suggesting that he was born about two years earlier. Nevertheless, Brands refers to "fifteen-year-old Billy" joining the army as an ensign (180). Brands combines his joining the army with his attempting to run away from home and becoming a sailor. No one knows for certain when that happened, but it seems to have been several years previous. In May 1747, Brands has promoted Billy to captain (197), when he would have been, according to Brands, age sixteen. But I have seen no evidence that William Franklin, within a year, was promoted from ensign to lieutenant, much less from ensign to captain. The revised estimate of the editors concerning his age agrees with the major nineteenth-century biographer, James Parton (1:177, 198-99), who thought Franklin was born about 1729. Eighteen or possibly seventeen seem to be about the youngest age that William would have been accepted as an ensign and about the youngest age that Franklin would have allowed him to join the army. His date of birth was probably 1728 or possibly 1729.

Some errors betray a lack of familiarity with the eighteenth century. Brands states that a "book written against deism by the chemist Robert Boyle in fact pushed Franklin further in a deistic direction" (94). The most famous series of sermons of the eighteenth century were "Boyle's Lectures," so-named because the scientist Robert Boyle (1627-1691) endowed them. He did not write them.

Brands says that "even as" the *Pennsylvania Gazette* "carried advertisements for slaves," Franklin "participated in the slave trade himself" (118). Does he only mean that Franklin, like all other printers in English in colonial America, accepted advertisements concerning slaves? Maybe so, but the statement seems to say that Franklin was a slave trader, i.e., that he bought and sold slaves as a business. Brand documented the statement by quoting several advertisements for the sale of slaves. The first reads: "To be sold: A likely Negro girl, about 14 years of age, bred in the country but fit for either town or country business. Enquire of the printer hereof." "Enquire of the printer hereof" may suggest to those unfamiliar with eighteenth-century newspaper advertisements that Franklin himself sold the slaves. Similar statements, however, are found in all colonial newspapers, sometimes when the printer advertised large estates, ships, auctions, and other goods and services. Like other printers, Franklin did not own and was not displaying at his printing shop the estates, ships, etc. The formula "Enquire of the printer hereof" merely meant that more information concerning the advertisement could be had at the printer's. Though Franklin owned several slaves before the 1770s, he never imported them or bought them to sell.

"Masonic connections may have been behind Franklin's success in winning work from the provincial government" (114). A vote by the assembly decided who would

print the journals and the laws. The masons had nothing to do with his election. No member of the assembly was a Mason in 1730 when Franklin was voted the printer. The assembly's Speaker usually could decide who would be elected printer. Pennsylvania's Speaker in 1730, Andrew Hamilton, was no Mason, but, as the *Autobiography* makes clear, he was Franklin's friend and patron. His influence underlay Franklin's election.

Brands names the committee appointed by the Continental Congress to write the Declaration of Independence as "John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, Robert Livingston of New York, and Franklin" (510). He then speculates on the reasons why Jefferson drafted the document, and quotes Adams's jealous opinions on the question (510). He evidently does not know the significance of who is listed first, who second, etc. In fact, the order specified by the Continental Congress on June 11, 1776, was Jefferson, Adams, Franklin, Sherman, and Livingston. It was standard that unless the committee chair was otherwise specified, whoever was named first chaired the committee. Jefferson was the chair. He therefore could and should decide how the committee would proceed. He could have asked various members to submit drafts of a Declaration of Independence, he could have assigned portions of a draft to different members to write, etc. Jefferson chose to draft it himself and to submit his draft to the other committee members.

Modern biographies of Franklin frequently say that he was carried by sedan chair to and from the Constitutional Convention. Brands calls a sedan chair Franklin's "mode of travel" during the convention. He writes, "Four prisoners from the Walnut Street jail hoisted the chair on their shoulders, and, if they walked slowly, Franklin's stone did not pain him too much" (674). Brands describes the sedan chair as "a seat mounted between two poles, which he had brought from France. . . . Although the seat was covered, with glass windows, it was not really suited to foul weather, and when heavy rain doused the opening day of the convention, Franklin was forced to stay home" (674).

Franklin owned a sedan chair. In a letter to Franklin of June 16, 1788, Mrs. Powel asked him to lend his sedan chair to a Virginia gentleman (ms., American Philosophical Society). When did he use it? Is there any evidence that he used it during the Constitutional Convention? Franklin wrote Jean-Baptist Le Ray on April 18, 1787, about ballooning in France. He said that he "sometimes wished I had brought with me from France a balloon sufficiently large to raise me from the ground. In my malady it would have been the most easy carriage for me, being led by a man walking on the ground."⁹ Commenting on that passage, Carl Van Doren said that Franklin "had a sedan chair built and was usually carried in that" (*Ben-*

⁹ *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Albert Henry Smyth (10 vols., New York, 1910), 9:572-73). Hereafter cited as S within parentheses in the text.

jamin Franklin [1938], 741). Franklin's wish for balloon travel, however, seems to be playful fantasy. Van Doren says Franklin had a sedan chair built; Brands says he brought it from France. Perhaps Franklin's accounts will shed some light on that question. Colonel Robert Carr (1778–1866), who grew up near Franklin's Philadelphia home, wrote at age eighty-seven on May 25, 1864, that he recalled Franklin being "carried by two men, to and from the State House, where he was President of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania."¹⁰ Carr does not say that Franklin was carried during the Constitutional Convention.

If Franklin had been in especially poor health during the Constitutional Convention, it would lend some credence to the report of his being carried in a sedan chair. Franklin, however, seems to have been in comparatively good health. Just three days before writing the letter to Le Roy concerning balloons, and only slightly over a month before the convention, Franklin wrote Louis Le Veillard on April 15, 1787, that "on the whole it [the stone] does not give me more pain than when at Passy, and except in standing, walking, or making water, I am very little incommoded by it" (S 9:560). Brands himself quotes Franklin writing on September 20, 1787—within a few days of the convention's end—that "the daily exercise of going and returning from the State House has done me good" (697). Franklin's statements would seem to contradict the theory that he was carried to and from the State House during the Constitutional Convention. Further, no contemporaries referred to the sedan chair during the convention. That alone makes the report seem improbable. The sedan chair story does not appear in the most detailed nineteenth-century biography, James Parton's *Benjamin Franklin*, though Parton knew many of Carr's contemporaries.

In evaluating the possibility that Franklin was carried to and from the meetings of the Constitutional Convention, we should consider the structure of Franklin's home. His bedroom and library were on the second floor. Going up and down the stairs must have been as painful and perhaps more so than walking on level ground. Every day during the convention, he went from his bedroom and his library on the second floor to the rooms on the first floor and back. Are we also to think that Franklin was carried up and down the stairs? Franklin often entertained delegates at dinner and saw visitors during the convention. On Friday, July 13, 1787, he took Manasseh Cutler and other guests from the garden to his library. That means that he took them from his garden into the house and upstairs to his library on the second floor. After having shown them various curiosities and books in the library, he took out "a huge volume on Botany . . . so large that it was with great difficulty that the Doctor was able to raise it from a low shelf and lift it on to the table; but with that senile ambition common to old people, he insisted on doing it himself,

¹⁰ Robert Carr, "Personal Recollections of Benjamin Franklin," *Historical Magazine*, 2d ser., 4 (August 1868), 59–60.

and would permit no person to assist him, merely to show us how much strength he had remaining."¹¹

Franklin evidently walked back and forth to the State House during the Constitutional Convention. Nevertheless, Robert Carr may be correct in what he actually wrote. Franklin may have been carried by sedan chair sometime while he was president of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania. Though he continued to be well in October and November 1787 (S 9:619, 621), he fell down the stone steps leading to his garden in January 1788, during a time when he was suffering severely from the gout (S 9:633). He spent the remainder of January and perhaps much of February in bed. By mid-April, he was as well as he had been in Passy (S 9:644, 647). Perhaps on some occasion between November 1787 and April 1788 (most likely during January, February, or March, 1788), he was helped up and down the stairs and carried by sedan chair to the State House. That would both explain how Mrs. Powel knew in June that he owned a sedan chair and would confirm Colonel Robert Carr's boyhood memory.

No evidence exists that Franklin was carried by four persons, that he was carried by prisoners, or that he was carried to and from any meeting of the Constitutional Convention.

Previous large biographies of Franklin, like those by James Parton and Carl Van Doren, were based in part on wide reading in the period and on archival research. Brands's biography seems to be based upon the readily available published papers of Franklin, Adams, and others. The only bit of seemingly new research that I noted was the article celebrating Franklin's "Pennsylvania Fireplace" from the *Boston Evening Post* (167), but that was evidently taken, without acknowledgement, from my on-line documentary history of Benjamin Franklin. Brands does, however, mention the site in his acknowledgements.

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¹¹ *Life, Journals and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler*, ed. William Parker Cutler and Julia Perkins Cutler (2 vols., Cincinnati, 1888), 1:269-70.