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nothing but the truth...

Franklin & Marshall: American Titans

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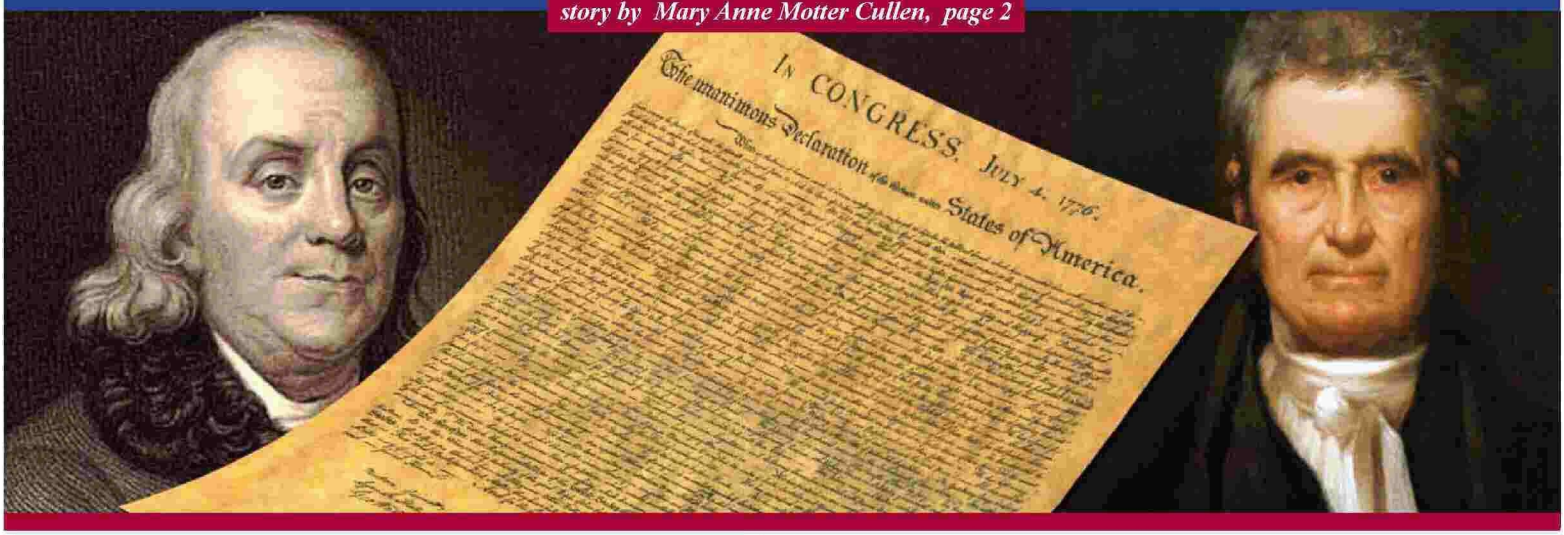

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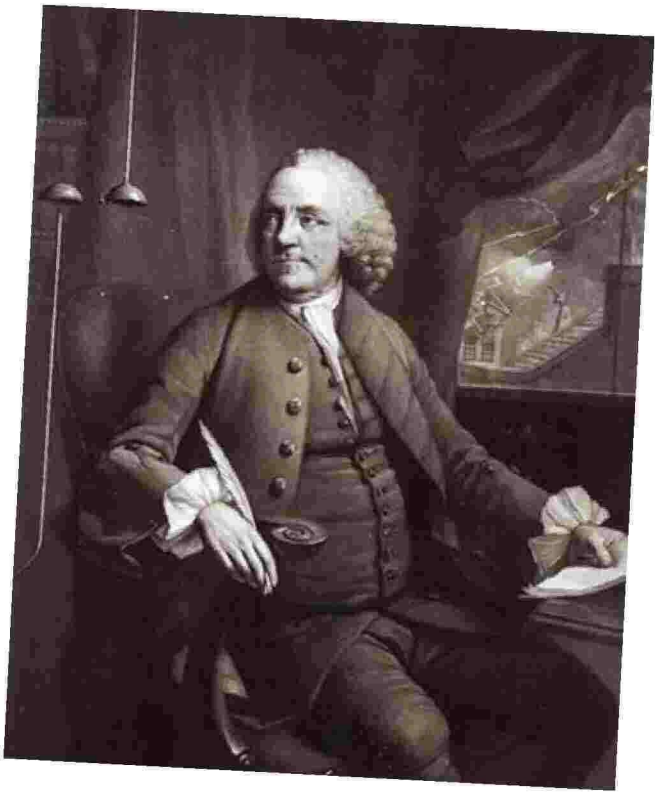
What Would Franklin and Marshall Do?

by Mary Anne Cullen, *Lancaster Post Contributor*

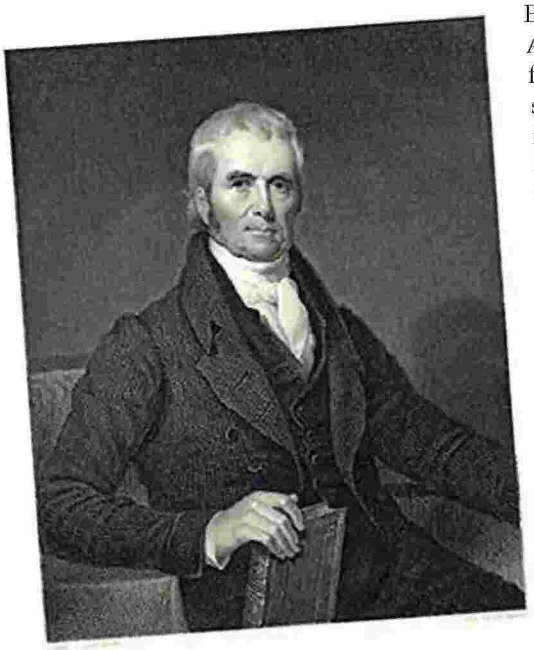


What would Benjamin Franklin & John Marshall, the men themselves, do if today they visited the college named after them? What would they say about the recent actions of college president, John Fry, and the school's private security force, which attempted to restrict the freedom of the press by assaulting and arresting newspaper publishers?

What would Franklin & Marshall think about the seemingly wanton expansion of the college's business interests, often over the objections of the non-college local community?

When I stepped onto the campus of Franklin & Marshall College in the fall of 1969, I was one of about 100 women admitted to the previously all-male institution. Sadly, I was clueless about these two famous men. To me, they were just silhouettes on the school's logo. Now, almost 40 years later, I deeply appreciate their invaluable contributions to the freedoms given to all Americans.

Benjamin Franklin, writer, printer, publisher, scientist, ambassador, inventor, visionary lived his life epitomizing the "Renaissance Man."



JOHN MARSHALL LL.D.



But he wasn't born to such a lofty existence. The 15th of 17 children to father, a blacksmith and farmer named Josiah, and mother, Abiah (who bore Josiah the last eight). Benjamin was not an obvious choice to end up being one of the most important figures in world history.

Although he stopped formal education at age ten, Franklin was first published in 1721 at age 12 in the New England Courant. Later, he owned a successful newspaper, the Pennsylvania Gazette, which published the first political cartoons in the colonies.

Franklin remained a published writer all of his life, and perhaps no person has practiced the idea of a free press more than Benjamin Franklin. He wrote the Poor Richard's Almanack, a pithy collection of recipes, weather forecasts, medicinal remedies, and wise sayings. Poor Richard's was second at the time in popularity only to the Bible, with annual sales reaching 10,000 copies. This made him wealthy.

Benjamin Franklin had a strong sense of civic duty and believed that a "greater good" could be accomplished if people volunteered together. He gathered 11 men forming a group called "The Junto." This group was responsible for starting the first lending library, among other things.

Franklin designed many useful inventions like bifocals, swim fins, and is credited with advancing the use of electricity through his famous kite experiments with lightning.

Franklin was a signer of both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. He, along with John Adams, edited the Declaration. Even though he was 84 years-old and in poor health and great physical pain, he worked vigorously to foster unity and compromise to get the Constitution ratified.

Benjamin Franklin (shown above) was also one of the first to speak out against the abusive treatment of Native Americans; and two months before he died, in 1790 -- seventy years before Emancipation -- he signed a petition to abolish slavery.

John Marshall was a different man. Born in 1755 to Virginia aristocracy (his mother was Thomas Jefferson's cousin), the oldest of 15 children, Marshall came from the slaveholding gentry.

Marshall had an elite classical education, with courses in Latin and private tutors. He studied at exclusive private academies, including one with future fifth President of the United States, James Monroe. Marshall was destined for the ruling class from birth.

But the young Marshall was also a fighter. He was lieutenant in the "Culpepper Minutemen" during the Revolutionary War, and fought in the decisive Battle of Great Bridge," which gave control of Virginia to the revolutionary Americans. This is a man who literally fought for the freedom of his country.

Marshall served in the Virginia House of Delegates and Virginia Assembly, and was, along

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What Would Franklin and Marshall Do?

with James Madison, a key voice supporting ratification of the Constitution. He was a man who deeply believed in the principles of the country's founding laws.

He turned George Washington down for the Attorney General's job in 1795.



The job he held onto (after serving as Secretary State) came in 1801, when he was appointed Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, an occupation he maintained for the next 34 years of his life, the longest tenure in that position in the nation's history.

Marshall introduced the meaningful application of "judicial review," which exercised Supreme Court power to overrule Congressional legislation that did not comply with the Constitution. More than anyone, it was John Marshall who established the authority of the Supreme Court, making it a co-equal branch of government next the legislative and executive branches.

It is fitting that the famous crack in Philadelphia's Liberty Bell was made during its tolling of the funeral for John Marshall in 1835.

It is interesting to imagine what Franklin & Marshall, two men joined at the core by the nation's principles, might do or say today if they were to come across the college that carries their names. But, you know, something tells me they wouldn't be entirely pleased.



Mary Anne Motter Cullen, Franklin & Marshall College, Class of 1971 (at age 17), was the youngest person, at age 20, admitted to the Pennsylvania Bar.