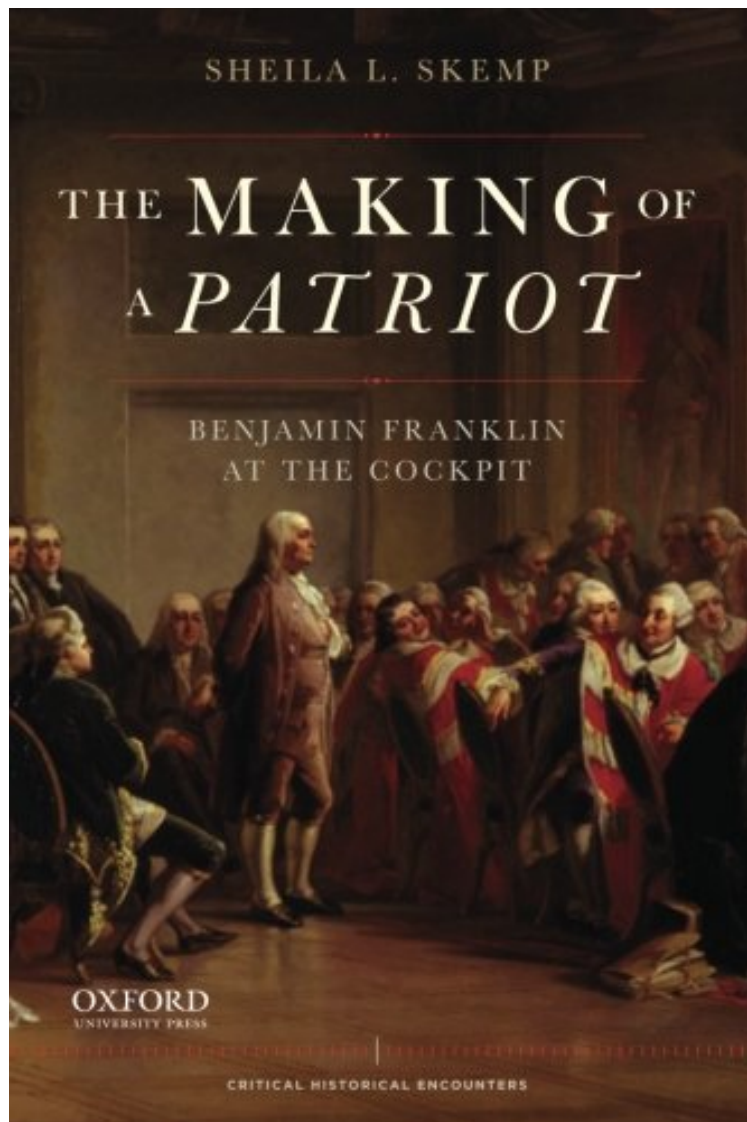


(Ebook pdf) The Making of a Patriot: Benjamin Franklin at the Cockpit (Critical Historical Encounters Series)

## The Making of a Patriot: Benjamin Franklin at the Cockpit (Critical Historical Encounters Series)

*Sheila L. Skemp*

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**Sheila L. Skemp : The Making of a Patriot: Benjamin Franklin at the Cockpit (Critical Historical Encounters Series)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Making of a Patriot: Benjamin Franklin at the Cockpit (Critical Historical Encounters Series):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Tipping PointBy VA DuckProfessor Sheila Skemp has written

previous books on Franklin and his son William. (Benjamin and William Franklin: Father and Son, Patriot and Loyalist William Franklin: Son of a Patriot, Servant of a King). With this book Professor Skemp examines a single event in which the political loyalty of Benjamin Franklin is changed as well as the personal affection for his son William destroyed. 'The Cockpit' - a room in London's Whitehall Palace named for the cock-fighting that literally occurred there in earlier time - is the scene of Franklin's transformative event. Here Solicitor General Alexander Wedderburn publicly humiliates Franklin for his (perceived) role in America's disloyalty to Great Britain, or more accurately from the American perspective, disdain of the British Parliament. It is difficult to convincingly pinpoint turning points of history, nonetheless Professor Skemp does a masterful job in this case. The reader sees Franklin turn from moderate - still very much loyal to King and Mother Country, to revolutionary - fully committed to the independence of his native America. The leveraging factors of the event are shown to be both political and personal. Franklin has carelessly allowed confidential letters by the Massachusetts Governor to be publicized, a clumsy act by Franklin that seals his fate (in Wedderburn's eyes) as a firebrand of a smoldering revolution in 1774. But it is the manner of the engagement that drives Franklin from Loyalist to Patriot. His public humiliation in front of Privy Council and room full of courtiers is an unforgivable affront to Franklin's decorous 18th Century 'honor' and pride. Sadly, the event also was the ruination of Benjamin Franklin's loving relationship with his son William. William Franklin at the time was Royal Governor of the New Jersey Colony and a man who remained loyal to the King and Country throughout and after the war. Franklin's inability to 'turn' his son from Loyalist to Patriot, infuriated him enough that father and son became hopelessly estranged; Benjamin to end his life in America, respected Father of his country, William to retreat to England to live and die in relative obscurity. A very enjoyable read - written in a scholarly fashion, bristling with end-notes and citations, but easily read by "the rest of us". The book includes a number of portraits of the principals. By the end, Professor Skemp convinces that she has in fact identified one of history's critical tipping points. If you are interested in American Founding history or Franklin in particular you will enjoy this book.

1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Good but repetitive  
By Kayla  
Good book, but it was very repetitive. I believe that the information could have been relayed in shorter context. It had some insight on Benjamin Franklin that was very interesting and overall I thought that everything in there was very accurate.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Some brilliant insights but with a disjointed and contrived manner  
By dreader  
Part of Oxfords Critical Encounters series, Sheila Skemps The Making of a Patriot: Benjamin Franklin at the Cockpit attempts to place a largely forgotten incident in American (and British) history into context by judging its impact on the transformation of Benjamin Franklin from a devoted servant of the British Empire into one of the most ardent supporters of independence for its American colonies. The subtitle refers to Franklins appearance at Whitehall Palace on January 29, 1774 in a small, oddly shaped room once used by Henry VIII for cockfighting (hence known as the cockpit). Then the seat of the Kings Privy Council, Franklin was summoned to appear as the agent of the Massachusetts assembly, ostensibly to hear arguments as to how the Council would handle that colonys petition to the King to remove its detested royal governor. Instead, he was subject to an abusive harangue from the British Solicitor General, mostly over an incident that had occurred years earlier involving some purloined correspondence from the governor that Franklin had transmitted to the governors enemies back in America. Utterly humiliated in front of men he believed to be friends and colleagues in the British imperial project, Franklin left that day a changed man. The books narrative is, however, very light in regards to the details of this particular episode. It related who was in the room to witness the proceedings, what people wore in some cases, and Franklins history with them. The basic events are relayed, but the book quickly diverts its story down the other corridors of Franklins journey towards independence. Much is made of Franklins efforts to re-charter Pennsylvania from proprietary to crown colony. His feud with the Penn family is the subject of an overly long narrative. Franklins attempts to fully explain colonial theories of the imperial constitution are also explored mostly critically, largely unfairly in my view given how the diverse thinkers in the colonies differed on crucial points and how quickly they were evolving an ocean away from where Franklin was during the time period of this book. Subsequent chapters are more useful, especially that entitled Dueling Conspiracies, which describes the American and British mindsets, and how each side came to misunderstand and miscalculate the other. The final chapter, Civil War nicely uses the estrangement of Franklin from his son as a result of their strong differences on colonial independence to illustrate how the war was really a civil war, even more so than the conflict that would engulf America not 100 years later. There is much to appreciate in Skemps work, but it largely reads in the end like five essays on Franklins pre-Revolutionary life than a coherent narrative of his ideological journey giving the impression of glimpses into his story rather than a comprehensive account of his ideological sojourn. Additionally, Skemps conclusion as to the historical import of the Cockpit incident seems contrived. She concludes (of course, given the series title) that it was critical to Franklins story, but not to American history. Without the Cockpit incident, she speculates, Franklin would have likely been a more moderate voice and therefore excluded from those events that made him a leading figure of the Revolution the drafting of the Declaration and an opportunity to serve the American cause at the French Court that eventually resulted in a the crucial alliance that secured American independence. But given all of the other decisions made on both sides, independence and victory would have happened regardless of Franklins story in her view. Whether this was the case, or Franklin was as indispensable to

America's cause overseas as Washington was in America as Gordon Wood argues, is left largely unexplored.

On January 29, 1774, Benjamin Franklin was called to appear before the Privy Council--a select group of the king's advisors--in an octagonal-shaped room in Whitehall Palace known as the Cockpit. Spurred by jeers and applause from the audience in the Cockpit, Solicitor General Alexander Wedderburn unleashed a withering tirade against Franklin. Though Franklin entered the room as a dutiful servant of the British crown, he left as a budding American revolutionary. In *The Making of a Patriot*, renowned Franklin historian Sheila L. Skemp presents an insightful, lively narrative that goes beyond the traditional Franklin biography--and behind the common myths--to demonstrate how Franklin's ultimate decision to support the colonists was by no means a foregone conclusion. In fact, up until the Cockpit ordeal, he was steadfastly committed to achieving "an accommodation of our differences." *The Making of a Patriot* sheds light on the conspiratorial framework within which actors on both sides of the Atlantic moved toward revolution. It highlights how this event ultimately pitted Franklin against his son, suggesting that the Revolution was, in no small part, also a civil war.

"Sheila L. Skemp's *The Making of a Patriot* offers a concise and insightful account of a consequential moment in the construction of the American historical narrative....Skemp brings into much sharper focus the relationship between a single individual and the historical canvas, between Franklin and America....This study helps us better understand the dynamics and fluidity of the [Cockpit]."--*Journal of American History*"Using a single incident as a point of departure--Benjamin Franklin's humiliation by the Privy Council in 1774--Sheila Skemp explores how and why Franklin came to renounce his allegiance to the King in order to become one of the foremost proponents of American independence. Through her incisive examination of Franklin's personal and political struggles, Skemp sheds light on the intellectual choices and painful decisions that were necessary for those who came to support the American cause."--Rosemarie Zagari, George Mason University, author of *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*"Once again Sheila Skemp demonstrates her unique ability to illustrate the long-term consequences of an isolated incident through a single individual. This time the person is Benjamin Franklin and the critical moment is the withering tongue lashing he received at the Cockpit. As she skillfully contextualizes the events preceding and following that scathing interview in a highly readable narrative, Skemp makes a compelling case for Franklin's disenchantment with England and the development of his American identity."--Elaine Forman Crane, Fordham University"Sheila Skemp's lively and immensely informative book is full of insights into both leading individuals and politics, balancing a crucial event and the actions and intentions that shaped it. Her Franklin is a good politician, not a perfect one; she writes to understand rather than to celebrate. Her narrative highlights contingency while bringing together many themes of recent scholarship."--David Waldstreicher, Temple University, author of *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery and the American Revolution*About the AuthorSheila L. Skemp is the Clare Leslie Marquette Professor of American History at the University of Mississippi.