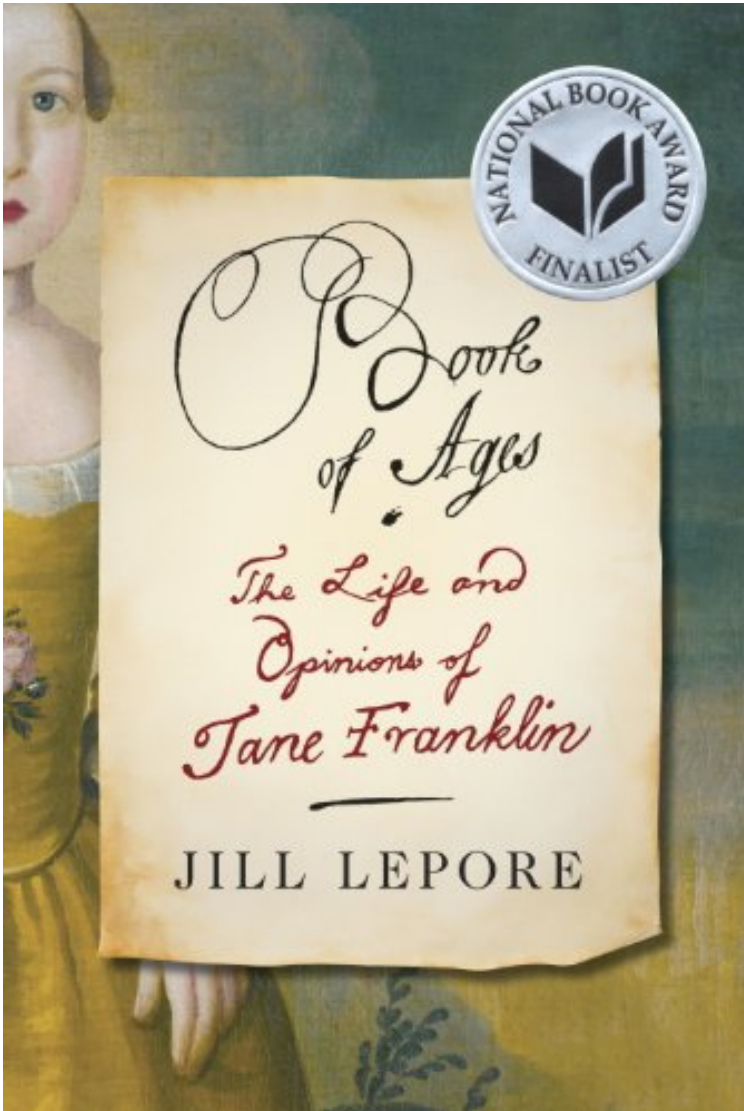


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# Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin



*Par Jill Lepore*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurNational Book Award FinalistFrom one of our most accomplished and widely admired historians, a revelatory portrait of Benjamin Franklins youngest sister and a history of history itself. Like her brother, Jane Franklin was a passionate reader, a gifted writer, and an astonishingly shrewd political commentator. Unlike him, she was a mother of twelve.Benjamin Franklin, who wrote more letters to his sister than he wrote to anyone else, was the original American self-made man; his sister spent her life caring for her children. They left very different traces behind. Making use of an amazing cache of little-studied material, including documents, objects, and portraits only just discovered, Jill Lepore brings Jane Franklin to

life in a way that illuminates not only this one woman but an entire world a world usually lost to history. Lepores life of Jane Franklin, with its strikingly original vantage on her remarkable brother, is at once a wholly different account of the founding of the United States and one of the great untold stories of American history and letters: a life unknown. From the Hardcover edition. Extrait Chapter VII Bookry, Cookry She learned to bake and to roast, to mend and to scrub. She learned to sew and to knit. She helped her mother tend the garden. She learned to dye.<sup>1</sup> She helped her father in the shop, doing the work that her brother hated, cutting Wick for the Candles, filling the Dipping Mold, and the Molds for cast Candles.<sup>2</sup> What more could she study? A Boston newspaper printed A Dialogue between a thriving Tradesman and his Wife about the Education of Their Daughter. The wife wishes to send the girl to school. The husband refuses, telling her: Prithee, good Madam, let her first be able, To read a Chapter truly, in the Bible, That she maynt mispronounce Gods People, Popel, Nor read Cunstable for Constantinople; Make her expert and ready at her Prayers, That God may keep her from the Devils Snares; Teach her whats useful, how to shun deluding, To roast, to toast, to boil and mix a Pudding. To knit, to spin, to sew, to make or mend, To scrub, to rub, to earn and not to spend, I tell thee Wife, once more, Ill have her bred To Bookry, Cookry, Thimble, Needle, Thread.<sup>3</sup> That Jane Franklin learned to write as well as she did was a twist of fate: she was her brothers sister. Mostly, she learned other things. She was bred to bookery and cookery, needle and thread. She learned how to make soap. She once wrote down the family recipe. In a wooden box with a hole bored in the bottom and set over a tub filled with bricks, soak eighteen bushels of ashes and one bushel of lime with water. Leach lye. Then, in a copper pot, boil the lye with wax won third mirtle wax two thirds clean tallow the Greener the wax the beter, she wrote and keep it from boiling over by flirting the froith with a scimer. Stir in salt. Be carefull not to Put too much salt in it will make it Britle. Line a mold with a cloth (not too coars) and pour in the boiling soap: keep it smoth on the top take care to let your Frame stand on a Level let care be taken when it is in that it Is not Jogd. Let it set overnight, and in the morning cut it with a small wier fixed to a round stick at Each End. Use a gauge to make sure each cake is of equal weight and, if not, Pare it fitt.<sup>4</sup> She lived a life of confinement. She never learned to ride. (I hant courage to ride a hors, she once admitted.)<sup>5</sup> If she left the city, it was with her mother, by boat, to visit the Folgers on Nantucket, where she played with her cousin Keziah.<sup>6</sup> She spent her Sundays at the Old South Meeting House, listening to mens voices thundering from the pulpit. She ran errands, to the shops, to the docks, and to Jamess printing house, to visit her brothers. She visited her married sisters and helped care for their children, or they for her: some of her nieces and nephews were older than she was. She loved best her niece Grace.<sup>7</sup> Most days she spent at home, close to the fire. She was curious, and she could be untoward. But she was dutiful. She was pared to fit. A girls apprenticeship was girlhood itself. A boys apprenticeship was a trade. In 1717, when Jane was five, her brother James came back from England and set up a printing shop in Boston, over against the Prison in Queen Street.<sup>8</sup> It was a godsend. Here at last was a trade for Benjamin, the bookish boy too poor to go to Harvard. In 1718, he became his brothers apprentice: a printers devil. He moved into a room above Jamess shop. Benny was twelve; Jenny was six. The best part of his apprenticeship, Franklin always said, was the chance it gave him to read. At the Blue Ball, he had only ever found in his fathers library a few books he liked: Plutarchs Lives, a Book of Defoes called an Essay on Projects and another of Dr. Mathers calld Essays to do Good. But working at a printers shop was almost as good as working at a bookshop. I now had Access to better Books, he remembered. An Acquaintance with the Apprentices of Booksellers, enabled me sometimes to borrow a small one, which I was careful to return soon and clean. Often I sat up in my Room reading the greatest Part of the Night.<sup>9</sup> Jane Colman read all night long, too. Her fathers house was stocked with books. She read all the English Poetry, and polite Pieces in Prose, printed and Manuscripts in her Fathers well furnishd Library, and much she borrowd of her Friends and Acquaintance. She had indeed such a Thirst after Knowledge that the Leisure of the Day did not suffice, but she spent whole Nights in reading.<sup>10</sup> Jane Franklin enjoyed neither the leisure of a ministers daughter nor the library of a printers apprentice. What books she read were what books she found in the house of a poor soap boiler. My Fathers little Library consisted chiefly of Books in polemic Divinity, her brother had written. Her world of learning widened so far, and no farther. Her brother resolved to be his own tutor. Determined to become a good writer, he trained himself by reading. The boy who wanted to become the author of his own life taught himself to write by copying the prose style he found in the Spectator. I thought the Writing excellent, and wishd if possible to imitate it, he explained. He read an essay, wrote an abstract, and then rewrote the argument from the abstract, to see if he could improve on the original. Then he rewrote the essays as poems since, he thought, nothing acquaints a Lad so speedily with Variety of Expression, as the Necessity of finding such Words and Phrases as will suit with the

Measure, Sound and Rhime of Verse, and at the same Time well express the Sentiment. He wrote rules, pledging himself to brevity (a multitude of Words obscure the Sense), clarity (To write clearly, not only the most expressive, but the plainest Words should be chosen), and simplicity: If a Man would that his Writings have an Effect on the Generality of Readers, he had better imitate that Gentleman, who would use no Word in his Works that was not well understood by his Cook-maid. His cook-maid . . . or his little sister. Prose Writing has been of great Use to me in the Course of my Life, Franklin knew, and was a principal Means of my Advancement. He would write his way up, and out.<sup>11</sup> Reading, he grew skeptical of his familys faith.

The more books he read, the less he believed the Bible. I was scarce 15, he remembered, when, after doubting by turns of several Points as I found them disputed in the different Books I read, I began to doubt of Revelation itself. He discovered, too, that he liked to argue. My indiscrete Disputations about Religion began to make me pointed at with Horror by good People, as an Infidel or Atheist. He especially liked to debate, like University Men, with another Bookish Lad in the Town, John Collins by Name. They once debated the Propriety of educating the Female Sex in Learning, and their Abilities for Study. Young Collins was of Opinion that it was improper and that girls were naturally unequal to it. Franklin disagreed: I took the contrary Side, perhaps a little for Disputes sake.<sup>12</sup> In crafting his argument, Franklin leaned on Defoes Essay on Projects, one of the few books in his fathers library that he liked. Defoe had proposed the establishment of an Academy for Women: I have often thought of it as one of the most barbarous Customs in the world, consider- ing us as a Civilised and a Christian Countrey, that we deny the advantages of Learning to Women. Like Astell, Defoe regretted the frivolousness of girls education: Their youth is spent to teach them to Stitch and Sew, or make Bawbles. They are taught to Read indeed, and perhaps to Write their Names, or so; and that is the height of a Womans Education. His Academy for Women was to embrace every subject:

To such whose Genius woud lead them to it, I woud deny no sort of Learning.<sup>13</sup> But, for all his Defoe, Franklin didnt win the argument. Collins, he admitted, was naturally more eloquent, had a ready Plenty of Words, and sometimes . . . bore me down more by his Fluency than by the Strength of his Reasons. They parted without settling the question and continued the debate by letters. Three or four Letters of a Side had passd, Franklin wrote, when my Father happend to find my Papers, and read them. Without entering into the

Discussion, he took occasion to talk to me about the Manner of my Writing, observd that tho I had the Advantage of my Antagonist in correct Spelling and pointing (which I owd to the Printing House) I fell far short in elegance of Expression, in Method and in Perspicuity.<sup>14</sup> Spelling and pointing (punctuating) were genteel accomplishments; they date to the rise of printing. People used to spell however they pleased, even spelling their own names differently from one day to the next. Then came the printing press, and rules for printers: how to spell, how to point. More books meant more readers; more readers meant more writers. But only the learned, only the lettered, knew how to spell. Franklin was a better speller than his friend Collins, and he could point better, too, but Collins proved a better debater. Be more precise, Josiah urged his son. Be plainer. On the question itself, he did not venture an opinion. While Benny was improving his writing by arguing about the education of girls, Jenny was at home, boiling soap and stitching. Quietly, with what time she could find, she did more. She once confided to her brother, I Read as much as I Dare.<sup>15</sup> With all my own art good old unkle Benjamins memorandoms I cant make them good colors, JFM wrote to her brother in 1766, suggesting that, at least at that point, she had his book of memorandums, or recipes. JFM to BF, November 8, 1766. (And she certainly owned his books of poetry, one of which is inscribed with her name.)

The original of the recipe book is either lost or in private hands; all that survives is a transcription. See Dyeing and Coloring in Commonplace-Book of Benjamin Franklin (16501727), Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts 10 (1907): 20625.2. BF, Autobiography, 6. 3. A Dialogue between a thriving Tradesman and his Wife about the Education of Their Daughter, Boston Evening-Post, December 10, 1744.

4. She wrote the recipe down twice. (BF lost it; see Van Doren, Letters, 129.) JFM, For Making Crown Soap, 1772, in Letters, 13032. And JFM, Recipe for Crown Soap, 1786, PBF, unpublished. Im not certain that the dates assigned to these recipes are especially plausible. The first seems to have been written down after the death of John Franklin, to whom JFM must have been referring when she wrote, My Brother in His Life time tould me it could not be conveyd by Receipt (that is, that you couldnt write down this recipe; you needed to learn by doing). The original is Jane Franklin Mecom, Recipe for Crown Soap, n.d., Hays Calendar IV, 376, Franklin Papers, vol. 58, folio 19. Van Doren credited the invention of crown soap to John Franklin, without any substantiation. But as Huang has remarked, there is every reason to believe that Josiah, who trained his son, was involved in perfecting the soap (Franklins Father Josiah, 4345). And as Lemay argues, Abiah must have been involved (Life of BF, 1:56) and its highly probable that Jane was intimately

involved as well, which would also account for her subsequent frustration at her sons being kept out of the soap business. Jane herself gave some credit to her brother John. In one letter to Franklin, she refers to their brother John as the Inventor of crown soap, but in the same letter she explains that he had nearly as much difficulty getting it right as she did. The Labour is Grate, the operation critical, the Exact knolidg not to be attained without Expearance, my Brother Him self tould me it workd some times not to his mind in a way he could not account for (JFM to BF, December 29, 1780). When sending her own soap to Franklin in 1786, and apologizing that it wasnt exactly as fine as she had hoped, she wrote, I beleve my Brother John Perfectly understood the Exact proportion that would do best (JFM to BF, May 29, 1786). Yet this letter does not place John so far above herself, as a soap boiler; instead, it substantiates an argument that she and her brother knew very well how to make soap even if, at the age of sixty-four, she was having a hard time remembering the exact proportions to use.<sup>5</sup> JFM to BF, September 12, 1779. <sup>6</sup> Keziah Folger was born on Nantucket on October 9, 1723, when Jane was eleven. Keziahs father, Daniel Folger, was Abiah Folger Franklins cousin, and her mother, Abigail Folger, was actually another cousin of Abiah Folger Franklins. Useful information about Keziah Folger Coffin was gathered by Jared Sparks in the 1830s. In 1838, William Folger of Nantucket wrote to Sparks, about Franklin, that her parents being so nearly related to each other the Doctor used to say, that he considered Kezia as an own cousin. Jared Sparks, Papers sent to me by William C. Folger, of Nantucket. Relating to Franklin in Papers relating chiefly to Franklin. Used in writing his Life, 1839, Sparks Papers, MS Sparks 19, Houghton Library, Harvard University. (The papers are filed by manuscript number; all further references to the Sparks Papers in Houghton Library supply this reference number.) Sparks also visited Nantucket, in 1826; see his diary entry for October 10, 1826, in MS Sparks 141c. Keziah Folger married John Coffin in 1746. She and Jane remained close until the American Revolution. Franklin also corresponded with Keziah, though much less frequently, it appears, than Jane did. On Keziah Folger Coffin, see Nathaniel Philbrick, *Away Off Shore: Nantucket Island and Its People*, 16021890 (Nantucket: Mill Hill Press, 1994), 12333, and Betsy Tyler, *Sometimes Think of Me: Notable Nantucket Women Through the Centuries* (Nantucket: Nantucket Historical Association, 2010), 1117. No scholar has yet investigated the ties between the Coffins and the Mecoms. William C. Folgers notes from which he compiled the information he sent to Sparks can be found in William C. Folger, *Minutes from which my letter to Jared Sparks was Compiled and from which the account of the Folgers in Sparks [sic] Life of Franklin is derived*, Peter Foulger (16181690), Folder 34, Folger Family Papers, Nantucket Historical Association Research Library.<sup>7</sup> Grace Harris was born on August 3, 1718, the daughter of Janes sister Anne and her husband William Harris of Ipswich (PBF, 1:lvii). In 1746, Grace Harris married Jonathan Williams of Boston. Janes friendship with Grace lasted until Graces death in March 1790, and Jane was close to all of the Williams children.<sup>8</sup> Lemay, *Life of BF*, 1:56. On James Franklin as a dyer, see Lemay, *Life of BF*, 1:5657.<sup>9</sup> BF, *Autobiography*, 9, 10. Ebenezer Turell, *Memoirs of the Life and Death of . . . Mrs. Jane Turell*, 25.<sup>11</sup> BF, *Autobiography*, 11, and BF, *Idea of the English School*, January 1751, PBF, 4:101. BF, *On Literary Style*, August 2, 1733, PBF, 1:328. BF, *Autobiography*, 10.<sup>12</sup> BF, *Autobiography*, 45, 11. <sup>13</sup> Daniel Defoe, *Essay on Projects* (London: R.R., 1697), 28283, 293.<sup>14</sup> BF, *Autobiography*, 11. <sup>15</sup> JFM to BF, October 21, 1784. This was when she was sixty-two.

Revue de presse\*\*The New York Times 100 Notable Books of 2013\*\*\*\*Barnes and Noble Best Books of 2013\*\*\*\*Kirkus Best Books of 2013\*\*\*\*Time Magazine#1 Nonfiction Book of 2013\*\*\*\*The Week Best Nonfiction Books of 2013\*\*Jane Franklins indomitable voice and hungry, searching intellect shine through these pages; she will not be forgotten, and the world is richer for it. Time Magazine, Top 10 Nonfiction Books of the YearLuminous.Lepore gives us a woman in the flesh, with no hints and hedges about what she must, or might, have felt.Jane emerges as witty, curious, and resilient in the face of unimaginable grief, yet she is not an unsung hero of the revolution, a forgotten Abigail Adams. Her importance, as Lepores portrait memorably shows, lies in her ordinarinessher learning thwarted by circumstance, but her intelligence shaped by her uniquely female experience. We may know about Jane Franklin only because of her famous brother, but he is not why she matters. Joanna Scutts, Washington PostAs she stitches together Janes story, Lepore gives us a side of Benjamin Franklin we have never seenan evocative look at what life was like for most 18th-century women. Tina Jordan, Entertainment WeeklyBook of Ages is the name of Lepores extraordinary new book about Jane Franklin, but to call it simply a biography would be like calling Bens experiments with electricity mere kite flying.The end product is thrillingan example of how a gifted scholar and writer can lift the obscure out of silence. In so doing, Lepore enriches our sense of everyday life and relationships and conversational styles in Colonial America. . . The brilliance of Lepores book is that plain Janes story becomes every bit as grippingand, in its own way,

importantas Big Bens public triumphs. Maureen Corrigan, NPRIn this beautifully written double biography, Lepore brings into focus not just the life of Jane Franklin Mecom, alongside that of her brother, but illuminates the dynamic era through which they lived and gives us a birds-eye view of history from the vantage point of a powerless woman who grew up in a Boston family alongside one of the 18th centurys greatest authors, entrepreneurs, scientists and statesmen. Remarkably, in the end Janes story comes to life; we know her or at least about her. But, in fact, we know her because her life is one that we recognize, perhaps better than that of her familiar brother. That is the brilliance of this book. . . . This lyrical and meditative book ranks familiarly as a history or biography, but is more than either. . . . It descends historiographically from Laurel Thatcher Ulrichs *A Midwifes Tale* as a classic and enduring tribute to an obscure woman, only this one also had a famous brother. Edith B. Gelles, *San Francisco Chronicle*Ms. Lepore is a fantastic historian, and meticulous research brings this portrait to life. . . . In the hands of a less accomplished writer, Jane Franklin might have appeared merely a pale shadow in contrast to her brothers accomplishments. But the portrait that emerges here is both frank and astute, an observant witness to the time. Madeleine Schwartz, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*To stare at these siblings is to stare at sun and moon. But in Jill Lepores meticulously constructed biography, *Book of Ages: The Life and Opinions of Jane Franklin*, recently placed on the long list of nominees for the National Book Award in nonfiction, this moon casts a beguiling glow. Consistently first rate. Dwight Garner, *The New York Times*This book is a tour de force that can only evoke admiration. Priscilla S. Taylor, *The Washington Times*Go read Jill Lepores *Book of Ages*. A biography of Jane Franklin, Benjamins sister, it is simultaneously a fascinating look at early America, a meditation on one remarkable mind by another, and, implicitly, a biography of all the other Janeshistories anonymous and overlooked women. Kathryn Schulz, *New York Magazine*It is uncanny how vividly personal, how vibrantly colored, Janes voice sounds from these pages . . . lets call it genius. Melissa H. Pierson, *The Barnes Noble Book of Ages* is an artful, serious, marvelous book. Lepore brings to it focus, intensity, and proud delight in her subject. Bob Blaisdell, *The Christian Science Monitor*Eloquent . . . deeply sensitive to language. Susan Dunn, *The New York of Books*Astonishing. . . . This is a work of meticulous reconstruction and high ambition. In *Book of Ages*, Lepore has lovingly resurrected [Jane Franklin]. Julia M. Klein, *The Boston Globe*A thoughtful and illuminating biography. *O Magazine*, *Ten Titles to Pick Up Now*By restoring Jane so vividly to the historical record, Lepore provides a fresh, personal perspective on Benjamin. And so extraordinarily demanding was her research, even the appendixes in Lepores vibrantly enlightening biography are dramatic. . . . Lepores stature grows with each book, and this first telling of a remarkable American story, supported by a national tour and generous print run, is destined for an even greater readership. Donna Seaman, *Booklist* (starred review)New Yorker writer Lepore masterfully formulates the story of Benjamin Franklins youngest sister, who will be virtually unknown to many readers, using only a few of her letters and a small archive of births and deaths. Jane Franklin was an amazing woman who raised her children and grandchildren while still having the time to read and think for herself. We can only see into her mind because her correspondent was famous and because a vastly talented biographer reassembled her for us. Kirkus (starred review)This book is an important, inspiring portrait of a determined and faith-filled woman who just happened to be the sister of a big shot. It will be enjoyed by all. *Library Journal* (starred review)This is a brilliant and delightful book! By weaving together the tales of Benjamin Franklin and his beloved little sister, Jill Lepore creates a richly-textured tapestry of life in early America. Deeply researched and passionately written, it brings us inside a poignant relationship between two lovable people who seemed so different but were also so connected. I devoured this book and will treasure it. Walter Isaacson, author of *Steve Jobs* *Book of Ages* is an ardently told life story, brimming with love and loss against a background of political strife and war. Jill Lepore opens a smeared casement on the life of Jane, Benjamin Franklin's gifted sister, confidante and life-long correspondent. While Benjamin was able to forge a path to greatness from his obscure beginnings, Jane, trapped by gender, starved of education, was not. The contrast between the two destinies is by turns captivating, enraging and profoundly moving. As Lepore sheds light on this one, unsung life, she brilliantly illuminates an entire era. Geraldine Brooks, author of *March* From scraps and whispers, Jill Lepore has resurrected Ben Franklin's youngest sister, the only relative who could truthfully say, "Every line from him was a pleasure." The subject is tailor-made for Lepore, as artful a writer as she is exact a scholar. She delivers two marvels at once: An authentic 18th century female voice, cheerful, inquisitive, and saucy, as well as an intimate portrait of Jane Franklin's revered brother himself. Stacy Schiff, author of *Cleopatra* This poetic and powerful diptych takes readers on a fascinating journey. With consummate skill, Lepore moves us beyond the story of a famous brother and his woebegone sister, instead bringing both

Benny and Jenny--and the relationship between them--to life. A book to ponder and prose to savor. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, author of *A Midwife's Tale* "With careful and ingenious research, Jill Lepore uncovers the surprising life of the obscure sister to a very famous man. This eloquent book reveals two remarkable siblings and their intertwined and revolutionary lives." Alan Taylor, author of *The Civil War of 1812*