

Readings from Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack* and his *Reformed Mode of Spelling*

The objective of these resources is to provide the reader with a phonologically informed reconstruction of Franklin's natural Boston accent as well as the London-based model of pronunciation he imagined for his *Reformed Mode of Spelling* (1768/1779). The first representation is founded on the conclusions to Part III (Volume II), i.e. the historical phonology of New England English, and the second is based on the conclusions to Part IV (Volume II), a phonological analysis of Franklin's RMS.

In the first set recordings, the reader will hear a selection of six poems composed by Franklin between 1733 and 1758 and published in his *Poor Richard's Almanack*. Given that he travelled to London to argue the case of the Philadelphia Assembly as a colonial agent in 1757, this guarantees that his rhymes reflect his natural American pronunciation.

The possibility that characteristics of Philadelphia English may have influenced his Boston accent was addressed in Part III and Part IV of Volume II. In earlier discussions (Chapter 15, Part II, Volume I), I also considered whether the register of English in these poems was adapted for use in poetic contexts and that this may explain the retention of conservative features. Having said this, the rhymes of Barlow, Dwight and Franklin, as well as those of other colonial American poets, show such overwhelming unity of pronunciation of that the accent reproduced here most likely reflects natural New England English of the first half of the 18th century. Given that Franklin was born in 1706, this should come as no surprise. Indeed, as we have concluded in Part III, many of the characteristics of the accent heard here are representative of the Type C1 phase, that is of the late 17th century. Among the older pronunciations which are most striking are:

- [ɛ: ~ ε:] for *Meat* words,
- [əi ~ ɹi] for *Price*, *Choice* and *Happy* words
- [ɒɪ] for words such as *Lord*, *word*, *work*
- [ɹ] in words such as *God* and *Lot*, but also *done*, *come*, *flood*. (Recall the multiple rhymes of *God* with *blood*, *flood*, *wood*, *stood*, etc., Part III)
- [ɒ: ~ ɑ:] for *Thought* words.

Nota Bene: The pronunciations have been simplified in this recording, as they have been on occasion in Parts III and IV. Here the restricted phonetic ranges of [əi ~ ɹi], [ɛ: ~ ε:], [ɒ ~ ɑ:], etc. are reduced to [əi], [ɛ:], [ɒ:]

**POEM 1 – Franklin on Aristotelian wisdom
1742, *Poor Richard's Almanack***

On him true HAPPINESS shall wait
Who shunning noisy Pomp and State
Those *little* Blessings of the *Great*,
Consults the Golden Mean.
In prosp'rous Gales with Care he steers
Nor adverse Winds, dejected, fears,
In ev'ry Turn of Fortune bears
A Face and Mind serene...

Audio Recording: https://cdn.openbookpublishers.com/poem_1_59059edcb8.m4a

**POEM 2 - On drunkenness
1758, *Poor Richard's Almanack***

He that for sake of Drink neglects his Trade,
And spends each Night in Taverns till 'tis late,
And rises when the Sun is four hours high,
And ne'er regards his starvin Family;
God in his Mercy may do much to save him,
But, woe to the poor Wife, whose Lot it is to have
him.

Audio Recording: https://cdn.openbookpublishers.com/poem_2_e9fa032f22.m4a

**POEM 3 - Worshipping God
1749, *Poor Richard's Almanack***

'Tis done, O Lord, the Idol I resign,
Unfit to share a Heart so justly thine;
Nor can the Heav'nly Call unwelcome be,
That still invites my Soul more near to thee:
Ye Shades, ye Phantoms, and ye Dreams adieu!
With Smiles I now your parting Glories view.
I see the Hand; I worship, I adore,
And justify the great disposing Power.

Audio Recording: https://cdn.openbookpublishers.com/poem_3_f8693a06a0.m4a

**POEM 4 - On foretelling the weather
1744, *Poor Richards Almanack***

Observe the daily circle of the sun,
And the short year of each revolving moon:
By them thou shalt forsee the following day,
Nor shall a starry night thy hopes betray.
When first the moon appears, if then she
shrouds

Her silver crescent, tip'd with sable clouds,
Conclude she bodes a tempest on the main,
And brews for fields impetuous floods of rain.

Audio Recording: https://cdn.openbookpublishers.com/poem_4_727522b65a.m4a

POEM 5 - Vanity and immorality
1735, *Poor Richard's Almanack*

There's nought so silly, sure, as Vanity,
Itself its chiefest End does still destroy*.
To be commended still its Brains are racking,
But who will give it what it's always taking?
Thou'rt fair 'tis true; and witty too, I know it;
And well-bred, Sally, for thy Manners show it:
But whilst thou mak'st Self-Praise thy only Care,
Thou'rt neither witty, nor well-bred, nor fair.
When Mars ♂ and Venus ♀ in ♂ union lie,
Then, Maids, whate'er is ask'd of you, deny!

Audio Recording: https://cdn.openbookpublishers.com/poem_5_e539e90137.m4a

POEM 6 – One man or one wife?
1733, *Poor Richard's Almanack*

Time was my spouse and I could not agree,
Striving about superiority:
The text which saith that man and wife are one,
Was the chief argument we stood upon:
She held, they both one woman should become;
I held they should be man, and both but one.
Thus we contended daily, but the strife
Could not be ended, till both ... were one Wife.

Audio Recording: https://cdn.openbookpublishers.com/poem_6_925d5d791c.m4a

The second set of recordings is taken from Franklin's *Reformed Mode of Spelling*. The first reading is of two verses from "The Campaign", a poem composed by Joseph Addison's in 1704 in celebration of the defeat of Louis XIV's forces at the Battle of Blenheim. As we have seen, this victory was celebrated by the Whigs and defenders of the English Bill of Rights (1689) as a great triumph marking the symbolic end to the Divine Right of Kings and, indirectly, the tyranny inherent to the Great Chain of Being which justified it (cf. Chapter 1, Part I, Volume I).

The second and last reading is taken from Franklin's letter of September 28th, 1768, in which he responds to Polly Stevenson's criticisms of his RMS, insisting that the advantages of his system far outweigh its inconveniences. Franklin's RMS also retains some older features of pronunciation, such as:

- postvocalic rhotic /r/,
- post-vocalic /l/ (possibly an older New Englandism)
- /vɪ/ for *Storm* words
- /æ/ for *Path* words (rather than lowered /a:/,
- /v: ~ ɑ:/ for *Thought* words (rather than raised /ɔ:/ as in RP).
- /Δi/ for *Price* and *Choice* words (rather than RP/GA /aɪ/)

Note the asymmetry between *Price* /Δi/ [Δi ~ əi] and *Mouth* words /vɪ ~ ɔv/ where one would have expected either /Δi/ ~ /Δu/ or /vɪ/ and /vɔv/. Recall that he included /vɪ/ as a possible variant for *Price* words in the 1768 manuscript version of his scheme (cf. Chapters 26, Volume II, and Appendix 2). It was rejected in the 1779 edition in favour of /Δi/, a London variant. In Part III, we saw that Franklin's native realization of *Price* and *Choice* words was [əi ~ ɹi] and *Mouth* words was [əv ~ ɹv] respectively. The hesitancy here probably results from the variety of pronunciation he heard in London itself as well as his own native pronunciation.

When compared with the first set of readings, the most striking differences are innovations such as the centralization of *Mercy* words, [ɛɪ] > [əɪ] and the raising of *Meat* words [ɛ: ~ ɛ:] > [i:]. As the reader will have noticed, I have interpreted Franklin's Boston [ɹ ~ ɹ̃] as a more evolved London [Δ] (cf. Wells 1982, 1999). *Face* words are [ɛ: ~ ɛ:] and not yet diphthongal RP/GA /eɪ/, which spread during the 19th century.

The bottom line here is that the model of pronunciation advocated by Franklin reflects his occasionally faulty impressions of proto-RP London as he heard it during his stay there between 1757 and 1775. Furthermore, the similarity between this proto-RP model and GA suggests that contemporary American pronunciation is closer to the older London pronunciation favoured among late 18th century polite speakers. Ironically, RP contains numerous innovations that were considered crude at the time, r-loss, the lowering of /æ/ > /ɑ:/ in *Bath* words, the raising of /ɑ: ~ v:/ to /ɔ:/ in *Thought* words, etc. This, in itself is another argument in favour of the linguistic continuity between 17th- and 18th-century Britain and America with important aspects of GA reflecting Type D (1730-1800) phase of development. A number of New Englandisms slip into his transcriptions and can be heard in this last recording in the form of a lack of palatalization of words such as *arguments* [ˈæɪgəmənts], *gradually* [ˈgɹæduəli], *continually* [ˌkɔn'tɪnuəli] (cf. Chapters 24, 27, 28, Volume II, for more details).

“The Campaign”, Joseph Addison, 1704

Reformed Mode of Spelling, p. 471

So, when some angel by divine command
with rising tempests shakes a guilty land

such as of late and of pale Britannia past
calm and serene he drives the furious blast
and pleased th'almighty orders to perform
rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm

So the pure and limpid stream when foul with stains

of rushing torrents and defending rains
works itself clear and as it runs refines
Till by degrees the floating mirror shines
Reflects each flower that on its border grows
And a new heaven in its fair bosom shows.

Audio Recording: https://cdn.openbookpublishers.com/The_Campaign_RMS_b8d08932b5.m4a

Franklin's letter to Polly Stevenson, September 28, 1768,
Reformed Mode of Spelling, pp. 473-474

That it will be attended with inconveniences and difficulties is a natural one, for it always occurs when any reformation is proposed, whether in religion government, laws and even down as low as roads and wheel carriages. The true question then, is not whether there will be no difficulties or inconveniences but whether the difficulties may not be surmounted and whether the inconveniences will not, on the whole, be greater than the inconveniences.

In this case, the difficulties are only in the beginning of the practice: when they are once overcome, the advantages are lasting. To the either you or me, who spell well in the present mode, I imagine the difficulty of changing that mode for the new, is not so great, but that I might perfectly get over it in a week's writing.

As to those who do not spell well, if the two difficulties are compared, [viz] that of teaching them true spelling in the present mode, and that of teaching them the new alphabet and the new spelling according to it, I am confident that the latter would be by far the least. They naturally fall into the new method already, as much as the imperfection of their alphabet will admit of. Their present bad spelling is only bad, because contrary to the present bad rules. Under the new rules, it would be good.

The difficulty of learning to spell well in the old way is so great that few attain it, thousands and thousands writing on to old age, without ever being able to acquire it. T'is, besides, a difficulty continually increasing as the sound gradually varies more and more from the spelling.

Audio Recording:

[https://cdn.openbookpublishers.com/Franklin s letter to Polly 28 Sept 68 c8a05134b0.m4a](https://cdn.openbookpublishers.com/Franklin_s_letter_to_Polly_28_Sept_68_c8a05134b0.m4a)