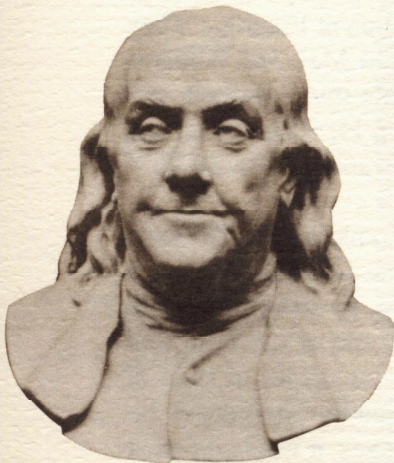


"Had I the power, I would
scatter libraries over the
whole land, as the sower
sows his wheat field."

— Horace Mann in *The Life
of Horace Mann* by Mary Peabody



Franklin, Massachusetts Town Meeting, November 26, 1790 – "Voted: Article II – That the Rev. Nathaniel Emmons be Directed to lend the Books presented to this town by the late Dr. Franklin to the Inhabitants of this town at large, and until the town shall order other ways, they being accountable to him for the use and improvement of said Books."

With that vote a long struggle between the strong-willed, overbearing Dr. Emmons and the citizens of Franklin came to an end, or more correctly, *nearly* to an end, for just a month later, on Christmas Eve, Dr. Emmons was to have the last word on *all* the books owned by the parish.

Four years earlier the Franklin Public Library had its origins in the donation of 116 books given by one of America's foremost patriots, Benjamin Franklin. That gift in turn had a strong influence on the life of the town's most famous son, Horace Mann, the father of American public education. Therefore, not only does Franklin have the first public library in America, it also can lay claim to being the only town whose fortunate choice of a name brought with it the *establishment* of a library for its citizens.

Books Instead of a Bell

In 1778 when Franklin was incorporated as a town separate from Wrentham, the first name chosen was Exeter. Before the final act of incorporation, however, someone (who it was is not known) changed the name in order to honor Benjamin Franklin. (News that Franklin had successfully negotiated an alliance with the French had recently reached the rebellious colonies. The defeat of Burgoyne at the Battle of Saratoga and the diplomatic efforts of Benjamin Franklin had convinced the French to ally with the colonists.)

