



The Library Company OF PHILADELPHIA

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**THE LIBRARY COMPANY OF PHILADELPHIA ANNOUNCES
OPENING OF EXHIBITION CELEBRATING BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
AS WRITER AND PRINTER**

PHILADELPHIA – May 16, 2006 – At the time of his death, Franklin was well known around the world as a scientist and a diplomat; however, he chose to be remembered as simply, **“Benjamin Franklin, Printer.”** Ironically, his success as a printer and writer have been comparatively overlooked aspects of his life, until now.

Opening on **May 16, 2006**, the exhibition, *Benjamin Franklin, Writer and Printer*, takes a fresh, even surprising look at Franklin’s dual relationship to the book as printer and author. The centerpiece of the Library Company’s 275th Anniversary celebration, the exhibition is curated by Librarian James Green and University of Pennsylvania English Professor Peter Stallybrass.

Incorporating more than eighty artifacts, the exhibition is divided into three main sections, the first focusing on Franklin’s career as a printer, the next on his writing, and the final section devoted to his *Autobiography*, an international best-seller and the most widely-published autobiography of all time.

Franklin’s career as a printer began at an early age as an apprentice to his brother in Boston; he took this trade with him when he ran away to Philadelphia at the age of 17 and continued to prosper at it until his retirement at age 42. The exhibition first takes visitors through Franklin’s career as a printer, during which he made a living producing newspapers, almanacs, pamphlets, broadsides, laws, government printing, blank forms, lottery tickets, and almost everything but books.

On display will be the Library Company's preeminent collection of Franklin imprints as well as examples of the entire range of his output, from ephemera to massive folio tomes. Franklin's first appearance in print in Philadelphia can be seen in this section.

The second section of the exhibition highlights Franklin's early writing, a pursuit to which he was drawn as a result of his printing career. Franklin employed just about every genre and mode of authorship, using an amazing variety of masks to cloak his true identity from his readers. A pivotal point in the exhibition is a case study of when Franklin suddenly put his press and pen to the service of a political cause. Franklin's life as public printer came to an end when he became involved in a campaign to raise money for a citizen militia in Pennsylvania. At this point, he could no longer be a neutral newspaper editor, and he retired from the printing industry shortly thereafter. Here, visitors can see the only known copy of the earliest broadside edition of Franklin's most popular work, *The Way to Wealth*.

The final section of the exhibition focuses on Franklin's *Autobiography*, the work that transformed Benjamin Franklin, Printer, into Benjamin Franklin, Author – the most famous American writer of the nineteenth century. The *Autobiography* was an international best-seller, the greatest literary achievement of the American eighteenth century, yet ironically it was first published in a bizarre assortment of paraphrases and translations, and it was not available in book form as he wrote it until long after his death. One interesting artifact displayed in this section will be the printer's copy of the first publication of all four parts of the *Autobiography*.

“It is only fitting in this, the Library Company's 275th anniversary year, that we present an in-depth look at Franklin's career as a printer and writer,” says Jim Green, Librarian and curator of *Benjamin Franklin, Writer and Printer*. “Through the exhibition, we hope to provide the public with an intimate look at Benjamin Franklin, Printer and come away with a greater appreciation for the impact Franklin's career as a printer and writer has on our everyday lives.”

Benjamin Franklin, Writer and Printer is open free of charge and in the exhibition gallery of the Library Company of Philadelphia on 1314 Locust Street. The hours are Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. through 4:45 p.m. The exhibition runs through December 22, 2006.

There will be an opening reception for the exhibition on Tuesday, May 16, at 5:45 p.m. at the Library Company of Philadelphia.

Franklin's Tercentenary Year

Benjamin Franklin, Writer and Printer is one of several exhibitions celebrating Franklin's 300th birthday. The Library Company of Philadelphia is one of five consortium members that make up the Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary. The Tercentenary's projects form the official national celebration for America's first founding father to reach 300. The Tercentenary can be found online at www.benfranklin300.org. This exhibition also marks the 275th anniversary of the Library Company's founding by Benjamin Franklin.

The Library Company of Philadelphia, founding in 1731 by Benjamin Franklin, is an independent research library encompassing over half a million rare books, prints, and photographs documenting every aspect of American history and culture from the 17th through the 19th centuries. It is a research center serving a national and international constituency of scholars and presents exhibitions and programs for the public. The Library Company is located at 1314 Locust Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107, and is open free of charge from 9:00 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Monday through Friday. The Library Company can be found online at www.librarycompany.org.

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