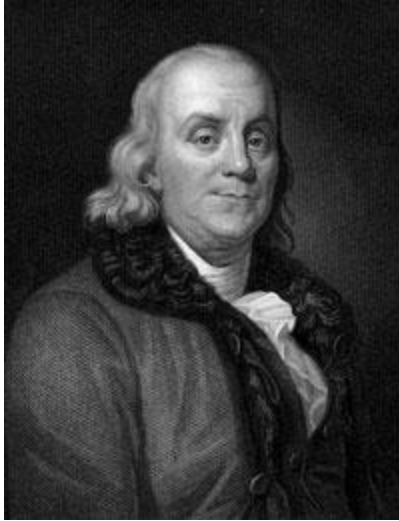


Benjamin Franklin



The name of Benjamin Franklin is usually associated with the early application of electric current for therapeutic purposes. Franklin is a well known American writer, publisher, scientist and diplomat, who helped to draw up the famous Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. In 1752 Franklin proved that lightning and the spark from amber were one and the same thing. The story of this famous milestone is a familiar one, in which Franklin fastened an iron spike to a silken kite, which he flew during a thunderstorm, while holding the end of the kite string by an iron key. When lightning flashed, a tiny spark jumped from the key to his wrist. The experiment proved Franklin's theory, but was extremely dangerous – He could easily have been killed.

In 1747, Franklin in America and William Watson (1715-87) in England independently reached the same conclusion: all materials possess a single kind of electrical “fluid” that can penetrate matter freely but that can be neither created nor destroyed. The action of rubbing merely transfers the fluid from one body to another, electrifying both. Franklin and Watson originated the principle of conservation of CHARGE: the total quantity of electricity in an insulated system is constant. Franklin defined the fluid, which corresponded to vitreous electricity, as positive and the lack of fluid as negative. Therefore, according to Franklin, the direction of flow was from positive to negative—the opposite of what is now known to be true. Franklin called the travel of electricity *positive current*, from which we get today the notion of something being “positive.” Yet, later the electron, the particle accountable for the movement of electricity was labeled to have a *negative charge* and thus conventions in science changed from positive electron flow, to negative flow. A subsequent two-fluid theory was developed, according to which samples of the same type attract, whereas those of opposite types repel. He further established that laboratory-produced static electricity was akin to a previously mysterious and terrifying natural phenomenon. When the Royal Society in London published these discoveries, and the lightning rods he soon invented appeared on buildings all over America and Europe, Franklin became world famous. He was elected to the Royal Society in 1756 and to the French Academy of Sciences in 1772. His later achievements included formulating a theory of heat absorption, measuring the Gulf Stream, designing ships, tracking storm paths, and inventing bifocal lenses. Franklin learned of results in German and Italy of the use of electroshock treatment for affected limbs. He treated many persons in his Pennsylvania home. On the whole, he considered his results disappointing, admitting he was not a physician. But due to his fame, many static machines were used in Europe for “franklinization”.

After Benjamin Franklin came a storm of Electrical Pioneers whose names have become part of our electrical terminology: Luigi Galvani, Alessandro Volta, Nikola Tesla, Andre Ampere, etc. These pioneers conducted many important electrical experiments and derived formulas for its manipulation, generation, and storage. Many others contributed significantly to medical electrotherapy, but their names, stories, and discoveries have largely been suppressed due to the

monopolistic conventions being established by the emerging corporate interests, as we shall see...

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