



Draw the Lightning Down: Benjamin Franklin and Electrical Technology in the Age of Enlightenment

Michael Brian Schiffer

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Most of us know—at least we've heard—that Benjamin Franklin conducted some kind of electrical experiment with a kite. What few of us realize—and what this book makes powerfully clear—is that Franklin played a major role in laying the foundations of modern electrical science and technology. This fast-paced book, rich with historical details and anecdotes, brings to life Franklin, the large international network of scientists and inventors in which he played a key role, and their amazing inventions. We learn what these early electrical devices—from lights and motors to musical and medical instruments—looked like, how they worked, and what their utilitarian and symbolic meanings were for those who invented and used them. Against the fascinating panorama of life in the eighteenth century, Michael Brian Schiffer tells the story of the very beginnings of our modern electrical world.

The earliest electrical technologies were conceived in the laboratory apparatus of physicists; because of their surprising and diverse effects, however, these technologies rapidly made their way into many other communities and activities. Schiffer conducts us from community to community, showing how these technologies worked as they were put to use in public lectures, revolutionary experiments in chemistry and biology, and medical therapy. This story brings to light the arcane and long-forgotten inventions that made way for many modern technologies—including lightning rods (Franklin's invention), cardiac stimulation, xerography, and the internal combustion engine—and richly conveys the complex relationships among science, technology, and culture.

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