

# Colonial Printer

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## 13 Colonies Navigation

This page describes the work of a colonial printer. Did you know that Benjamin Franklin was one of the most successful printers in the Colonial America before becoming involved in politics?

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## Trades

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Colonial printers printed books, newspapers, pamphlets and other publications. Their shops sometimes served as mail centers as well. Printers who printed newspapers bought their paper from a paper mill and made the ink in their shops. Paper was made from linen and cloth and ink was made from tannin, iron sulfate, gum, and water.

Printing a publication such a newspaper was a comprehensive and complicated task. First, the type was set. A type was a single piece of metal with a letter, number, or point of punctuation. Setting the time was a taxing, cumbersome task. A single page of a colonial newspaper could take up to 25 hours of labor to produce. The type setting process was done by an employee or apprentice of the printer known as the compositor. An inking pad or "beater" was used to spread the ink over the type. The type would be arranged and held with an apparatus called a composing stick. The stone was a large flat surface that held the work to be printed, and the press was the machine that transferred the arranged lettering to a page. The press itself functioned by squeezing the paper against the arranged type with about 200 pounds of pressure to ensure the ink was deposited boldly and evenly on the paper. The paper was then set aside to dry before the other side was printed.

Among the most famous of colonial printers was Benjamin Franklin, who published newspapers and books from his printing press in Philadelphia. One of Franklin's most famous publications was called Poor Richard's Almanac, a book of predictions, information, and advice, in which popular sayings were first published such as "a penny saved is a penny earned" and "three may keep a secret if two of them are dead."

