



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.*

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 from A. C. Carter (Comptroller, as of this)	245. 18. 1
Nov 29 To Cash paid the Receiver General	1100. 10. 10 1/2	Account	
June 19 To do paid for letters	1. 0. 0	By Bury Franklin for sundry Bills from B. 1899. 19. 1	
July 7 To Sundries (Bills on Longchamps taken)		By do for do from B. 339. 13. 2	
To do Charles Carroll, with Charges of		By do for do from B. 85. 4. 3	
Robertson, Bills 200. Receipts 25. 00	21. 5. 00	Nov 27 By John Hancock from A. C. Carter	50. 0. 0
Robertson, Bills 200. Receipts 25. 00	52. 5. 9	1771 Jan 12 By do from A. C. Carter	67. 10. 0
To do for the late Secretary of the Post Office	25. 0. 0	Feb 14 By do from A. C. Carter	200. 0. 0
from July 1 to Oct 15. in Lancaster		28 By do from A. C. Carter	100. 0. 0
Oct 24 To Cash paid the Receiver General	1500. 0. 0	Nov 28 By do from A. C. Carter	400. 0. 0
1771 Apr 5 To Bury Franklin for one year's salary	300. 0. 0	July 3 By Bury Franklin from A. C. Carter	100. 0. 0
To John Hancock for do	300. 0. 0	Sept 2 By do from A. C. Carter	510. 15. 1
Sept 23 To do travelling Expenses from June		Oct 2 By John Hancock from A. C. Carter	165. 0. 0
16. to this day inclusive, being 100	105. 0. 0	Oct 2 By Bury Franklin from A. C. Carter	75. 0. 0
Days at 21/2 p. diem			
1771 Feb 13 To Cash paid the Receiver General	800. 0. 0		
Apr 5 To Bury Franklin for one year's salary	300. 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

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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, *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.	New-York.	New-York.	Philadelphia.
1. Postage, in New-England.	1. New-York.	1. New-York.	1. Philadelphia.
2. 1st Class.	2. 1st Class.	2. 1st Class.	2. 1st Class.
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