

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (1706-90), c. 1850

Micali et fils (at work 1850-60)

marble

24 3/4 (h) (62.87)

Gift of Maria W. Barton, October 1867

Weis 60

Hewes Numbers: 54

Ex. Coll.: Purchased from the artist by Ira Moore Barton; to his widow, the donor.

Publisher, printer, philanthropist, inventor, scientist, inspirational writer, Benjamin Franklin was a thoughtful man of many accomplishments.<sup>1</sup> His life journey extended from Boston, where he was born in 1706, to Philadelphia where he moved in October 1723, to London and Paris, back to Philadelphia, and then more broadly onto national and international stages.

Unable to establish himself in printing in Philadelphia in his late teens, he went to London and in two years there learned the book trade while absorbing the culture of the metropolis. He returned to America and enjoyed exceptional success in the printing business, which he pursued until 1747.<sup>2</sup> In 1727 he established a debating club called Junto, which later became the American Philosophical Society, to extend his ideas of intercolonial networks that he developed through his printing and publishing experience; he was also instrumental in forming a city police force, fire company, circulating library, and city hospital. An avid scientist, he invented a freestanding iron fireplace in 1744 and in his famous kite experiment in 1746, proved that lightning and electricity are the same.

Some highlights among his myriad contributions to the public life of the colonies follow. He served as deputy post-master general for the colonies (1753), militia colonel (1755), agent in London for Pennsylvania and later, Massachusetts Bay (1757-62, 1766-75), member of the Second Continental Congress (1776), leader of the diplomatic mission to create a military

alliance with France (1778), signer of Peace of Paris (September 1783), and delegate to the Constitutional Convention in 1787.

Franklin is venerated for his position in the world of printing. Isaiah Thomas, Sr. (cat. 123 et seq.), in his The History of Printing in America, chronicled Franklin's life and offered one anecdote that described 'the spirit with which Franklin edited his paper.' He related how a writer brought a piece to be published in Franklin's Pennsylvania Gazette. Deeming the piece 'scurrilous and defamatory,' Franklin justified his decision to reject it by claiming that he had spent the night eating only bread and water and sleeping on the floor—as he discovered he could live in such a manner, he had no need to 'prostitute [his] press to the purposes of corruption, and abuse of this kind, for the sake of gaining a more comfortable subsistence.'<sup>3</sup> Such a response from Franklin typified his sense of humor as well as his sense of ethics.<sup>4</sup>

This bust of Franklin was acquired by Ira Moore Barton (1796-1867), a member of the American Antiquarian Society, who made the first of several trips to Italy in the spring of 1850. While abroad he collected works of art for both his home in Worcester and for the American Antiquarian Society.<sup>5</sup> Barton visited Leghorn (now Livorno), Italy, where he ordered this marble bust of Franklin from the workshop of H. Micali. The bust is based on the well-known sculpted likeness by French artist Jean-Jacques Caffieri (1725-92).<sup>6</sup> Workshops such as Micali et fils were a source of mass-produced images for the American tourist market, offering likenesses of famous historical figures at discounted prices. The Franklin bust, along with the likeness of George Washington (cat. 138), was displayed in Barton's home in Worcester until his death, after which his widow gave both busts to the American Antiquarian Society as a memorial to her husband.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dictionary of American Biography, s.v. 'Franklin, Benjamin.'

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<sup>2</sup> James N. Green, 'English Books and Printing in the Age of Franklin,' in David Hall and Hugh Amory, eds., The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World, vol. 1 of A History of the Book in America (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 248-71.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, Isaiah, The History of Printing in America (Barre, Mass.: Imprint Society, 1970), 370.

<sup>4</sup> Other sources on Franklin include Edmund S. Morgan, Benjamin Franklin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); H. W. Brands, The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin (New York: Anchor Books, 2002); Leo Lemay, 'Benjamin Franklin: A Documentary History,' [www.english.udel.edu/lemay/franklin/](http://www.english.udel.edu/lemay/franklin/). A multivolume series of the papers of Benjamin Franklin is in preparation as a collaboration between Yale University and the American Philosophical Society.

<sup>5</sup> Ira Moore Barton to Samuel Foster Haven, February 4, 1853, reprinted in Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society (April 1853): 15-17. In 1853 Barton presented the Society with two Italian portraits, thought at the time to depict Amerigo Vespucci (Weis 130) and Christopher Columbus (Weis 36). The sitter in the latter is now known to be Gian Galeazzo Sanvitale.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Coleman Sellers, Benjamin Franklin in Portraiture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 16, 20, 117-19.

<sup>7</sup> Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society (October 1867): 13-14.