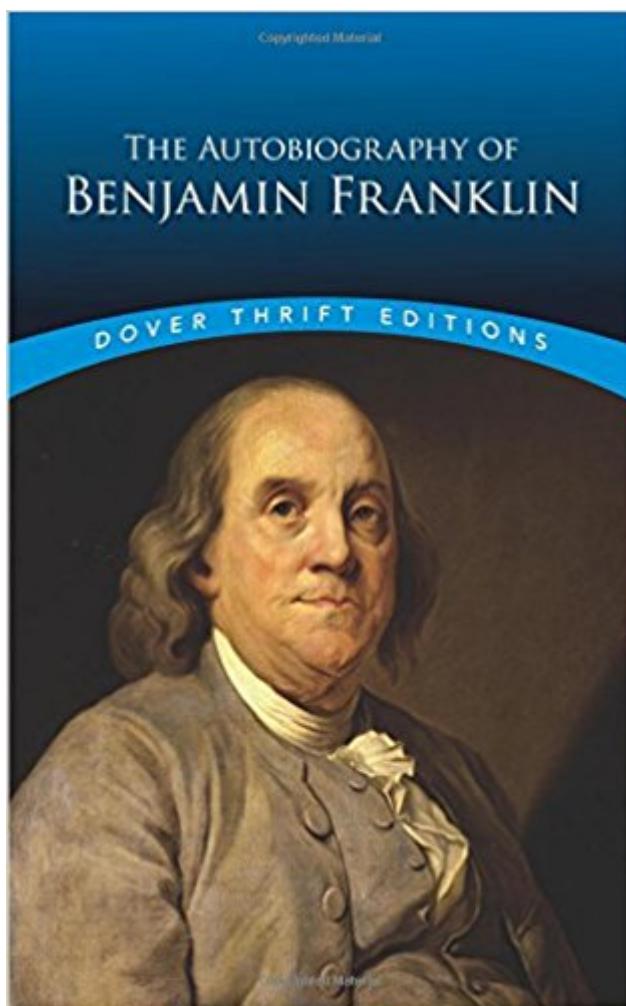


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The Autobiography Of Benjamin Franklin (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

Blessed with enormous talents and the energy and ambition to go with them, Franklin was a statesman, author, inventor, printer, and scientist. He helped draft the Declaration of Independence and later was involved in negotiating the peace treaty with Britain that ended the Revolutionary War. He also invented bifocals, a stove that is still manufactured, a water-harmonica, and the lightning rod. Franklin's extraordinary range of interests and accomplishments are brilliantly recorded in his Autobiography, considered one of the classics of the genre. Covering his life up to his prewar stay in London as representative of the Pennsylvania Assembly, this charming self-portrait recalls Franklin's boyhood, his determination to achieve high moral standards, his work as a printer, experiments with electricity, political career, experiences during the French and Indian War, and more. Related in an honest, open, unaffected style, this highly readable account offers a wonderfully intimate glimpse of the Founding Father sometimes called "the wisest American."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Compelling, instructional and inspiring. It is obvious that Morgan has done his homework. -- (Blue Ridge Business Journal) | Named a Best Book of 2002 -- (Salt Lake City Tribune) | Thanks to Morgan's amiable biography we meet Franklin and track his love of the British Empire and his eventual disillusionment. -- (Salt Lake City Tribune) | [Morgan] writes with the discipline of someone who commands far more detail than he has allowed himself to impart. --(George Fetherling, Vancouver Sun) --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Also available by Edmund S. Morgan: Benjamin Franklin --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

It's a little presumptuous to write a "review" of a book as historically important as this, so I'll just give a few reasons why you should read it. It's well-written and engaging, even 200+ (nearing 300+; Franklin was born in 1706) years later. It stops in 1760, well before his involvement with the Revolution, but it covers in detail his youth, apprenticeships, the formation of his philosophy and ideals, and his path from poor roots to business and social success -- the first telling of the American Dream, the idea that a poor young man could Find His Fortune in the New World through enterprise, wisdom, and work. There is a high degree of self-hagiography here, and it would be amusing to tally up (for example) how many times Franklin praises himself vs. how many times he advises on the virtue of humility. He smooths over controversial topics like his illegitimate son, he doesn't mention his membership in the Freemasons, etc. The construction is also a bit rambling ("Then I did this thing. Next, I did another thing. Then I did a third thing"), but Franklin simply did so many interesting things -- even in this short slice of his life -- that the book is interesting despite that. There's a great deal of discussion on his scientific and inventive accomplishments, and he talks at length about his development of his own personal moral code and how he achieved business success (along with Franklin's Personal Method You Can Use for Self-Improvement -- in some ways, this is the first self-help book!) All in all, this is very much worth reading, and gives a compelling picture of Franklin's life and times. I particularly liked the picture Franklin draws of contemporary American society -- free, open, and small, with most people in most towns all knowing each other, and business opportunities are wide open for anyone with industry and pluck. I'm not sure how similar modern-day America still is to Franklin's Philadelphia, but it's certain that Franklin -- and this book -- helped set the image that we still *want* to believe America conforms to. And for that alone, it's worth reading. If you like this book, you might also be interested in reading Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, for another view of colonial-era America, or any of Mark Twain's nonfiction (*Life on the Mississippi*, *Roughing It*, etc.), for similar accounts of America's growth and development a hundred-odd years further on. Any of those should be available as a free Kindle download.

This version of Franklin's autobiography (*The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, Volume One: 1706-1757*, ISBN 9781596980303) is edited by Mark Skousen. His main work was to "compleat" the autobiography, which Regnery publishing has made a volume two to this volume (*The Compleated*

Autobiography by Benjamin Franklin, Volume Two: 1757-1790) by piecing together Franklin's other pieces into a similar autobiographical form. Skousen doesn't do much annotating here. Just a few footnotes explaining old terms (what's an "eleve"?) and adding a few details to Franklin's text (like, editing a date or name here and there). There is a short and interesting introduction to the project, a "cast of characters," a chronology, and an index. Unlike the Skousen-edited Compleated Autobiography, there are no images. Read in tandem, these two volumes provide the classic Autobiography and the "compleation" in the same mode, even the same font and styling, which makes for a unified experience. It is well worth buying both if you can. As to the classic text of Franklin's Autobiography, what more can be said that already hasn't for a century. A story of pluck and determination. A story of hard work and humility. A story of virtue versus vice. A story of humor and wit. A story that encourages all the morals and values that made America great. You can see definitely why American children were made to read this all through the 1800s and early 1900s. It is a sort of shame that that is not the case now. Franklin's pragmatism, ecumenicism, public-mindedness, entrepreneurship, and *joie de vivre* is a story that should be told and emulated by all no matter their gender, age, creed, race, or color, i.e., by every American. In many ways Franklin is the quintessential American.

The book's material deals almost exclusively with the period of Franklin's life when he was still a loyal British subject, and does not cover the most interesting time of his personal history. It did contain some interesting background material. BF repeatedly implies that he wrestles with the tendency to self-aggrandize, but he is not much of a wrestler; he yields every time. His self assessments are painted in modesty, but it is a thin coat of paint. Clearly Mr. Franklin's most ardent admirer is Ben himself. He might have titled the book: "My Apotheosis". This book would be most useful to a Franklin student who has already read one or two comprehensive biographies of the man, and wants to supplement their understanding with an inside view.

Interesting insight into Benjamin Franklin. Decent to read even though the writing was done in the mid-1700's. Not a full description of his life by any means, but certainly helps you understand one of the great founding fathers. His thirst for knowledge, work ethic and honesty could be lessens that we teach our children. The book could be improved with a bit of modern editing, just adding a few paragraph breaks, printing a little larger and perhaps some added chapters would make the book easier to read.

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