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Female Ancestor Number: 168

Name: Read, Sarah (White)

Dates: (bap. 16 Dec 1675 - 7 Dec 1761)

Colonial Society: PA

Date added to ROA: 9-7-2024

Service: Woman of Distinction: Business Owner, Apothecary

Authority: Advertisement, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 12 August 1731, p. 4; Roach, Hannah B. "Benjamin Franklin Sept Here." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 1960, p. 141.

Biography:

Sarah White Read is an example of a woman whose life was overshadowed by what came later, namely who her son-in-law was. But she, in her own right, has an important story to tell. Her parents were Joseph and Deborah (Cash) White of Birmingham, England. She had an elder sister Mary, baptized in May of 1674. She was baptized in December of 1675. Her marriage to John Read, a carpenter, in 1700 was solemnized at the Parish Church of Handsworth, a suburb of Birmingham. Sarah and John left England for America, arriving in Philadelphia in 1711, along with their own two daughters, Deborah and Frances. John's skills were put to great use in a growing port town. He was soon able to acquire several lots of land, including 2 houses off Market Street, between 3rd and 4th streets. John died in 1724, and Sarah was left to carry on, a scenario that was soon complicated when her daughter Deborah was abandoned by her husband John Rogers.

Sarah was a savvy woman and hardworking. She utilized a well-developed network of female businesswomen to maintain an apothecary. Women such as [Ann Wishart](#), the tallow chandler, and [Rachel Draper](#), a tavern keeper, were part of the tightly-knit High Street Ward community. Sarah was one of the witnesses at Ann Wishart's wedding. In August of 1731, the "Widow Read" advertised in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* that she was relocating from the upper end of the High Street to the "new printing office" near Market, where she continued to sell her well known "Ointment for the ITCH, with which she has cured abundance of People in and about this City for many YEARS past." She was also known for her "Family Salve" for burns or scalds.

The purpose of her relocation was to move in with her daughter Deborah, who was now remarried to Benjamin Franklin. Sarah wasn't initially keen on this marriage given the chance that Deborah's first husband was likely still alive somewhere in the world and could show up at any time, branding Deborah an adulterer, and making the marriage illegal. There is some indication that the property that Franklin built his printing office on was actually a property that had been held by the Reads. Sarah repurchased the



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property, the centerpiece of what would become Franklin Court, after her husband mortgaged it off. In July of 1731, she arranged to rent one side of Franklin's print shop for £6 a year to operate her apothecary. [Deborah Read Franklin](#) and her mother would work closely through the years. She would be a great support for her daughter in the times that Benjamin was abroad. Which was often enough.

In her 86th year, Sarah died in a tragic accident. As recorded in Isaac Norris, Jr.'s diary she "*in a fit fell in the fire*" and was burned to death. Poor Deborah mourned her mother with Ben overseas. He wrote his wife a very Franklin-esque condolence:

"Tis, I am sure, a Satisfaction to me, that I cannot charge myself with having ever fail'd in one Instance of Duty and Respect to her during the many Years that she call'd me Son. The Circumstances attending her Death were indeed unhappy in some Respects; but something must bring us all to our End, and few of us shall see her Length of Days."

The fortitude of Sarah White Read was carried down through Deborah Read Franklin, to granddaughter Sarah Franklin Bache, to great-granddaughter Deborah Bache Duane to her great-great-granddaughter Elizabeth Duane Gillespie. Gillespie was a history maker in her own right, utilizing her family name for the causes she believed in, such as a woman's right to vote. She was also one of the original [founding](#) members of the NSCDA/PA.