

From: "Stuart Green" <stuartgreenmd@yahoo.com>
To: "Benjamin Franklin" <dr_benjamin_franklin@yahoo.com>
Subject: **Closing a long and useful life**

Dear Doctor Franklin:

As your health improves, you'll chuckle over your own death announcement. I've transcribed it for your amusement. This version appeared in John Fenno's *Gazette of the United States* within a few days of your encasement. To me, it seemed too detailed; I suspect that the author, Dr. John Jones, tried to persuade the public of its truthfulness, rather than be ridiculed for participating in your Madeira project. Here it is:

PHILADELPHIA, April 20, 1790

Died on Saturday night, in the 85th year of his age, the illustrious BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, of this city. His remains will be interred tomorrow afternoon, at four o'clock, in Christ Church burial ground.

We are favored with the following short account of Doctor Franklin's last illness, by his attending Physician.

THE stone, with which he has been afflicted for several years, had for the last twelve months, confined him chiefly to his bed; and during the extreme painful paroxysms, he was obliged to take large doses of laudanum to mitigate the tortures—still, in the intervals of pain, he not only amused himself with reading and conversing cheerfully with his family and a few friends, who visited him, but was often employed in doing business of a public as well as private nature, with various persons, who waited on him for that purpose; and in every instance displayed, not only that readiness and disposition of doing good, which was the distinguishing characteristic of his life, but the fullest and clearest possession of his uncommon mental abilities; and not frequently indulged himself in those *jeux d'esprits* and entertaining anecdotes, which were the delight of all who heard him.

About sixteen days before his death, he was seized with a feverish indisposition, without any particular symptoms attending it till the third or fourth day, when he complained of pain in the left breast, which increased until it became extremely acute, attended with a cough and laborious breathing. During this state, when the severity of his pains sometimes drew forth a groan of complaint, he would observe—that he was afraid he did not bear them as he ought—acknowledged the grateful sense of the many blessings he had received from that Supreme Being, who had raised him, from small and low beginnings, to such high rank and consideration among men—and made no doubt his present afflictions were kindly intended to wean him from a world, in which he was no longer fit to act the part assigned to him.

In this frame of body and mind he continued till five days before his death, when his pain and difficulty of breathing entirely left him, and his family were flattering themselves with the hopes of his recovery, when an imposthumation, which had formed itself in his lungs, suddenly burst, and discharged a great quantity of matter, which he continued to throw up while he had sufficient strength to do it, but, as that failed the organs of respiration became gradually

oppressed—a calm lethargic state succeeded—and on the 17th, at about 11 o'clock at night he quietly expired, closing a long and useful life of 84 years and three months.

It may not be amiss to add to the above account that Dr. Franklin, in the year 1735, had a severe pleurisy, which determined in an abscess of the left lobe of his lungs, and he almost suffocated with the quantity and suddenness of the discharge. A second attack of a similar nature happened some years after this, from which he soon recovered, and did not appear to suffer any inconvenience in his respiration from these diseases.



Masthead of John Fenno's newspaper

You can understand, I hope, my skepticism about your alleged final moments. It stuck me that no doctor would provide so many details about a death unless he was determined to embellish an untruth with vivid particulars to increase its veracity. (If I'm wrong about this, Sir, I'm on a fool's errand, writing to a dead person!)

Imposthumentation, by the way, is a word we no longer use. We'd say empyema (also employed in your time) to describe your lung condition. I'll tell you more about the cause of empyemas in a later email.

I hope you can easily read what I've written; I presume Dr. Jones left your double spectacles on your nose before encaskment. Since your eyeglasses will be the first item you see on revival, I'll tell you about eyewear development in my next email.