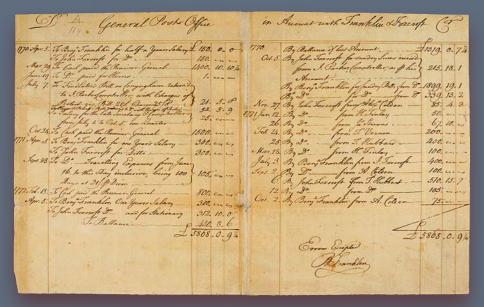


which remained grew very weak." Braddock appealed to Governor Morris for help, and Morris, in turn, called on Franklin. Soon an advertisement appeared in the Pennsylvania Gazette calling for 41 wagons to carry oats and corn to Wills Creek. Those interested in earning £12 were instructed to "apply to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



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

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 lesserknown contributions to American life and showcases some treasures from the Smithsonian's collection.

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

