



Poor Richard's Almanack

Benjamin Franklin (1705 - 1790)

Read by:	Michelle Fry	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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Poor Richard's Almanack was a yearly almanac published by Benjamin Franklin using the pseudonym Richard Saunders, the "Poor Richard" of the title. Almanacs offered an amalgam of weather forecasts, sunrises, sunsets, phases of the moon, and tides along with household tips, puzzles and other amusements. Both useful and entertaining, they were immensely popular, and none more so than Franklin's, which sold quite well, as many as 10,000 copies per year, and made him a wealthy man. Published for 25 years between 1732 and 1758, the pamphlet was known for its wordplay and extensive sprinkling of witty and wise sayings throughout, many of which have found their way into the American vernacular. Some 690 of these aphorisms and sayings are collected here.

Born one of ten children in Boston, Benjamin Franklin attended Boston Latin School but did not graduate. He continued his self-education through voracious reading. At age 12 he was apprenticed to his brother James, a printer. When his brother declined to print a letter from young Franklin, he responded by submitting anonymous pieces under the pseudonym of Mrs. Silence Dogood, a middle-aged widow, which were published and became popular. The discovery of his authorship led to the first of several differences with his brother, which led to his leaving his apprenticeship and being forced to seek employment outside of Boston.

He landed in Philadelphia and was employed by a local merchant before returning to the printing trade. He became the successful publisher of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, which gave him a forum to express his opinions and the capital to underwrite newspaper operations for other colonial printers. In doing so he established the first newspaper chain. He established *Poor Richard's Almanack* in 1733. Writing under the pseudonym Richard Saunders, the pieces written for the almanac established his mature voice and style. He was both a moral philosopher and a student of topical satire of the sort found in *The Spectator*. He believed that the press had a moral duty to instruct colonial America in moral virtue, and his writings manage to convey moral truths with a humor, wit and humility uniquely American.

Franklin's activity as a printer, publisher, and writer brought him wealth, social standing and the freedom to use his extraordinary talents in new areas. His many activities influencing the independence of the colonies and the birth of the republic are well known, yet these are only the last in an extraordinary life of accomplishments far too numerous to mention here. He established the first lending library. He established one of the first volunteer fire fighting companies. He freed his slaves. He became the deputy postmaster of North America and reformed the postal system. With Dr. Thomas Bond he established the first hospital. With two others he established a new model for university education, focusing on the professions, which became the University of Pennsylvania. He invented the Franklin stove, still in use today. His study of electricity led to the concepts of positive and negative charges and electrical ground, which led to the invention of the lightning rod and made Franklin a celebrity throughout Europe.

Several other discoveries are less well known but no less influential. Franklin's studies of population underscored the importance of abundant farmland and food, predicted America's growth and directly influenced both Adam Smith and Thomas Malthus. He published the first chart of the Gulf Stream in which would later shave two weeks from the trip from England to America. He was the first to make decisions using the "Pro and Con" method.