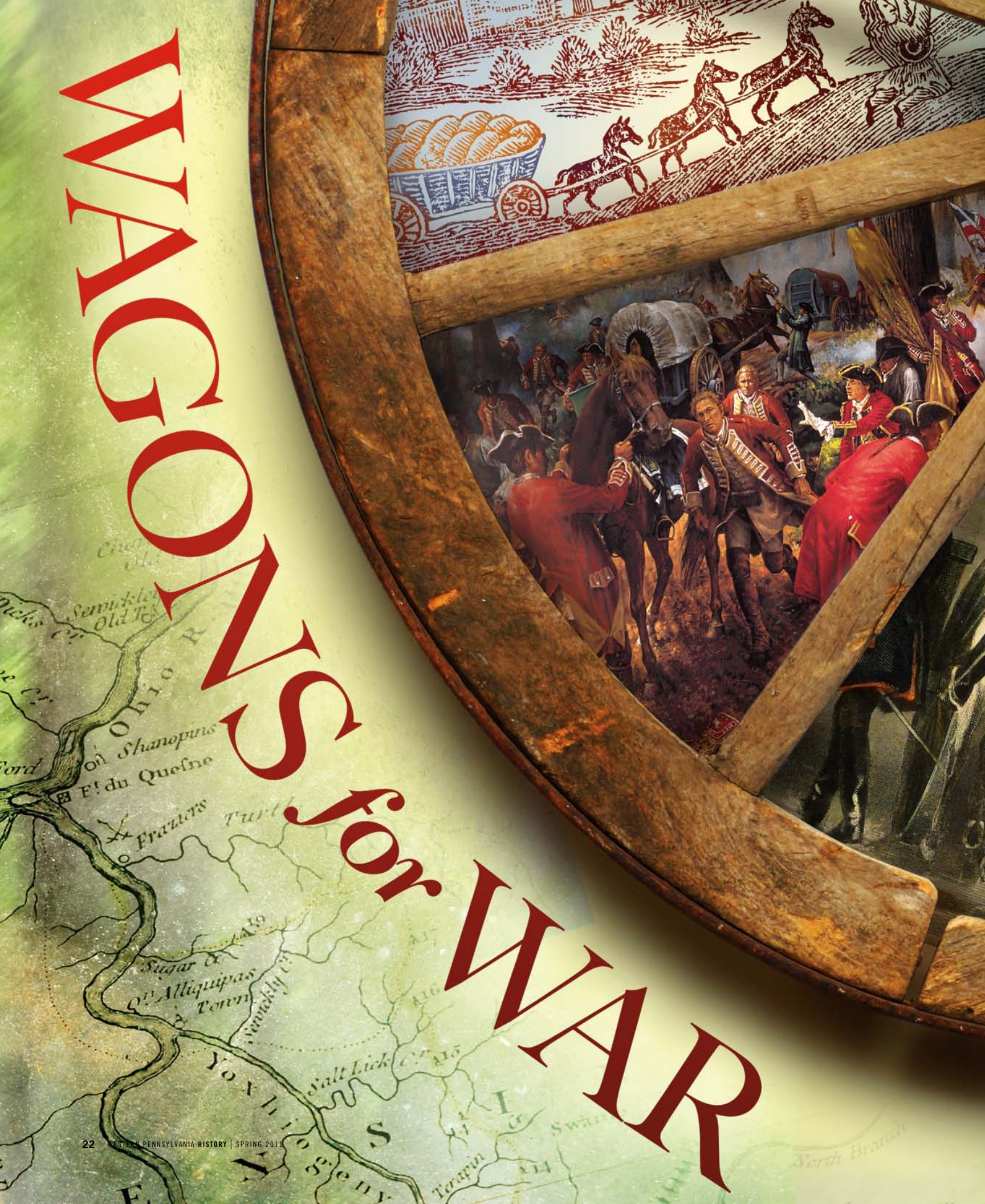


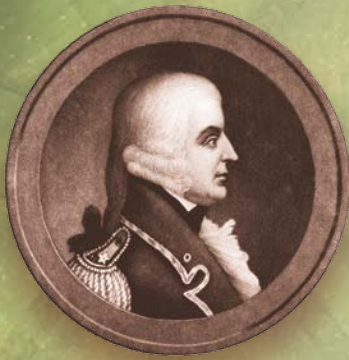
WAGGONS for WAR





HOW BENJAMIN FRANKLIN HELPED BRADDOCK'S MARCH TO THE FORKS

By Alan Houston, Ph.D.



Edward Braddock—harsh, impatient, and hot-tempered General Edward Braddock—held the colonies of North America in disdain. He called them “supine”: their governments lethargic and disorganized, their militias raw and undisciplined. Pennsylvania, he said, was the worst of the lot. Though rich and populous, it had not spent a farthing to prepare for his 1755 expedition against Fort Duquesne at the Forks of the Ohio River. Small wonder his troops were stranded for two months in Virginia, unable to find horses and wagons sufficient to cross the Alleghenies.¹

By mid-April, Braddock was on the march. Then on July 9, just a few miles short of his destination, he was surprised by a small contingent of French and Indians. Braddock’s regulars fell into confusion and suffered catastrophic casualties. Braddock was fatally wounded, dying several days later as survivors of the rout beat a hasty retreat. Ironically, despite Braddock’s “violent prejudices” against Pennsylvania, it was the wagons and horses of Pennsylvania settlers that brought him to the banks of the Monongahela. And it was Benjamin Franklin who made that possible. Recently discovered letters to and

from Franklin shed new light on this intriguing moment in colonial history.²

The previous summer had been tumultuous. In May 1754, a company of Virginians and a small number of Mingo warriors under the command of George Washington had ambushed and massacred a party of French soldiers at Jumonville Glen. Six weeks later, Washington and his soldiers were soundly defeated at Fort Necessity. Washington surrendered, agreed to the French terms of capitulation, and returned to Virginia. Imperial authorities in London were distressed. Though small and local, the battles at Jumonville Glen and Fort Necessity pitted two nations against each other that were not then at war, and thus had international repercussions. The British discerned a French plan to fortify the backcountry, take control of major waterways, and slowly squeeze the life out of the colonies of North America. A strong and swift response was called for. Thus

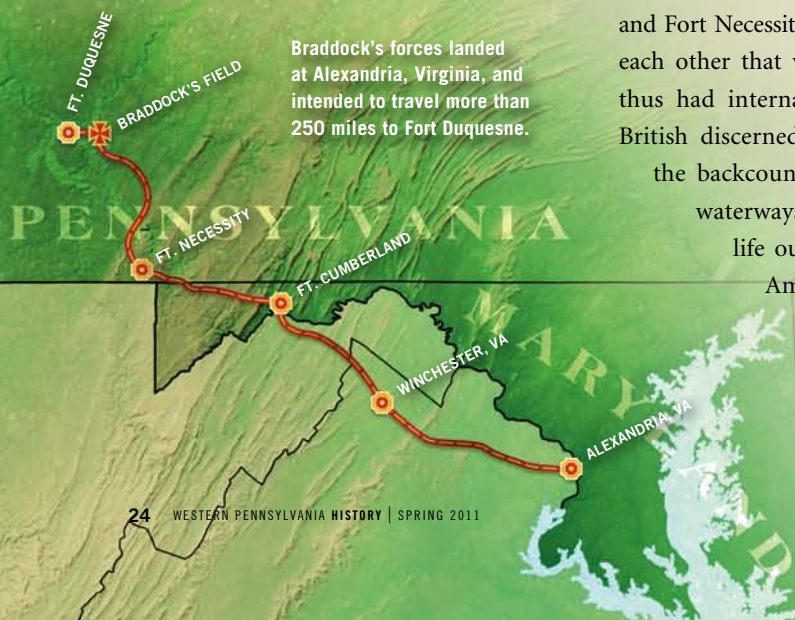
in early 1755, General Edward Braddock,

along with two regiments of infantry and a train of artillery, was sent to reassert control over the frontier.

Braddock’s forces landed at Alexandria, Virginia. Fort Duquesne, at the junction where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers form the Ohio, was more than 250 miles away. The governors of Virginia and Maryland, Robert Dinwiddie and Horatio Sharpe, had assured Braddock that they would provide sufficient wagons, pack horses, and forage for the overland march. But these promises were empty. Instead of 250 wagons, Braddock received 20; instead of 2,500 horses, he was given 200. Though Braddock had brought a small number of wagons with him from England, they were utterly insufficient for his needs. In public and private conferences and letters, he railed against the colonists. In response his quartermaster, Sir John St. Clair, offered to “scour” Pennsylvania “from one end to the other,” taking wagons and horses by force and chastising those who resisted “with fire and sword.”³

At this precarious juncture Benjamin Franklin arrived at Braddock’s headquarters.

Braddock’s forces landed at Alexandria, Virginia, and intended to travel more than 250 miles to Fort Duquesne.





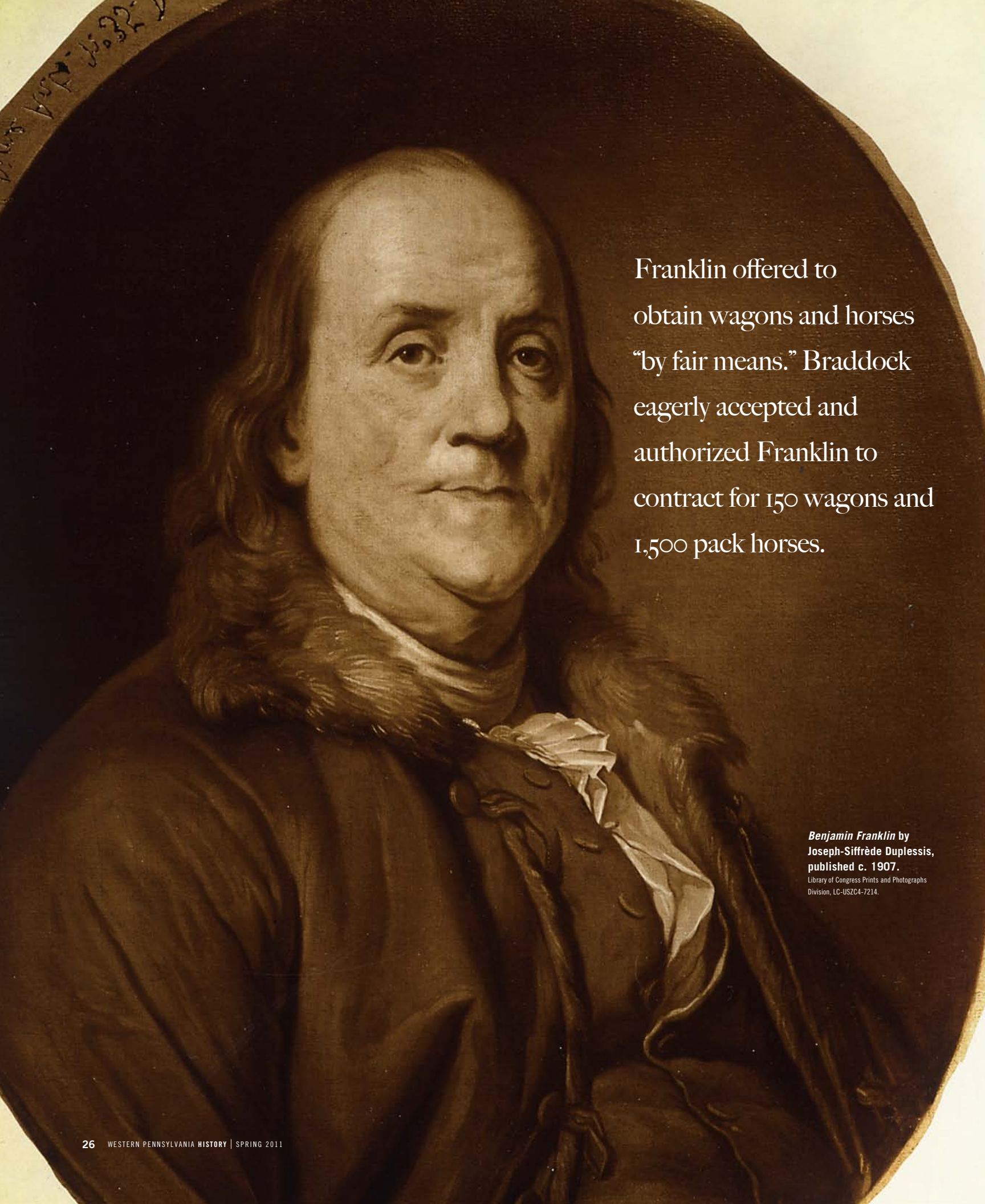
This c. 1900 farm was little changed from the farms where wagons were found for Braddock's expedition.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-D401-13007.

Ostensibly traveling on post office business, Franklin had been sent to Virginia by the Pennsylvania Provincial Assembly to soften Braddock's harsh view of the colony. Franklin offered to obtain wagons and horses "by fair means." Braddock eagerly accepted and authorized Franklin to contract for 150 wagons and 1,500 pack horses.⁴

Decades of civic and political leadership in Philadelphia had given Franklin the tools needed to mobilize his countrymen. Before leaving Braddock's camp he dictated the terms of the offer, ensuring that it would be attractive to Pennsylvania farmers. He then drafted a

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Benjamin Franklin by
Joseph-Siffrède Duplessis,
published c. 1907.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs
Division, LC-USZC4-7214.

one-page advertisement and put his network of relatives and associates to work. In Lancaster, printer William Dunlap—married to Franklin's niece (by his wife Deborah)—made copies of the advertisement. Chief Justice William Allen, riding circuit in Lancaster and York, used courts of oyer and terminer (courts of criminal jurisdiction) to recommend the arrangement. Franklin's son William traveled with family friend and assemblyman John Wright to Carlisle; once there, "Billy" lined up two of Carlisle's assemblymen, John Smith and Harmanus Alrichs, to summon neighboring townships to meetings to consider Braddock's offer.⁵

What of the Pennsylvanians targeted by this campaign? In his *Autobiography*, Franklin implies that they responded with alacrity, fulfilling the original goal of 150 wagons within two weeks. In a letter to Braddock, Franklin went further, praising many for acting "more from a sense of duty, and a desire of rendering some service to so good a king, than for the sake of the offered wages." This was doubtless true for some, but local reactions were more complicated than Franklin suggested. In York, farmers hinted at a quid pro quo: having provided a hearty supply of horses and wagons, they hoped Braddock would reciprocate by ending the practice of enlisting indentured servants. In Lancaster, Indian trader Joseph Simon urged his peers to forgo signing a contract with Franklin; by holding onto their horses, then later delivering them directly to Braddock, they could command a higher price.⁶ Western Pennsylvanians may have lacked the sophistication of Philadelphia merchants, but they fully understood the law of supply and demand; some were not above contracting weak and lame animals, knowing that Braddock's desperation "did not permit" him "to reject anything."⁷

Before a contract could be signed, horses and wagons had to be appraised. The assessed value determined how much owners would be

paid should their wagons be destroyed or their horses die. Franklin's advertisement indicated that the appraisal would be conducted "by indifferent persons, chosen between me and the owner." But that did not prevent the process from becoming heated. Settlers wanted horses and wagons to be appraised at the highest possible value; Franklin, seeking to limit liability, wanted the opposite. Alcohol, staple of the colonial diet, fueled this conflict of interests. From Carlisle, Billy reported the most extraordinary "scene of confusion....

Artifacts from the Braddock Expedition have been found along the trail, such as these from Dunbar's Camp, not far from Braddock's grave.

Fort Pitt Museum and Braddock Road Preservation Association.



This prosperous-looking farm is from "The Waggoneer and Hercules" by a Philadelphia tradesman, 1747, and used by Franklin in his *Plain Truth*.



"'Tis scarcely to be believed what havoc and oppression has been committed by the army in their march. Hardly a farmer in Frederick county has either horse, wagon or servant to do the business of his plantation."



Braddock's March by H.B. Hall, Jr.
Collection of Alan Gutches.

There is not one, who is satisfied with the appraisal of his wagons and horses. Nothing but cursing and swearing at the appraisers, nay even threatening their lives. I had much ado to pacify them, they being almost all drunk.”⁸ So many settlers objected that they did not know Braddock, and thus could not trust his promises, that Franklin was forced to personally bond each contract.

Anticipating that neither financial self-interest nor patriotic duty would suffice, Franklin concluded his advertisement with a threat: “If this Method of obtaining wagons and horses is not like to succeed, I am obliged to send word to the General in fourteen days; and I suppose Sir John St. Clair the Hussar, with a body of soldiers, will immediately enter

the Province, for the purpose aforesaid.” St. Clair was no Hussar, but among colonists he shared the same fearsome reputation as those mounted warriors from Germany and the Low Countries. British officers were amused by Franklin’s characterization. Braddock was reported to have laughed for nearly an hour, and even St. Clair considered it “a kind of compliment.” But Pennsylvania settlers, especially those from Germany, reacted differently. “Hussar” was a word of terror, and even before Franklin put pen to paper they were frightened that St. Clair might be “as good as his word.”⁹

It was not St. Clair’s violent temper but the callous and callow behavior of soldiers and junior officers that crushed the countryside.

From the mouth of the Conegocheague, in western Maryland, Billy described the train of violence and injustice that accompanied the imperial army:

’Tis scarcely to be believed what havoc and oppression has been committed by the army in their march. Hardly a farmer in Frederick county has either horse, wagon or servant to do the business of his plantation. Many are entirely ruined, being not able to plant their Corn, or do anything for their subsistence. But what seems most extraordinary, is, that after they had pressed a considerable number of wagons and horses, they kept them standing at the camp of this place for 7 or 8 days together under a guard of soldiers, who would not suffer the drivers to take the horses out, or to go

A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

Lancaster, April 25, 1755.

WHEREAS 150 Waggon, with 4 Horses to each Waggon, and 1500 Saddle or Pack-Horses are wanted for the Service of his Majesty's Forces now about to rendezvous at *Will's Creek*; and his Excellency General *Braddock* hath been pleased to empower me to contract for the Hire of the same; I hereby give Notice, that I shall attend for that Purpose at *Lancaster* from this Time till next *Wednesday Evening*; and at *Fork* from next *Thursday Morning* till *Friday Evening*; where I shall be ready to agree for Waggon and Teams, or single Horses, on the following Terms, viz.

1st, That there shall be paid for each Waggon with 4 good Horses and a Driver, *Fifteen Shillings per Diem*. And for each able Horse with a Pack-Saddle or other Saddle, and Furniture, *Two Shillings per Diem*. And for each able Horse without a Saddle, *Eighteen Pence per Diem*.

2^{dly}, That the Pay commence from the Time of their joining the Forces at *Will's Creek* (which must be on or before the twentieth of *May* ensuing) and that a reasonable Allowance be made over and above for the Time necessary for their travelling to *Will's Creek* and home again after their Discharge.

3^{dly}, Each Waggon and Team, and every Saddle or Pack Horse is to be valued by indifferent Persons, chosen between me and the Owner, and in Case of the loss of any Waggon, Team or other Horse in the Service, the Price according to such Valuation, is to be allowed and paid.

4^{thly}, Seven Days Pay is to be advanced and paid in hand by me to the Owner of each Waggon and Team, or Horse, at the Time of contracting, if required; and the Remainder to be paid by General *Braddock*, or by the Paymaster of the Army, at the Time of their Discharge, or from time to time as it shall be demanded.

5^{thly}, No Drivers of Waggon, or Persons taking care of the hired Horses, are on any Account to be called upon to do the Duty of Soldiers, or be otherwise employ'd than in conducting or taking Care of their Carriages and Horses.

6^{thly}, All Oats, Indian Corn or other Forage, that Waggon or Horses bring to the Camp more than is necessary for the Subsistence of the Horses, is to be taken for the Use of the Army, and a reasonable Price paid for it.

Note. My Son *William Franklin*, is empowered to enter into like Contracts with any Person in *Cumberland County*.

B. FRANKLIN.

To the Inhabitants of the Counties of Lancaster, York, and Cumberland.

Friends and Countrymen,

BEING occasionally at the Camp at *Frederic* a few Days since, I found the General and Officers of the Army extremely exasperated, on Account of their not being supply'd with Horses and Carriages, which had been expected from this Province as most able to furnish them; but thro' the Diffusions between our Governor and Assembly, Money had not been provided nor any Steps taken for that Purpose.

It was proposed to send an armed Force immediately into these Counties, to seize as many of the best Carriages and Horses as should be wanted, and compel as many Persons into the Service as would be necessary to drive and take care of them.

I apprehended that the Progress of a Body of Soldiers thro' these Counties on such an Occasion, especially considering the Temper they are in, and their Resentment against us, would be attended with many and great Inconveniencies to the Inhabitants; and therefore more willingly undertook the Trouble of trying first what might be done by fair and equitable Means.

The People of these back Counties have lately complained to the Assembly that a sufficient Currency was wanting; you have now an Opportunity of receiving and dividing among you a very considerable Sum; for if the Service of this Expedition should continue (as it's more than probable it will) for 120 Days, the Hire of these Waggon and Horses will amount to upwards of *Thirty thousand Pounds*, which will be paid you in Silver and Gold of the King's Money.

The Service will be light and easy, for the Army will force march above 12 Miles per Day, and the Waggon and Baggage Horses, as they carry those Things that are absolutely necessary to the Welfare of the Army, must march with the Army and no faster, and are, for the Army's sake, always placed where they can be most secure, whether on a March or in Camp.

If you are really, as I believe you are, good and loyal Subjects to His Majesty, you may now do a most acceptable Service, and make it easy to yourselves; for three or four of such as cannot separately spare from the Business of their Plantations a Vaggon and four Horses and a Driver, may do it together, one furnishing the Vaggon, another one or two Horses, and another the Driver, and divide the Pay proportionably between you. But if you do not this Service to your King and Country voluntarily, when such good Pay and reasonable Terms are offered you, your Loyalty will be strongly suspected; the King's Business must be done; so many brave Troops, come so far for your Defence, must not stand idle, thro' your backwardness to do what may be reasonably expected from you; Waggon and Horses must be had; violent Measures will probably be used; and you will be to seek for a Recompence where you can find it, and your Case perhaps be little pitied or regarded.

I have no particular Interest in this Affair; as (except the Satisfaction of endeavouring to do Good and prevent Mischief) I shall have only my Labour for my Pains. If this Method of obtaining the Waggon and Horses is not like to succeed, I am oblig'd to send Word to the General in fourteen Days; and I suppose Sir *John St. Clair* the Hussar, with a Body of Soldiers, will immediately enter the Province, for the Purpose aforesaid, of which I shall be sorry to hear, because

very sincerely and truly

Your Friend and Well-wisher,

20a

B. FRANKLIN.

and get forage for them; so that many have died with hunger, after gnawing the tongues of the wagon, to which they were fastened. The abuse they gave the people, at whose houses they stopped is scarce to be paralleled. They have not paid any of the tavern-keepers much above one half of their bills, although no article in them is charged above the rate established by law. And when they are shown an authentic copy of those rates, they grow immediately enraged, swearing that they are the law during their stay in this country; and that their will and pleasure shall be the rule, by which the people shall square their conduct. Several of the farmers, who made opposition to some of these outrageous doings have been sent for by a file of musketeers, and kept a long time confined, and otherwise maltreated.

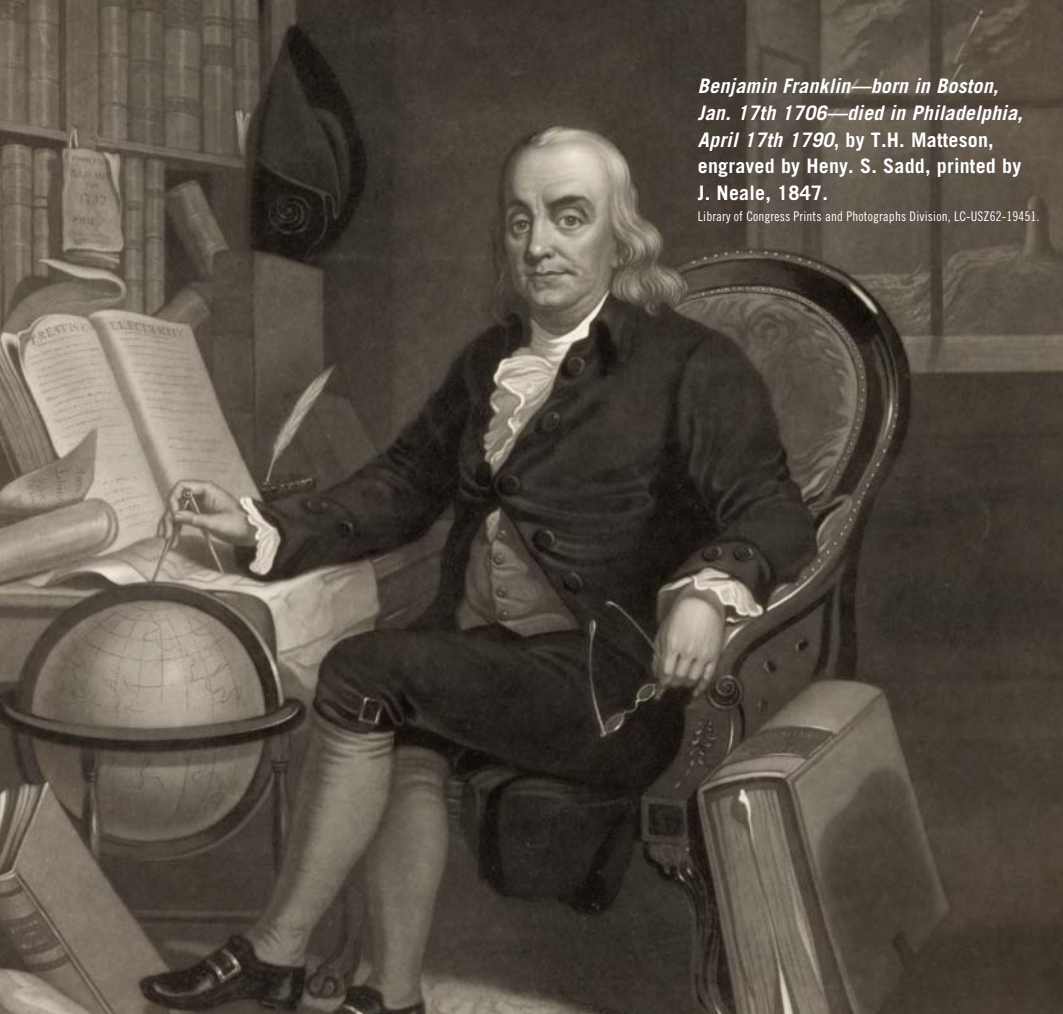
Small wonder that Franklin led an effort to pacify the army by providing junior officers with a fresh horse and a packet of supplies ranging from sugar and cheese to rum and raisins. Easing the lives of the officers was a clever strategy for bringing relief to beleaguered settlers.¹⁰

As spring turned to summer, and Braddock's army slowly marched toward Fort Duquesne, Franklin proved indispensable. Wilderness conditions repeatedly baffled the British. Lacking adequate forage, horses were turned out in the woods for subsistence. But hobbles proved ineffective restraints and bells could not be heard in dense forests, leading one officer to recall, "we lost our horses almost as fast as we could collect them, and those

Franklin's 1755 advertisement for wagons.

American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

"If this Method of obtaining wagons and horses is not like to succeed, I am obliged to send word to the General in fourteen days; and I suppose Sir John St. Clair the Hussar, with a body of soldiers, will immediately enter the Province, for the purpose aforesaid."



Benjamin Franklin—born in Boston, Jan. 17th 1706—died in Philadelphia, April 17th 1790, by T.H. Matteson, engraved by Heny. S. Sadd, printed by J. Neale, 1847.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-19451.

which remained grew very weak.” Braddock appealed to Governor Morris for help, and Morris, in turn, called on Franklin. Soon an advertisement appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* calling for 41 wagons to carry oats and corn to Wills Creek. Those interested in earning £12 were instructed to “apply to Benjamin Franklin, in Philadelphia.”¹¹

No sooner had Franklin solved this problem than he was called to Lancaster. In early May, Braddock had hired Matthew Leslie to purchase feed for the army’s horses. This work did not prohibit recreation, and while playing billiards in Lancaster, Leslie got into a brawl and was jailed for beating another player with his cue stick. Edward Shippen—a leading Philadelphia merchant and politician who had only recently relocated to Lancaster—was unable to secure Leslie’s release. Knowing the dire condition of Braddock’s horses, and the absolute need for

FRANKLIN AS CIVIL SERVANT

By Emily Ruby

General Post Office *in Account with Franklin & Co.*

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|---|------------------|---|------------------|
| 1770 Apr 5. To Bury Franklin for half a year's salary | £ 150. 0. 0 | 1770 By Balance of last Account | £ 1519. 0. 7 1/2 |
| To John Hancock for do | 150. 0. 0 | Oct 5. By John Hancock for sundry sums received | |
| Nov 29 To Cash paid the Receiver General | 1100. 10. 10 1/2 | from A. C. Carter (Comptroller, as of this) | 245. 18. 1 |
| June 19 To do paid for letters | 1. 0. 0 | Account | |
| July 7 To Franklin's Bill on Congress (taken up) | | By Bury Franklin for sundry Bills from 1770 | 19. 1 |
| To Charles Carroll, with Charges of | | for do from 1770 | 339. 13. 2 |
| Printed per Bill 200 (Receipts) | 21. 5. 0 | Nov 27 By John Hancock from A. C. Carter | 85. 4. 3 |
| Printed per Bill 200 (Receipts) | 52. 5. 9 | By do from do | 51. 0. 0 |
| To Bury for the late Secretary of the Post Office | 25. 0. 0 | 1771 Jan 12 By do from do | 67. 10. 0 |
| from July 1 to Oct 15. in Lancaster | 25. 0. 0 | Feb 14 By do from do | 200. 0. 0 |
| Oct 24 To Cash paid the Receiver General | 1500. 0. 0 | 28 By do from do | 100. 0. 0 |
| 1771 Apr 5 To Bury Franklin for one year's salary | 300. 0. 0 | Nov 28 By do from do | 100. 0. 0 |
| To John Hancock for do | 300. 0. 0 | July 3 By Bury Franklin from A. C. Carter | 400. 0. 0 |
| Sept 23 To do travelling Expenses from June | | Sept 2 By do from do | 100. 0. 0 |
| 16. to this day inclusive, being 100 | 105. 0. 0 | Oct 2 By John Hancock from A. C. Carter | 510. 15. 1 |
| 1771 Feb 13 To Cash paid the Receiver General | 800. 0. 0 | 12 By do from do | 165. 0. 0 |
| Apr 5 To Bury Franklin One year's salary | 300. 0. 0 | Oct 2 By Bury Franklin from A. C. Carter | 75. 0. 0 |
| To John Hancock for do and for Stationary | 312. 10. 0 | | |
| To Balance | £ 5808. 0. 9 1/2 | | |

Even Excepted
B. Franklin

Ledger page from Franklin's General Post Office account book, April 1770–April 1772.

National Postal Museum.

Most people remember Benjamin Franklin as a bespectacled Founding Father or as the father of electricity, running with his kite and key in hand. Few think of Ben Franklin the mailman. Although that role is not a well-known part of his varied and innovative life, Franklin was instrumental in developing the United States postal system. The National Postal Museum, a Smithsonian museum, documents Franklin's career first as deputy postmaster in Philadelphia, then as postmaster general for the American colonies, and finally as the first postmaster general for the Constitutional Post in 1776.

Among the many original papers in the National Postal Museum's collection are several pieces that speak to Franklin's important role in developing an efficient postal system for the colonies. One of the most interesting pieces is a ledger book of Franklin's postal accounts. In his autobiography, Franklin emphasized the importance of keeping accurate accounts to

“If Mr. Franklin’s business won’t permit him to come up here immediately to set Mr. Leslie right and to assist him in getting the forage and wagons for the army, I shall dread the consequences of it.”

forage, Shippen wrote an urgent note to the governor: “there is an absolute necessity for Mr. Franklin to come up immediately to assist Mr. Leslie.” It pained Shippen that for Franklin to reach Lancaster in time he would need to ride a horse so hard it might die, but if that was what it took to get Franklin there, then it must be done. “If Mr. Franklin’s business won’t permit him to come up here immediately to set Mr. Leslie right and to assist him in getting the forage and wagons for the army, I shall dread the consequences of it.”¹²

Most of the wagons contracted by Pennsylvania settlers failed to reach the Monongahela. The route from Fort Cumberland (at the confluence of Wills Creek and the Potomac River, now the site of Cumberland, Maryland), to Fort Duquesne was brutal: the rugged backcountry terrain favored “country wagons” over the larger and heavier army wagons brought from England, but the rough wilderness took its toll on all, and the settlers’ wagons were “shattered” on a regular basis. Horses were overloaded and underfed.

Some days the army made as little as two miles progress; by June 11, the army had traversed just 25 miles. Braddock recommended to his officers that all unnecessary baggage and many pieces of artillery be returned to Fort Cumberland. Even this proved insufficient, however: “the horses grew every day fainter, and many died,” and the men were exhausted by “the constant and necessary fatigue.” After five days, Braddock resolved to split his army. The heaviest artillery, cumbersome and slow supply wagons, and non-combatants were to

maintain a successful business; he brought this same ordered business mind to the postal system. Whether developing roads, more efficient rate systems, or keeping clear accounts, Franklin helped make the post profitable for the British Crown.

Franklin was mindful that set rates throughout the colonies would also improve revenue; a rate chart issued by Franklin and a fellow postmaster, John Foxcroft, demonstrates Franklin’s reordering of the postal rates. He insisted that lowered rates would increase profits as more people took advantage of the system, a prediction that proved true. Another interesting piece is a broadside issued by Franklin and his joint postmaster, William Hunter, that excused postal employees from jury duty as this imposition would slow postal service.

In ways both small and large, Franklin’s innovations shaped our government. The Heinz History Center’s exhibition *Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World* highlights many of Franklin’s lesser-known contributions to American life and showcases some treasures from the Smithsonian’s collection.

Emily Ruby is an assistant curator at the Heinz History Center and curator for the local component of the Franklin exhibition.

Rate chart issued by Franklin and Foxcroft, joint postmasters general of the British colonies in North America, 1765.

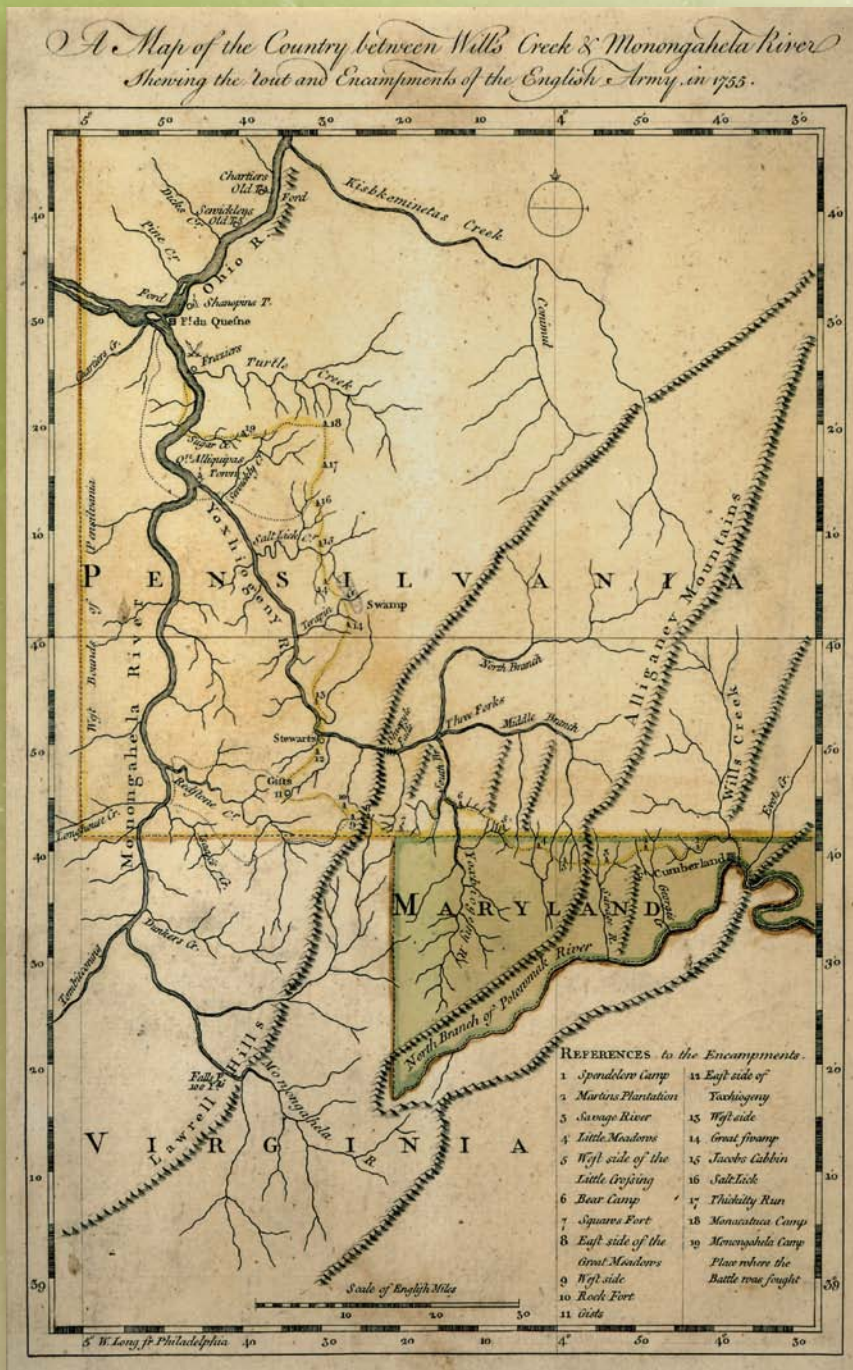
National Postal Museum.

TABLES of the Post of all Single Letters carried by Post in the Northern District of North-America, as established by Act of Parliament, passed in the fifth Year of the Reign of his Majesty King GEORGE the Third, entitled, *“An Act to alter certain Rates of Postage, and to amend, explain, and enlarge several Provisions in an Act made in the Ninth Year of the Reign of Queen Anne, and in other Acts relating to the Revenue of the Post-Office.”*

Rated in Penny-Weights and Grains of Silver, at Three Pence Sterling for each Penny-weight.

Letters, in Colonies.

1. Postage, in New-England.
2. 1st Class.
3. 2d Class.
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A Map of the Country between Will's Creek & Monongahela River Shewing the rout and encampments of the English Army in 1755 is one of six plates illustrating the campaign that were engraved by Thomas Jefferys and appeared in his 1768 book *General Topography of North America and the West Indies*.

Fort Pitt Museum.

remain at Little Meadows under the command of Colonel Dunbar. Braddock continued the march with “a detachment of about twelve hundred of the best troops.”¹³

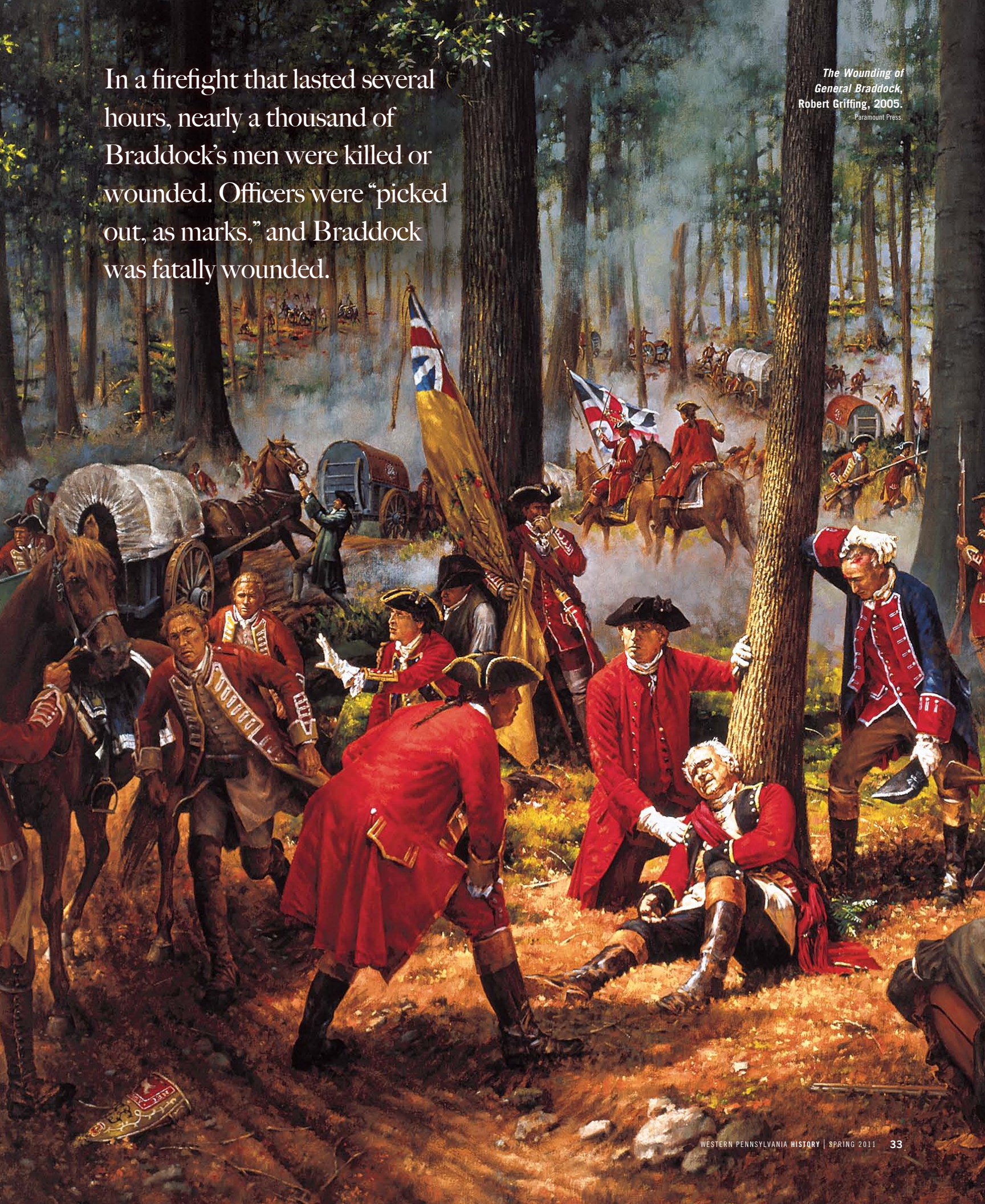
Prior to the start of the expedition Franklin had attempted to warn Braddock of the unique perils of frontier warfare: “the only danger I apprehend of obstruction to your march, is from ambuscades of Indians, who by constant practice are dexterous in laying and executing them. And the slender line near four miles long, which your army must make, may expose it to be attacked by surprise in its flanks, to be cut like a thread into several pieces, from which their distance cannot come up in time to support each other.” Braddock responded with the self-assurance of a professional: “These savages may indeed be a formidable enemy to your raw American militia; but, upon the King’s regular and disciplined troops, sir, it is impossible they should make any impression.”

Seldom has a general made a more disastrous estimate of his situation. On July 9, Braddock’s “best troops” were surprised by a much smaller contingent of French soldiers and Indian warriors at what became known as Braddock’s Field. The general’s seasoned regulars fell into confusion and suffered catastrophic casualties. In a firefight that lasted several hours, nearly a thousand of Braddock’s men were killed or wounded. Officers were “picked out, as marks,” and Braddock was fatally wounded. Braddock refused to allow his men to take shelter, insisting that they remain in line, but in the heat and confusion of battle they panicked and began firing on each other. The French and Indians, unprepared for a lengthy battle, exhausted their supply of bullets and began firing “metal buttons” ripped from

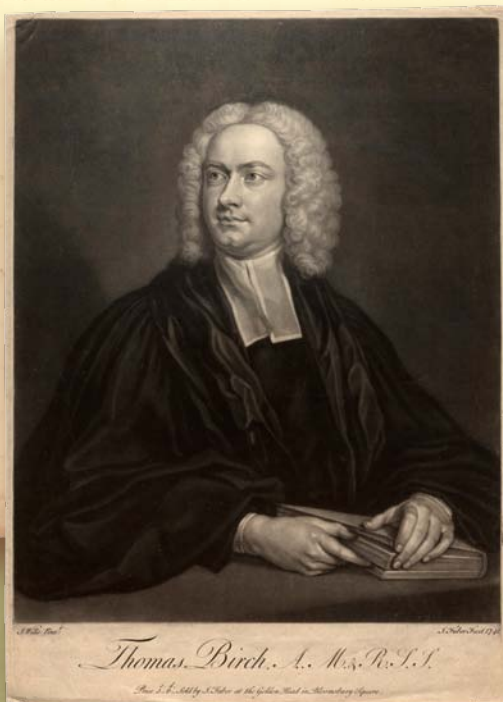
The route from Fort Cumberland to Fort Duquesne was brutal and the settlers’ wagons were “shattered” on a regular basis. Horses were overloaded and underfed. Some days the army made as little as two miles progress.

In a firefight that lasted several hours, nearly a thousand of Braddock's men were killed or wounded. Officers were "picked out, as marks," and Braddock was fatally wounded.

*The Wounding of
General Braddock,*
Robert Griffing, 2005.
Paramount Press.



tears. He was about five o'clock on Thursday evening
 at three the next morning he died. ^{the} ^{very} particular
 25. from trifling to kind, but every thing at such a serious
 affects the mind. ^{own} it did much & I know you
 had to present a report for the Doctor. that I could not
 write to inform you of ^{the} ^{various} ^{circumstances} ^{concerning}
 You have left a valuable friend, the world a great & so
 the man, & the University the ~~English~~ British Library



ABOVE: The first page of the Birch volume, Folio 105, which led to groundbreaking information about Franklin's wagon involvement. Seeing this, the author says he "nearly hit the roof of the British Library!"

British Library.

LEFT: Thomas Birch by John Faber, Jr., after James Wills, 1741.

National Portrait Gallery, London.

Copies of Letters relating to the ^{late} ^{General} Braddock
 Mr. Benjamin Franklin to Mr. Ridout, 105
 Secretary to Governor Huron. 10
 Dear Sir,
 Philadelphia Apr. 4. 1755.
 I have been a few Weeks returned from a
 Journey of six months, about ten Days since I sent
 you a Letter in the former volume, which
 though you sent to Boston I hope they got safe to hand
 for I did not know the person that sent them. He
 was a friend well known to me, & I took him to be on
 his way from Annapolis, particularly as he presented your
 Compliments, & asked I knew if I had any Commission
 for that place. I had not time to write by him, be-
 ing just going to the Assembly.
 Our House sent up a Bill last Week to the Governor
 granting 25,000 £ to the King's use, & to be raised in bills
 of Credit of 1000 £ each by the Office in ten Years, 5,000 £
 of it was assigned to Mr. Wm. or daughter of General Brad-
 dock, 5,000 £ to repay the money borrowed to purchase pro-
 visions for the Virginia Regt; 10,000 £ to New England
 & 5,000 £ for clearing Roads, paying for the

their clothing. Late in the day the survivors fled, leaving to the French everything from blankets and cannons to Braddock's official papers.¹⁴

When news of the rout reached London, imperial officials were mortified by the humiliating "cowardice" of the soldiers. But the collapse of military discipline on the banks of the Monongahela was a long time coming. From the moment the army left Virginia, colonists warned soldiers of scalping parties and of the horrors and depredations of Indian warfare. On June 24, Braddock's troops discovered a recently abandoned camp. Trees had been stripped and painted, upon

which the French and Indians had written "many threats and bravados with all kinds of scurrilous language." Two days later they uncovered another camp, this time with fires still burning. Once again the trees were marked with triumphant graffiti, this time accented by fresh scalps. "We seem to be apprehensive of a worse death than being shot," wrote one member of Braddock's regiment. British military order was maintained through a "ferocious disciplinary system" but the specter of whips and wooden horses paled next to tales of Indian torture. In London imperial officials began telling each other that in the

future "Americans should fight Americans," tacitly acknowledging that the fabled discipline of the British army had cracked in the North American frontier.¹⁵

The rump of Braddock's army fled back along the road they had just traveled, covering 60 miles in a scant 30 hours. In George Washington's famous words, "the shocking scenes which presented themselves in this night's march are not to be described. The dead, the dying, the groans, lamentations and cries along the road of the wounded for help were enough to pierce a heart of adamant."

Once reunited with Colonel Dunbar's forces, the army took time to care for the wounded and bury the dead. They also destroyed provisions and ammunition, and burned scores of wagons for which they no longer had horses. Though Dunbar, the senior surviving unwounded officer, had sufficient men at his command to renew the assault on Fort Duquesne, he decided instead to lead his forces back to Philadelphia, where in the heat of summer they would retire for the year and enter winter quarters.¹⁶

Braddock's defeat, and Dunbar's retreat, threw the frontier into chaos. As summer turned to autumn an apparently unstoppable series of Indian assaults on the frontier occurred. Virginians reported almost every week of "the most inhuman murders, robberies, and barbarities ... on our frontier settlements to the westward." Maryland's governor, Horatio Sharpe, noted that frontier men and women were determined to remove to more populous areas. In Pennsylvania, historically peaceful relations between white inhabitants and Indians entered a new phase characterized by suspicion, uncertainty, and violence. As one of Franklin's correspondents reported in late July, the inhabitants of Reading—in eastern Pennsylvania but now much closer to the boundary with the French—were "apprehensive of being visited by the Indians." By October the roads were "continually full of travellers" as settlers from the Tulpehocken removed to Reading, and residents of Reading moved closer to Philadelphia.¹⁷

Franklin returned to Philadelphia, where he touted his success in contracting wagons for war as a sign of the political virtues of the assembly. By the fall of 1755, the heightened sense of vulnerability throughout the colony permitted Franklin and his supporters in the assembly to pass a militia act, the first in Pennsylvania history. The long era of Quaker political domination came to an end. Support for war, in turn, became one more weapon in the assembly's conflict with Pennsylvania's proprietors for control of the colony.



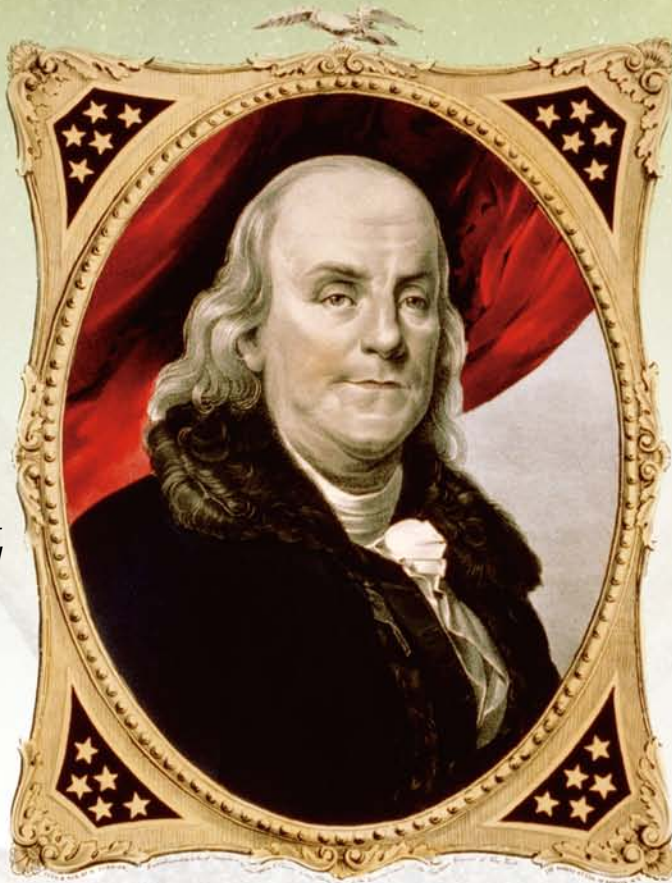
Benjamin Franklin, 1777, by C.N. Cochin. One of the first images of Franklin available in France, made within a few weeks of his arrival, this print was reproduced on countless souvenir objects.

The fur cap Franklin wore that winter attracted the attention of the French public, who also associated it with a similar hat worn by the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Collection of Stuart E. Karu, from the exhibit.


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**Benjamin Franklin—
The statesman and
philosopher, published
by N. Currier, 1847.**
Library of Congress Prints and
Photographs Division, LC-USZC-2004.



What of the owners of the wagons and horses used to transport Braddock's ill-fated army? We have no record of how many were injured or killed as a consequence of their participation in the expedition. We have no way of knowing how many of these farmers remained on the frontier, participated in General John Forbes' successful expedition against Fort Duquesne in 1758, or later

moved into the vast expanse of the Ohio Valley. We do know that those who survived kept accurate records and insisted that they be paid for their losses. As bondsman, Franklin faced nearly £20,000 in debt as a result of Braddock's expedition. Only a government bailout, authorized by Governor William Shirley of Massachusetts, saved him from bankruptcy.¹⁸

Franklin did not hesitate to remind others of Pennsylvania's contribution to Braddock's campaign. In official documents he invoked Braddock's praise to defend the Assembly's reputation. And when he traveled to London in 1757 he took with him a collection of letters demonstrating his skill as a colonial leader—letters that, having recently been discovered, allow us to better understand the "wagon affair" of 1755. The irony of these gestures would not have been lost on anyone familiar with Braddock's views on the colonies. Had it not been for Pennsylvanians, Braddock might not have reached the Monongahela on July 9, and the history of the British Empire in North America might have been profoundly different. 

Alan Houston is provost of Eleanor Roosevelt College, and professor of Political Science at University of California San Diego. He is the author of *Benjamin Franklin and the Politics of Improvement* and editor of Franklin's *Autobiography and Other Writings*.

BEN FRANKLIN: IN SEARCH OF A BETTER WORLD

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¹ British Library Add (BL) Add MSS 32853, fols. 347, 356; BL Add MSS 32855, fols. 338-39.

² Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings*, ed. Alan Houston (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 112; Alan Houston, "Benjamin Franklin and the 'Wagon Affair' of 1755," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd. ser., 66 (April 2009): 235-86.

³ "Wagon Affair," 259.

⁴ "Wagon Affair," 259, 251-52; *Autobiography*, 113.

⁵ *Autobiography*, 115-16; "Wagon Affair," 252, 259-60, 263.

⁶ *Autobiography*, 116, 120; "Wagon Affair," 268-69, 266.

⁷ Orme, "Journal," BL King's MSS, fol. 69.

⁸ *Autobiography*, 114; "Wagon Affair," 269-70.

⁹ *Autobiography*, 115; "Wagon Affair," 274, 258.

¹⁰ "Wagon Affair," 271-72, 274; *Autobiography*, 116-17.

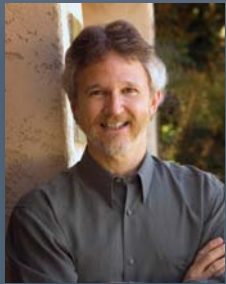
¹¹ Orme, "Journal," BL King's MSS 212, fol. 45; *Pennsylvania Gazette* (22 May 1755).

¹² Edward Shippen, Letterbook, APS B Sh62; PRO CO 5.16, fols. 21-22.

¹³ Orme, "Journal," BL King's MSS 212, fols. 68; "The Journal of Captain Robert Cholmley's Batman," in Charles Hamilton, ed., *Braddock's Defeat* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1959), 24-25; Orme, 74, 75-76.

¹⁴ "Wagon Affair," 280, 283. "Of 1,373 Anglo-American enlisted men in the Field, 430 were killed or left for dead on the battlefield, while 484

THE DISCOVERY

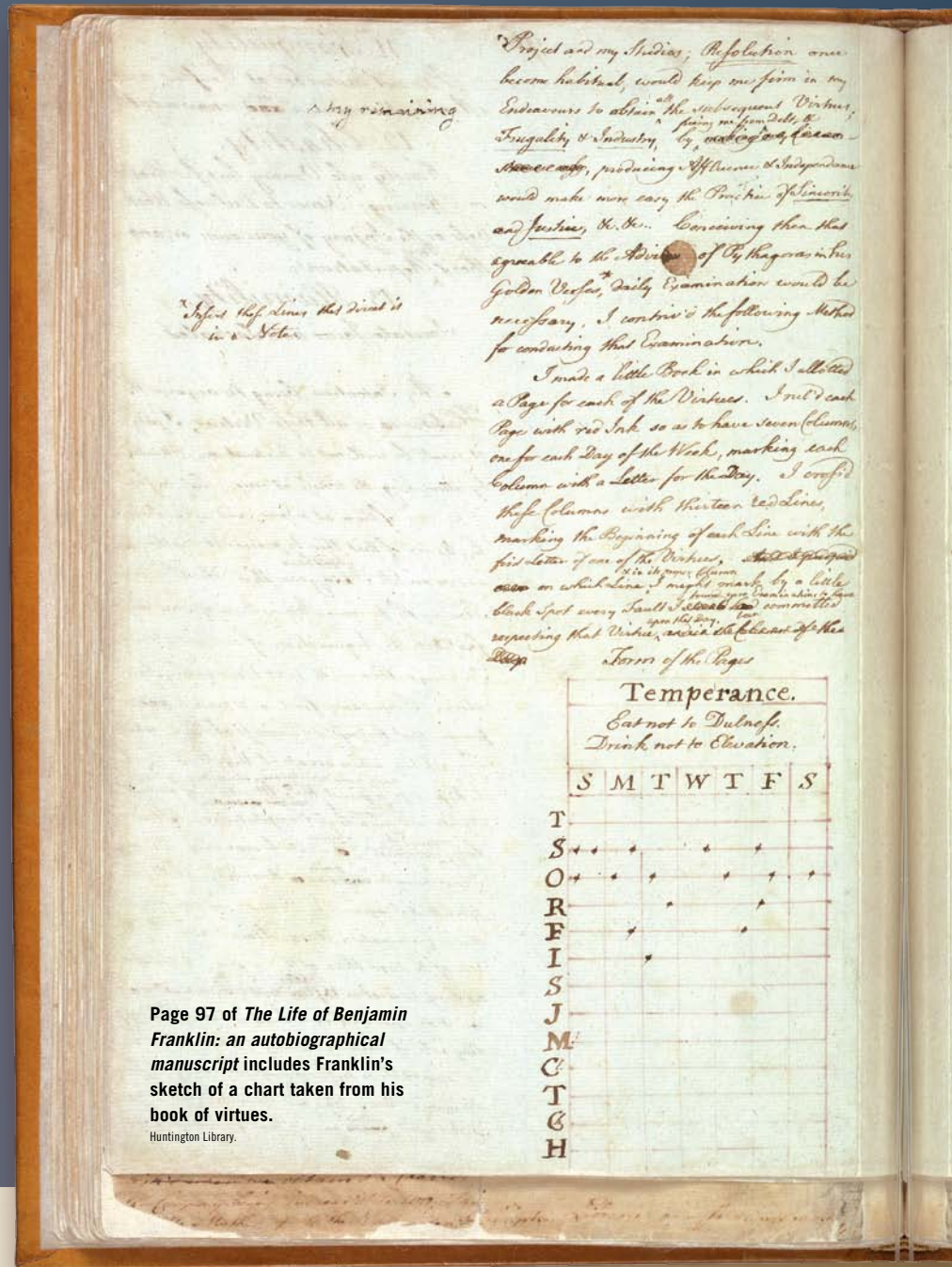


In 2007, author Alan Houston traveled to England to conclude research for his 2008 book, *Benjamin Franklin and the Politics of Improvement*. The last document he asked to see, on the last day of his trip, was “Copies of Letters Relating

to the March of General Braddock.” When he opened the volume he “nearly shot through the ceiling” of the British Library’s reading room: he had discovered a trove of Benjamin Franklin correspondence that hadn’t been seen in more than 250 years.

The 47 letters by, to, and about Franklin are actually copies made by Thomas Birch, who was secretary of the Royal Society, Britain’s scientific academy, and a renowned compiler and transcriber of documents. The letters concern Franklin’s involvement in helping General Braddock secure wagons for his 1755 march to Fort Duquesne. In contrast to Franklin’s biography, which made it sound as if farmers willingly offered up their wagons, the letters offer insights into the farmers’ worries about getting a fair price, or being paid at all since the military was known to take what it needed by force.

Houston believes that Franklin carried the letters with him to London in 1757 when on a mission for the Pennsylvania Assembly. Birch’s diary confirms that he befriended Franklin and that he frequently hosted the American. It was logical that Birch transcribed his friend’s correspondence, leaving for us a window on their world 250 years later.



Page 97 of *The Life of Benjamin Franklin: an autobiographical manuscript* includes Franklin’s sketch of a chart taken from his book of virtues.

Huntington Library.

were wounded; of the 96 officers, 26 were killed and 36 wounded.” The French and Indian forces included “36 officers, 72 regulars ... 146 Canadian militiamen, and 637 Indians.” Of these, 23 died and 16 were “seriously wounded” per Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 760 n.17, 99, 105.

¹⁵ “The Journal of a British Officer,” in Hamilton, *Braddock’s Defeat*, 50; Orme, “Journal,” BL King’s MSS 212, fols. 84, 88; “Wagon Affair,” 275; Fred Anderson, *A People’s Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years’ War* (Univ. of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill, 1984), 120; BL Add MSS 32858, fol. 292; BL Add MSS 35415, fols. 55-57.

¹⁶ George Washington, “Remarks”; “Wagon Affair,” 280; “Journal of Cholmley’s Batman,” 32.

¹⁷ PRO CO 5/1328, fol. 170; BL Add MSS 32858, fol. 185; “Wagon Affair,” 281; Samuel Hazard et al, eds., *Pennsylvania Archives* (Harrisburg: State of Pennsylvania, 1851-53), ser. 1, 2:443-44.

¹⁸ *Autobiography*, 114; “Wagon Affairs,” 269-70; Robert Orme, “Journal,” BL King’s MSS 212, fols. 68, 74, 45; “Journal of Captain Robert Cholmley’s Batman,” in *Braddock’s Defeat*, 24-25; Lewis Burd Walker, ed., *The Settlement of the Waggoners’ Accounts Relating to General Braddock’s Expedition towards Fort Du Quesne* (Pottsville, Pa.: Standard Pub. Co., 1899); PRO T 1/360.