“...we are fully sensible, that to publish a good News-Paper is not so easy an Undertaking as many People imagine it to be.”

The Printer to The Reader, Printed in The Pennsylvania Gazette, October 2, 1729.

Ben Franklin 300 Philadelphia Press Conference

On March 24, with 300 days to go before Franklin’s 300th birthday, the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary, the National Constitution Center, and the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation combined forces in a theatrical press conference to launch Ben Franklin 300 Philadelphia. The media were treated to six different vignettes from Ben’s life to reflect the six different sections of the exhibition. We even re-enacted the famous kite and key experiment complete with thunderclap. Three different actors were used to show Franklin at different ages – the young runaway and entrepreneur, the middle-aged scientist and civic leader, and the elder statesman. In between their performances, Rosalind Remer, executive director; Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary; Page Talbott, associate director and chief curator; Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary; Meryl Levitz, president and CEO, Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation; and Richard Stengel, president and CEO, National Constitution Center, all elaborated on their plans for the Tercentenary, the exhibition, and the city-wide celebrations.

For the press conference, the partnership produced a beautifully designed press kit, whose rich content was primarily written by GPTMC. It features releases and fact sheets on the exhibition and public programs, as well as Ben Franklin’s “Resume”, and a self-guided “Franklin’s Footsteps” walking tour. If you who haven’t seen a hard copy of the kit, the contents are available online at http://www.ben-franklin300.org/presskit.htm.

Both kit and conference have resulted in a great deal of media exposure. As of April 1, 2005, GPTMC had tracked and clipped 48 Ben Franklin 300 Philadelphia placements with an ad value of $207,019.29 and a combined circulation of 5,196,006. Placements were in local broadcast stations such as CN8, KYW, WFMZ, WHYY, WPVI and WWDB, and local media such as the Philadelphia Daily News, the Philadelphia Inquirer, and the Philadelphia Metro. The Associated Press picked up the story and a partial list of our national exposure includes Boston, Charleston, Harrisburg Houston, New York, Pittsburgh, Tampa, and Washington, D.C.. In addition, several placements were from the Internet – and http://www.ben-franklin300.org certainly saw a spike...
in visitors immediately following the conference. Meanwhile, in our office we've definitely noted an increased volume of calls from interested institutions and members of the public. Many thanks are due to our partners at GPTMC and at the National Constitution Center – everyone worked very hard to pull this off so successfully.

Ben Franklin 300
Philadelphia Profiles

In our last issue, we introduced Ben Franklin 300 Philadelphia – the year-long commemoration of Benjamin Franklin’s birthday in the Philadelphia region. Full details on the programs and institutions that will be part of the celebration can be found on our web calendar at http://www.benfranklin300.org, but in every issue from now on we will pick out a few to profile in greater depth.

Philadelphia Orchestra
Commissions New Work to Commemorate Franklin’s 300th Birthday

On November 18, 19, 22, and 30, 2005, you’ll be able to hear the Philadelphia Orchestra perform Beethoven’s Second and Fourth symphonies, along with the world premiere of the Orchestra’s newly commissioned work to honor the 300th birthday of Benjamin Franklin. Old and new inventions will stand side by side, as the dynamic young Daniel Kellogg’s commissioned piece is heard with the young Beethoven. American composer Daniel Kellogg, a Young Concert Artists Composer-in-Residence, was chosen from among 110 applicants, with the final selection being made by Philadelphia Orchestra Music Director Christoph Eschenbach. "Benjamin Franklin was one of America’s great creators, and we want to recognize his legacy with another new creation," said Eschenbach. The commission, which is made possible through the generous support of the Neubauer Family Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, will contain a significant educational component. According to Daniel Kellogg, a graduate of Philadelphia’s Curtis Institute of Music, "The possibilities for artistic response to such an individual are limitless, and I am thrilled to take up the challenge. I hope the music will capture his curiosity in all things, his flirtatious fun, his wit, and the spirit of the amazing time in which America was born."

The Princess and the Patriot: Ekaterina Dashkova, Benjamin Franklin and the Age of Enlightenment

From February 17, 2006, at the Museum of the American Philosophical Society, a new exhibition entitled The Princess and the Patriot will introduce visitors to two extraordinary people: the Russian princess Ekaterina Dashkova, and American printer, scientist, patriot and statesman Benjamin Franklin. When they met in Paris at the Hotel de la Chine in 1781, it was a meeting of two of the most fascinating minds of the "Age of Reason."

Portraits, memoirs, letters, court attire, medals, jewelry and other decorative arts that document the extraordinary lives of America’s world-renowned scientist and statesman and the outrageous Russian princess who spoke five languages, helped overthrow a czar and directed the most prestigious scientific organization in her country will be on view.

Three Enlightenment ideals that engaged both Franklin and Dashkova are examined in the exhibition through important documents fine art and artifacts, maps, scientific specimens, rare books and manuscripts and contemporaneous correspondence that reveals the rich international exchange of ideas and information in the 18th century. The first ideal is the "Pursuit of Knowledge and the Use of Reason" or as Franklin liked to call it, “useful knowledge.” The second, and far more difficult ideal
for Franklin and Dashkova was “Liberty and Equality.” As an owner of slaves early on, in Franklin’s case and serfs, in Dashkova’s case, each publicly and in private struggled to reconcile their own behavior with this ideal. The last, “Virtue and Self-Improvement” reveals how Franklin and Dashkova, each in their own way, invented and re-invented themselves creating virtuous personae with one eye on their contemporaries and one eye on posterity.

Together, these institutions are lending many of their most important artifacts to the Tercentenary exhibition, Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World. Staff members from each institution have also regularly contributed their skills and specialties to help the Tercentenary team, and each institution has a representative on the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary’s Advisory Board. Each institution is planning special programs as part of the Ben Franklin 300 Philadelphia celebrations, and this newsletter profiles the forthcoming exhibition at the Museum of the American Philosophical Society. Future newsletters will explore Tercentenary plans at the other four consortium member institutions, but in the meanwhile, you can also find their programs listed on the calendar at http://www.benfranklin300.org. And while you’re waiting for the Ben Franklin 300 Philadelphia celebrations to kick off in October 2005, Franklin can be found at each institution every day! Each is well worth a visit – as are their websites:

American Philosophical Society: http://www.amphilsoc.org

The Franklin Institute Science Museum, the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the University of Pennsylvania.

The Franklin Institute:

http://www.fi.edu

The Franklin Institute was founded in 1824 to honor Franklin and to advance the usefulness of his inventions. Today, The Institute is a premier American science museum. It is also the home of the Benjamin Franklin National Memorial and holds a significant collection of Franklin artifacts, including his original lightning rod.

Library Company of Philadelphia:

http://www.librarycompany.org

The Library Company of Philadelphia, founded in 1731 by Benjamin Franklin, is America’s first subscription library, operating today as an independent research facility whose extensive holdings include the largest extant collection of books from Franklin’s library.

Philadelphia Museum of Art:

http://www.philamuseum.org

The Philadelphia Museum of Art was a legacy of the great Centennial Exposition of 1876; today, it is one of the largest and most significant art museums in the United States. The Museum houses over 300,000 works of art encompassing some of the greatest achievements of human creativity, including priceless Frankliniana.
Theodore Wiederseim, a direct descendant of Franklin’s English friend Polly Stevenson, who owns a pastel—the only known 18th-century portrait of Polly.

Another fortuitous find was a ca.1760 cast iron frontplate of a Pennsylvania Fireplace or “Franklin Stove,” given by Franklin to his friend John Bartram and recently unearthed after many decades buried underground at Bartram’s Garden in Philadelphia. We are also borrowing and having conserved the 17th-century painted wood “Sign of the Blue Ball,” Franklin’s father’s sign from his chandler’s shop in Boston, currently owned by the Bostonian Society. One of our most unexpected lenders is Transylvania University in Kentucky, in whose Science Museum lives a thermometer formerly owned by one of Franklin’s friends and electrical experiment collaborators, Ebenezer Kinnersley.

Educational Programming Developing Curriculum For Exhibition

Educational programming for Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World has begun in earnest. Our educational activity guide will offer pre-visit, on-site and post-visit materials directly related to the exhibition and keyed to national education standards. Elementary, middle and secondary teachers will have the ability to select and customize the materials according to specific student needs and learning styles. To capture the varied facets and achievements that distinguish Franklin’s remarkable life, we also are creating Ben Across the Curriculum, an interdisciplinary set of classroom materials that will identify Franklinian themes across elementary, middle and secondary-grade curricula. Finally, we are producing a self-guided family brochure with an eye toward sharpening childrens’ detective skills as they track down Skuggs the Squirrel concealed in strategic spots throughout the exhibition. Franklin kept squirrels as pets, and in the eighteenth century, they were referred to as skuggs.

Lenders Big and Small, Donate More Than Just Pictures

How did we go about identifying the numerous loans for the exhibition? The group of about 70 lenders ranges from small, private collections (including some of Franklin descendants), to art and history museums in the U.S. and abroad, to national government institutions. Much of our knowledge of these artifacts was based on research: we spoke with curators, examined past exhibition and auction catalogues, scanned the internet, reviewed illustrations in books on Franklin, and explored archival collections. We also sent a letter to all potential lending institutions and individuals, asking them to describe their Franklin holdings. We received over one hundred replies to our queries.

Some lenders found us by reading about the Tercentenary in the local media; such was the case with Mr. University of Pennsylvania:
http://www.upenn.edu

In 1740 Benjamin Franklin led a number of Philadelphians in establishing what is now the University of Pennsylvania. Today, Penn is a world-class teaching and research institution. Its library houses the Curtis Collection of Franklin imprints, manuscripts, and correspondence, and preserves many artifacts originally owned by Franklin.
the official representative of the new United States (le Ministre Plénipotentiaire), Franklin ordered several suits from a French tailor, M. La Hure. One of his surviving bills, published in The Franklin Papers, vol. 30, pp. 102-104, gives enticingly specific details of the clothing ordered, and permits us to comprehend the complexity of Franklin’s position in France.

A figure of Franklin, clad in the suit, was displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s landmark 1936 exhibit. Now in secure storage at the Smithsonian Institution, the fragile suit is being copied by a scholar and fabricator of historic costume for the exhibit, Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World.

The Database aims to document the extremes of Franklin’s image, from fashion icon to decorative accessory. Among the most amusing but significant representatives of the man are small, free-standing figures produced in the Staffordshire potteries. Based on a table-sized terra cotta statuette exhibited by François Marie Suzanne in the Paris salon of 1793, the copies (“knock-offs,” to use the unflattering modern term) appeared at once to meet the demand for relatively inexpensive monuments to Franklin. They remained in production as long as there was a market for them in the new United States, and were turned out with equal alacrity bearing the captions “Geo. Washington” and “The Old English Gentleman.”

Their significance to the Database lies in the role they played: they provided an affordable means by which buyers of modest means could express their respect, affection or mourning for Franklin as one of a new nation’s first heroic figures.