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## ***BACKGROUND***

### ***Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World***

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

*Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World* has been organized and is presented by the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary. The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary, a non-profit organization supported by a lead grant of \$4 million from The Pew Charitable Trusts, was established to mark the 300-year anniversary of Benjamin Franklin's birth (1706-2006) with a celebration dedicated to educating the public about his enduring legacy and inspiring renewed appreciation of the values he embodied. The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary was founded in 2000 by a consortium of five Philadelphia cultural institutions: the American Philosophical Society, The Franklin Institute, the Library Company of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the University of Pennsylvania. In addition, an Act of Congress in 2002 created the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary Commission, a panel of fifteen outstanding Americans chosen to study and recommend programs to celebrate Franklin's 300th birthday. The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary can be found online at [www.benfranklin300.org](http://www.benfranklin300.org).

The 8,000 square foot exhibition is divided into six sections, including Character Matters, B. Franklin Printer, Civic Visions, Useful Knowledge, World Stage and Seeing Franklin. In each venue these sections will be laid out in the same order, but each exhibition will look somewhat different given the spatial configuration of each gallery.

#### **OVERVIEW:**

The title of the exhibition— *Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World*— was chosen to express the exhibition's central interpretive theme: all of Franklin's astonishing achievements stemmed from his life-long desire to understand and improve the world around him.

Visitors will meet the young Franklin in his native Boston and travel with him to Philadelphia, London, and Paris. Along the way they will learn how ambition, curiosity, and reflection inspired Franklin to better himself as both a printer and a citizen.

Through original copies of five of America's founding documents—all of which Franklin signed—visitors will come face to face with the unique blend of reasoned wisdom and openness to compromise Franklin developed as a successful statesman and diplomat.

Finally, visitors will discover how today's world views Franklin, three centuries after his birth.

— more —

## **I. CHARACTER MATTERS: 1706–1723**

**Character Matters** is where the viewer meets the young Franklin in the Boston of his youth. Franklin was profoundly affected by his upbringing in early 18<sup>th</sup> century Boston where he was steeped in Puritan traditions and teachings, and where he received his training as a printer. Books he read, an animation about the story of Franklin and his whistle, and a computer game called Seeking Opportunity are included in this section.

## **II. B. FRANKLIN, PRINTER: 1723–1748**

**B. Franklin, Printer** covers the years when Franklin made his fortune as Philadelphia's premiere printer. Arriving in Philadelphia in 1723, Franklin steadily expanded his network of personal and professional acquaintances, advanced his publishing business, and became a wealthy man by the time he was 42. An entrepreneur, Franklin also diligently pursued the cause of self-improvement. This section will feature Franklin's original printing equipment juxtaposed with several hands-on activities and multi-media experiences. In addition, the stories of Franklin's family— Deborah, William, Sally, and little Franky— unfamiliar to many, will be recounted in this section.

## **III. CIVIC VISIONS: 1731–1751**

**Civic Visions** tells the story of Franklin's involvement with the founding of several key philanthropic, educational and civic institutions. From self-improvement, Franklin turned his attention to improving the community around him, asking himself, "What good shall I do this day?" Franklin, and a group of eleven working-class friends, known as the Junto, were at the core of several Philadelphia institutions that were founded in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century on behalf of the citizens of the city. Many of these institutions, such as Pennsylvania Hospital and the University of Pennsylvania, continue today, and the account of their founding will be told in this section, focusing on the universality of this group of new institutions — fundamental to any new, rapidly growing community.

## **IV. USEFUL KNOWLEDGE: 1747–1785**

Having made enough money to retire from active business at the age of 42, Franklin devoted the next part of his life to the search for **Useful Knowledge**. At the center of his search was the American Philosophical Society, formed with like-minded friends in 1743. In this section visitors will see an array of scientific instruments used by Franklin and the most famous scientists — known as philosophers — of his day, such as astronomer David Rittenhouse. Here, too, visitors will have fun investigating many of the scientific problems that intrigued Franklin.

## **V. WORLD STAGE: 1744–1787**

**World Stage** begins with Franklin's political career in colonial Pennsylvania, proceeds to his years in England and France, and concludes in Philadelphia, where he returned in 1785 as an elder statesman and was welcomed as a hero. Seventy-nine years old and suffering from gout, Franklin deftly re-entered the Philadelphia political scene and became President of the Pennsylvania Assembly and served in the Constitutional Convention. And at the very end of his life, Franklin espoused a new cause, the abolition of slavery. **World Stage** covers the time in Franklin's life when all his worlds — literature, science, politics, diplomacy, and his fascination with the material world — came together at a critical time in modern history.

## **VI. SEEING FRANKLIN: 1787–Today**

The final section, **Seeing Franklin**, includes Franklin's *Autobiography*, with original versions of all the early translations, the last-life portrait of Franklin, and his epitaph. Images of Franklin from the 19th and 20th centuries combine with quotations from those who were profoundly influenced by him. The final exhibit is what appears to be a great pair of spectacles — the kind Franklin wore — set atop enormous, leather-bound books. The lenses reveal an image of Franklin wearing his fur cap. Franklin's image is composed of hundreds of wooden tiles, which gradually move and tilt to reflect an image of the visitor. Above this, we read, "Do you See Yourself in Franklin?" We are all capable of life-long curiosity, discovery, and doing well by our fellow humans while improving ourselves. This reflective experience will be the final and lasting image of the exhibition.

### **The Voice of Benjamin Franklin:**

The voice of Benjamin Franklin in *Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World* is actor John Benjamin Hickey, a talented stage and film actor who made a name for himself in such Broadway productions as *The Crucible*, *Cabaret*, and *Love! Valour! Compassion!*, for which he won an Obie award.

He has been seen on television in *Sex and the City*, and several episodes of *Law & Order*. His film credits include *The Ice Storm*, *The Anniversary Party*, *The General's Daughter*, *The Bone Collector*, *Flightplan*, and the upcoming Clint Eastwood movie, *Flags of our Fathers*. John trained at The Juilliard School of Drama.

### **TEAM:**

- **Chief curator:** Dr. Page Talbott
- **Exhibition designer:** Staples & Charles Ltd., Virginia
- **Interactives designer:** A More Perfect Union, LLC, Massachusetts
  - **Illustrations by:** Katherine Streeter
- **Fabricators:** Proto Productions, Illinois

### **FUNDING:**

Funders include The Pew Charitable Trusts, the John Templeton Foundation, the Annenberg Foundation, the Department of the Interior and the Florence Gould Foundation, among others. In addition, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has provided major funding for the Tercentenary's programs.

### **EXHIBITION SCHEDULE:**

- **Philadelphia**, National Constitution Center, December 15, 2005–April 30, 2006
- **St. Louis**, Missouri Historical Society, June 8–September 4, 2006
- **Houston**, The Houston Museum of Natural Science, October 11, 2006–January 21, 2007
- **Denver**, Denver Museum of Nature & Science, March 2–May 28, 2007
- **Atlanta**, Atlanta History Center, July 4–October 14, 2007
- **Paris**,
  - Musée des Arts et Métiers, December 4, 2007–March 30, 2008
  - Musée Carnavalet, December 4, 2007–March 9, 2008

### **MORE INFO:**

[www.benfranklin300.org](http://www.benfranklin300.org)