

# Benjamin Franklin

by [Michael E. Marotta](#)

Benjamin Franklin was born on January 17, 1706 in Boston Massachusetts. Franklin's busy life was devoted to science, invention, and diplomacy. He also influenced the first official coins of the United States of America.

Among all of the great people who helped shape our nation, no other person is quite as symbolic of America's colonial virtues as Benjamin Franklin. He was a printer in a time when people were expressing new ideas. His famous "Poor Richard's Almanac" cited many quotations, some of which Franklin created himself. He experimented with electricity and he invented bifocal lenses for glasses. He was enthusiastic about the world's first hot air balloon flights. Franklin typified the optimistic, hard-working and thrifty colonial settler of the new world.

When the time came to design coins for the new republic, Franklin was totally opposed to using the likeness or image of any person. Instead, he offered a sundial and the Latin word "Fugio" for "I fly" to mean that time flies. The other phrase on these first coins was not E Pluribus Unum or In God We Trust but somewhat more direct and colloquial advice: Mind Your Business.

With characteristic insight Franklin suggested that the coins of the United States should change often to make them more interesting and collectible.

Franklin also said that the eagle was a predator, a hunter of the helpless, and so it was unsuited to stand for our country.

This makes it ironic that from 1948 to 1963, Benjamin Franklin's likeness appeared in the American half dollar and on the reverse -- as mandated by Congress -- was the eagle.