



___ Benjamin Franklin, WRITER, EDITOR, PUBLISHER ___
Selections, 1730-1743

In 1750 in New England, almost 70 percent of white men and 45 percent of white women could read; in the southern colonies, about 50-60 percent of men and 40 percent of women. With a literacy rate greater than Britain, the colonies by mid century hosted more newspapers than the mother country.¹ A sample of this expansive output is this collection of brief items from Benjamin Franklin's newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, "containing the freshest Advices Foreign and Domestick." Together they offer a window into life in the middle colonies in the mid 1700s: fire, earthquake, weather extremes, smallpox, the revival tour of Rev. George Whitefield, the king's birthday, the mayor's feast for the city's citizens, fundraising for a "Negro school," return of a castaway, the birth of triplets, the exhibition of a live camel from Arabia, a fraudulent marriage, spousal abuse, a false charge of rape, the murder of an enslaved boy, death by alcohol, a hunting accident, robberies, obituaries, advertisements, and Franklin's announcement of his editorial policy.

April 30, 1730. On Friday Night last, about 11 o'Clock, a Fire broke out in a Store near Mr. Fishbourn's Wharf and, before it could be master'd, consumed all the Stores, &c. [etc.] on the Wharf, damaged several Houses on that Side the Street, and crossing the Way, seized the fine House of Mr. J. Dickinson, with two other Houses adjoining towards Walnut-street, which are all ruined. The Loss in the Whole is supposed to be four or five Thousand Pounds [English sterling]. It is thought that if the People had been provided with good [fire] Engines and other suitable Instruments, the Fire might easily have been prevented spreading, as there was but little Wind. There is now a Subscription on Foot for supplying the Town with every Thing necessary of that Nature, which meets with great Encouragement. There was much Thieving at the Fire, and several ill Persons are now in Prison on that Account.

May 14, 1730. We hear from New-England that the Small-Pox spreads in divers [several] parts of the Country [region]. There is an Account published of the Number of Persons inoculated in Boston in the Month of March, amounting to Seventy-two, of which two only died, and the rest have recovered perfect Health. Of those who had it in the common Way, 'tis computed that one in four died. Several Hundreds have been inoculated, and but about four in the Hundred have died under Inoculation; and even those are supposed to have first taken the Infection in the common Way.

July 8, 1731. The Small-pox has now quite left this City. The Number of those that died here of that Distemper is exactly 288, and no more. 64 of the Number were Negroes. If these may be valued one with another at £30² per Head, the Loss to the City in that Article is near £2000.

January 4, 1732. We have no Entries this Week, the River being full of Ice.

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¹ Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution Before 1776* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 111.

² £: English pound.

September 18, 1732. On Tuesday the 5th Instant [of this month], a small Shock of an Earthquake was felt in this City, about Noon. It was also felt at New-Castle.

January 11, 1733. Yesterday, being Market Day, Watt who was concern'd in the Counterfeit Money, as mentioned in one of our late [recent] Papers, receiv'd part of his Punishment, being whipt, pilloried and cropt. He behaved so as to touch the Compassion of the Mob, and they did not fling at him (as was expected) neither Snow-balls nor any Thing else. We hear that Grindal, the Importer of the Bills, and chief Person concern'd, was taken in the Jersies [West and East Jersey], but afterwards made his Escape. In his Pocket-Book was found the Account of Charge, so much to the Printer, so much for engraving the Plates, so much for Paper, &c.

February 8, 1733. On the 20th past, at a special Court of Common-Pleas held here, came on a Trial between A. Hamilton, Esq;³ Plaintiff, and Robert Gregory with Mary his Wife, Defendants; when the Plaintiff recovered £500 Damage against the Defendants for conspiring to charge him with the unnatural Abuse of the Body of the said Mary Gregory. It appear'd upon the Trial, from a great Number of Witnesses, that the whole was a villainous Forgery, contriv'd against the said A. Hamilton to extort Money from him: that the said Mary is a Person of a most abandoned and infamous Character, and that she had made the like Attempts against sundry [various] other Persons of unblemished Reputation in this City.

May 3, 1733. [Advertisement] There is to be sold a very likely Negro Woman aged about Thirty Years who has lived in this City, from her Childhood, and can wash and iron very well, cook Victuals, sew, spin on the Linen Wheel, milk Cows, and do all Sorts of House-work very well. She has a Boy of about Two Years old, which is to go with her. The Price as reasonable as you can agree.

And also another very likely Boy aged about Six Years, who is Son of the above said Woman. He will be sold with his Mother, or by himself, as the Buyer pleases. Inquire of the Printer.

October 25, 1733. We hear from Bristol [England] that, on Monday Morning last, two young Men were out a Hunting in the Woods near that Place, one of them being a little before the other, saw something thro' the Bushes on the other Side of the Creek, upon which he stepped back to his Companion, and said, *Lend me that Gun, for I see a fine Deer.* Accordingly he took Aim and gave Fire; but when he came to the Place, he found a Boy about nine Years of Age, (who had just been sent out by his Mother for a Can of Water) struggling for Life. The Child never spoke another Word, being shot in the Breast, and died immediately. Scarce a Year passes without one or more of these unhappy Accidents, which ought to make People more careful in their Hunting than they commonly are.

May 23, 1734. Last Night a Fire broke out in a back Building behind Dr. Jones's in Market-Street but was soon extinguish'd. It being difficult at first to get Water for the Engines, 'tis thought the Fire would have risen to a great Head thereabouts, if so much Rain had not fallen Yesterday as made every Thing very wet. Where there is not Pumps in Yards, it is to be wish'd that People would keep Hogsheads [wooden barrels] of Water always ready for such Occasions, As they are obliged by Law to do in some Cities.

July 11, 1734. The Weather has been so excessive hot here for a Week past that a great Number of People have fainted and fallen into Convulsions, and several have died in a few Hours after they were taken. From the Country round about we hear that a great many of the Harvest People faint in the Fields, and 'tis said that in some Places a multitude of Birds are found dead. Excepting the Hot Summer about 7 Years since, such Weather has not been known in this Country [colony] in the memory of Man.

³ Esq.: Esquire, gentleman.

April 17, 1735. We hear from Chester County [Pennsylvania], that last Week at a Vendue [sale/ auction] held there, a Man being unreasonably abusive to his Wife upon some trifling Occasion, the Women form'd themselves into a Court and order'd him to be apprehended by their Officers and brought to Trial. Being found guilty he was condemn'd to be duck'd 3 times in a neighbouring Pond, and to have one half cut off of his Hair and Beard (which it seems he wore at full length) and the Sentence was accordingly executed, to the great Diversion of the Spectators.

June 19, 1735. Sunday last one Rachel Twells of this City died suddenly, and the Coroner's Inquest having sat on the Body brought in their Verdict, that by drinking too plentifully of Rum and other strong Liquors she came by her Death. 'Tis said she had drank sixteen Drams of Rum and two Mugs of strong Beer that Day.

November 6, 1735. Thursday last being the Anniversary of His Majesty's Birth Day, the same was solemnly observed here. An elegant Entertainment was made by our Honourable Proprietor, for the Principal Gentlemen, Merchants, &c. of this City, at which all the Loyal Healths were drank under the Discharge of Cannon, and the Day concluded with the usual Demonstrations of Joy.

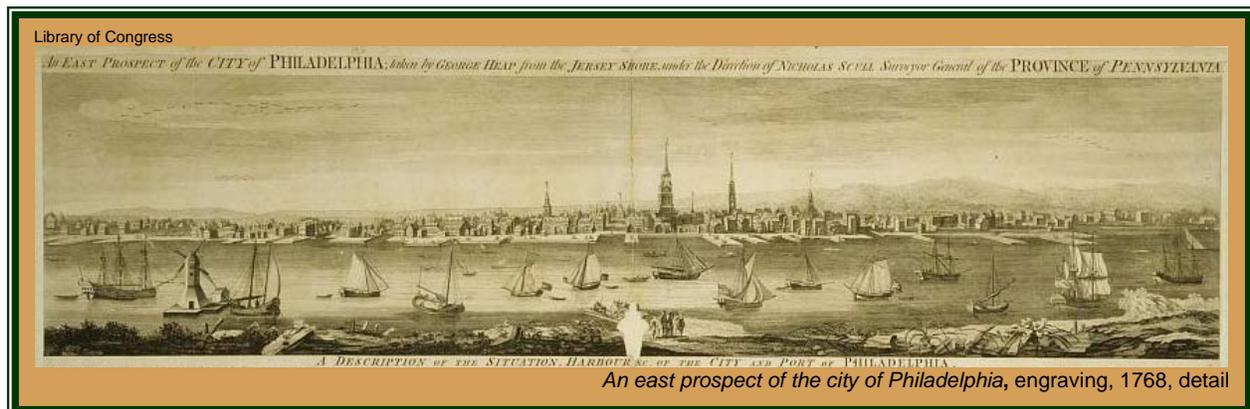
September 30, 1736. Thursday last, William Allen, Esq., Mayor of this City for the Year past, made a Feast for his Citizens at the Statehouse, to which all the Strangers in Town of Note were also invited. Those who are Judges of such Things, say, That considering the Delicacy of the Viands [meats], the Variety and Excellency of the Wines, the great Number of Guests, and yet the Easiness and Order with which the whole was conducted, it was the most grand and the most elegant Entertainment that has been made in these Parts of America.

June 2, 1737. The same Day [Monday last] arrived Capt. Farra, who has long been given over for lost. In his Voyage from Jamaica hither, he was cast away in Palachee Bay within Cape Florida, among the Cannibal Indians, who were extremely kind and assisted in saving the Cargo, Rigging, &c. And News of the Wreck coming to [St.] Augustine [Florida], the Spaniards sent Periaguas and other small Vessels round to take in what was sav'd and bring it to that Port, where Capt. Farra hir'd a Rhode-Island Sloop to bring it hither. Had this English Vessel been forc'd ashore on the civil, polite, hospitable, christian, protestant Coast of Great-Britain, Query, *Might they have expected kinder Treatment from their own Countrymen?*

November 3, 1737. Just Published, Poor Richard's Almanacks, For the Year 1738. Printed and Sold by the Printer hereof.

December 15, 1737. We hear from Derby that on Saturday Night last a Woman there was delivered of three Daughters, and all likely to live.

December 15, 1737. [Advertisement] The Person who borrow'd B. Franklin's Book of Laws of this Province, is desired to return it, he having forgot to whom he lent it.



February 7, 1738. [Advertisement] *To accommodate the Publick.* There will be a Stage Wagon set out from Trenton to Brunswick [New Jersey] twice a Week and back again, during next Summer. It will be fitted up with Benches and cover'd over so that Passengers may sit easy and dry. And Care will be taken to deliver Goods and Messages safe. *Note.* The said Wagon will set out for the first time from William Atlee's and Thomas Hooton's in Trenton, on Monday the 27th of March next, and continue going every Monday and Thursday from Trenton, and return from Brunswick every Tuesday and Friday. Every Passenger to pay *Two Shillings* and *Six Pence.* And Goods and Parcels at the cheapest Rates.

July 6, 1738. Yesterday Morning died here, and was the same Day decently interred, Madam Brownell, Wife of Mr. George Brownell, a Gentlewoman well known and much respected in New-England and New-York, as well as this Province, for her excellent and happy Method of educating young Ladies, in which useful Employment she had been engag'd many Years.

July 13, 1738. We hear that Mr. Robert Bolton is expected to return and open a Dancing-School in this City, considerable Encouragement being given him for that Purpose.

July 27, 1738. We have the Pleasure of acquainting the World that the famous Chinese or Tartarian Plant, called *Ginseng*, is now discovered in this Province [colony], near Sasquehannah, from whence several whole Plants with a Quantity of the Root have been lately sent to Town, and it appears to agree most exactly with the Description given of it in Chambers's Dictionary, and Père du Halde's Account of China. The Virtues ascrib'd to this Plant are wonderful.

March 22, 1739. We hear that, Tuesday Night last, a young Dutchman was married to an old Dutchwoman, who was known to have Money. They had a Fiddle at the Wedding, and when the Bride was about to Dance, the Bridegroom told her he was oblig'd to go out a little Way and would return in a short Time. She danc'd 'till it was late and then. he not appearing, she went to look for him in the BedChamber; where she found to her great Surprize that he had been and taken away her Money, and he has not since been heard of.

May 31, 1739. Yesterday one James Johnson met a Man riding into Town, who (in Company with another Man, not yet taken) robb'd him in his Journey from North Carolina to this Place of upwards of *Three Hundred Pounds*, Carolina Money, and a Note for *Fifty Pounds Sterling*, and laid hold of him. The Highwayman [robber] beg'd not to be expos'd, and pretended he had marry'd a rich Widow in Town, and would immediately refund the Money, if the other would go with him to his House. On this Pretence he led him to the outside of the Town, then leap'd on his Horse and made his Escape down to the Lower-Ferry, but finding himself closely pursued, and the Boat not ready to go over, he made into the Neck, where he was taken some Hours after and, after an Examination before a Magistrate, committed to Prison.

June 14, 1739. We are assur'd that the Man now in Prison in this City for a Robbery committed in Carolina is the same who, under various Names, had been guilty of a great Number of Cheats and Rogueries in this and the neighbouring Provinces for several Years past.

October 4, 1739. This Gazette Numb. 564 begins the 11th Year since its first Publication; And whereas some Persons have taken it from the Beginning, and others for 7 or 8 Years, without paying me one Farthing, I do hereby give Notice to all who are upwards of one Year in Arrear, that if they do not make speedy Payment, I shall discontinue the Papers to them, and take some proper Method of Recovering my Money.

B. Franklin

n.b. No new Subscriber will be taken in for the future without Payment for the first half Year advanc'd.

November 8, 1739. Last Week the Rev. Mr. Whitefield⁴ landed from London at Lewes-Town in Sussex County, where he preach'd; and arrived in this City on Friday Night, on Sunday, and every Day since he has preach'd in the Church: And on Monday he designs [plans] (God willing) to set out for New-York and return hither the Week after, and then proceed by Land thro' Maryland, Virginia and Carolina to Georgia.

November 15, 1739. On Thursday last, the Rev. Mr. Whitefield began to preach from the Court-House Gallery in this City, about six at Night, to near 6000 People before him in the Street, who stood in an awful Silence to hear him; and this continued every Night 'till Sunday. On Monday he set out for New-York and was to preach at Burlington in his Way going, and in Bucks County coming back. Before he returns to England he designs (God willing) to preach the Gospel in every Province [colony] in America belonging to the English. On Monday the 26th he intends to set out for Annapolis [Maryland].

March 27, 1740. Some unforeseen Accidents have a little retarded the Publication of the Rev. Mr. Whitefield's Sermons and Journals. The Work is however in great Forwardness, and Notice will be given in this Paper when they are finish'd and ready to be deliver'd to Subscribers.⁵

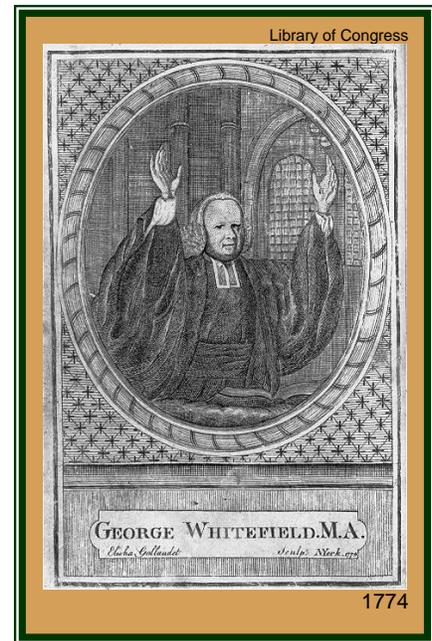
May 1, 1740. Since Mr. Whitefield's Preaching here, the Dancing School, Assembly and Concert Room have been shut up, as inconsistent with the Doctrine of the Gospel; And though the Gentlemen concern'd caus'd the Door to be broke open again, we are inform'd that no Company came the last Assembly Night.⁶

May 22, 1740. [Advertisement] Notice is hereby given to all Persons that there is come to Town a very Wonderful and surprizing Creature to all Persons in these Parts of the World; and it is in Scripture the very same Creature, which is there called a *Camel*. It is impossible to describe the Creature, and therefore all Persons of ingenious Curiosity have an Opportunity of Satisfying themselves.

The Creature was brought with great Difficulty from the Deserts of Arabia, in that Quarter of the World which is called Asia, to New-England; a Curiosity which never was in this Country and very likely never will be again.

Constant Attendance will be given to all Persons desirous of seeing said Creature at the House of Owen Owen, Esq. at the Sign of the Indian King in Philadelphia.

July 24, 1740. Statement of Editorial Policy [excerpt]. It is a Principle among Printers that when Truth has fair Play, it will always prevail over Falsehood. Therefore, though they have an undoubted Property in their own Press, yet they willingly allow that anyone is entitled to the Use of it who thinks it necessary to offer his Sentiments on disputable Points to the Publick, and will be at the Expence of it. If what is thus publish'd be good, Mankind has the Benefit of it. If it be bad (I speak now in general without any design'd Application to any particular Piece whatever) the more 'tis made publick, the more its Weakness is expos'd, and the greater Disgrace falls upon the Author, whoever he be; who is at the same Time depriv'd of an Advantage he would otherwise without fail make use of, viz. [namely] of Complaining, *that Truth is suppress'd, and that he could say mighty Matters, had he but the Opportunity of being heard.* . . .



⁴ Rev. George Whitefield, the English evangelist whose lengthy dramatic open-air sermons were the most publicized revivals of the Great Awakening.

⁵ Franklin published many of Whitefield's sermons delivered during his tours of the colonies.

⁶ In response to Whitefield's revivals, many entertainment businesses were closed in response to colonists' demands.

October 30, 1740. [Advertisement]

Thomas Godfrey Proposes during the Winter Season, to teach Navigation, Astronomy, and other Parts of the Mathematicks, at his House in Second-Street.

November 27, 1740. On Sunday the 16th Instant, the Rev. Mr. Whitefield preach'd his Farewell-Sermon and collected about £100 Sterl[ing]. for the Orphan-House in Georgia. He had been in Town eight Days, and preach'd 16 times in the New Building, besides private Exhortations, &c. The next Morning he set out in order to preach in

several Places on both sides the River, and then embark for Georgia on board the Sloop *Savannah*, which went down the River on Monday last, expecting to meet him at Reedy-Island or Lewes-Town.

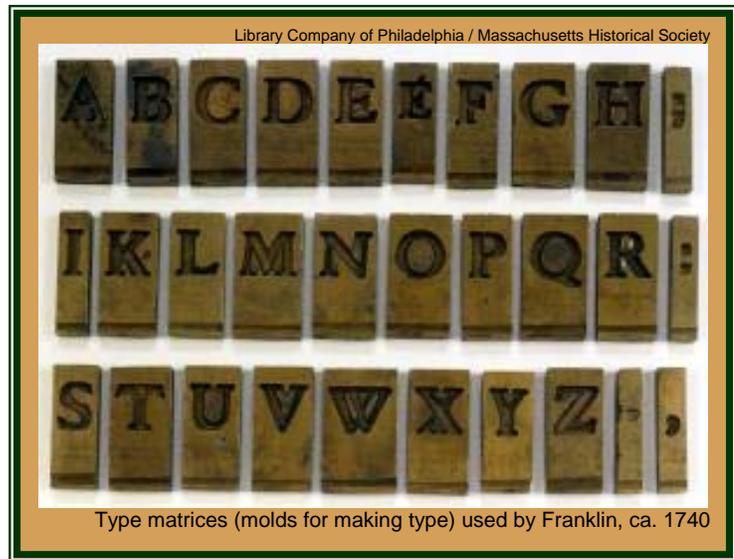
November 27, 1740. The Rev. Mr. Whitefield, having taken up 5000 Acres of Land on the Forks of Delaware in the Province of Pennsylvania in order to erect a Negro School there, and to settle a Town thereon with his Friends; all Persons who please to contribute to the said School, may pay their Contributions to Mr. Benezet, Merchant, in Philadelphia, Mr. Noble at New-York, Mr. Gilbert Tennent in New-Brunswick, New-Jersey, or to the Printer of this Paper.

March 26, 1741. Tuesday last Mr. William Logan, eldest Son of the Honourable James Logan Esq., was married to Mrs. Hannah Emlen, a young Lady of Beauty, Merit and Fortune.

April 9, 1741. We hear from Lancaster County [Pennsylvania] that, during the Continuance of the great Snow which in general was more than three Foot deep, great Numbers of the back [frontier] Inhabitants suffer'd much for want of Bread; that many Families of New Settlers for some time had little else to subsist them but the Carcasses of Deer they found dead or dying in the Swamps or Runns about their Houses; and although they had given all their Grain to their Cattle, many Horses and Cows are dead, and the greatest Part of the Gangs in the Woods are dead; that the Deers which could not struggle through the Snow to the Springs are believed to be all dead, and many of those which did get into the Savannahs are also dead, ten, twelve and fifteen being found in the Compass of a few Acres of Land. The Indians fear the Winter has been so fatal to the Deer, Turkeys, &c. in these Northern Parts, that they will be scarce for many Years. We also hear that a young Woman in Derry Township, attempting to get Home (about a Mile), as soon as she came within sight of her Father's House turned out the Horse which she had borrow'd of her Neighbour, as he directed her; but not being able to make Way through the Snow, she threw off her Clothes and attempted to return on the Horse's Footing; but after much struggling, as appear'd by her Tracks, she froze to Death.

December 3, 1741. Sunday Night last, Count Zinzendorff arrived here from New-York, attended by some of the Moravian Brethren, who are, with a considerable Number more expected in the Spring, to be settled at Nazareth on the Forks of Delaware.

February 24, 1742. On Saturday last, William Bullock was committed to the Goal [jail] of this City on Suspicion of having been the Occasion of the Death of his Negro Boy, about 8 Years old, by beating and whipping him at sundry Times. The Coroner's Inquest, upon view of the Body, were of Opinion the Injuries the said Boy had receiv'd from his Master, were the Cause of his Death.



March 10, 1742. On Monday last, at a Court of Oyer and Terminer held here . . . William Bullock was . . . tried for killing his Negro Boy, and found Guilty.

April 29, 1742. Yesterday William Bullock received Sentence of Death for the Murder of his Negro Boy.

June 17, 1742. [Advertisement] Stray'd, about two Months ago, from the Northern Liberties of this City, a small bay Mare, branded IW on the near Shoulder and Buttock. She being but little and barefooted, cannot be supposed to be gone far Therefore if any of the Town-boys find her and bring her to the Subscriber, they shall, for their Trouble, have the Liberty to ride her when they please, from
William Franklin / Philad. June 17. 1742. [June 17]

December 14, 1742. Whereas Mary, the Wife of Richard Leadame, hath misused her said Husband, and doth run him in debt unnecessarily, this is to warn all Persons against trusting her on his Account, for he will not pay any Debts she shall contract after the Date hereof.
Phila. Dec. 14. 1742. / Richard Leadame

December 21, 1742. Friend Benjamin Franklin, I desire thee to stop the Advertisement in thy last Week's Paper, concerning my Wife, and Print to the Contrary, that my Friends may give her Credit on my Account as usual. I acknowledge I had no Reason to do what I have done: For what I did was entirely thro' others' Persuasions, and my own Passion.
Richard Leadame

December 29, 1743. A Blazing Star or Comet was discovered here the Beginning of this Week. It appears in the West, and may be seen from Sunset to near Midnight.

