



**PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **THE FRANKLIN INSTITUTE SPOTLIGHTS NEW EXHIBIT OF ANTIQUE LIGHTNING RODS**

### **SELECT ARTIFACTS FROM AMERICA'S LARGEST COLLECTION NOW ON DISPLAY FOR ONE YEAR INSIDE ELECTRICITY EXHIBIT**

**PHILADELPHIA (January 8, 2013)** – In June 1752, Philadelphia was the site of one of history's most renowned experiments when Benjamin Franklin flew a key on a kite from the steeple of Christ Church to conduct electricity from the clouds. This mythical moment was actually just the first step in Franklin's long mission to guard his fellow citizens from storm hazards by creating one of his greatest inventions, the lightning rod.

The Franklin Institute is now home to an intriguing collection of eight artfully-handcrafted antique lightning rods, dating from late 18<sup>th</sup> through mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This unique collection, which is housed in the *Electricity* exhibit – sponsored by the Institute's Proud Corporate Partner, PECO, will be on display for one year and open during the anniversary of Franklin's birth on January 17. The collection is on loan from New York media executive and folk art devotee, Joshua Sapan. Mr. Sapan's more than 100 item collection of lightning rods is believed to be the world's largest, and some of its most beautiful and singular offerings are part of this first of its kind installation at The Franklin Institute.

"It seems only fitting that The Franklin Institute, founded on the unquenchable scientific spirit of Benjamin Franklin, would be the first venue to exhibit some of the finest selections from this collection," explains Dennis Wint, President and CEO of the Franklin Institute. "These items are an expression of America's rich past, the children, if you will, of one of Franklin's own brightest and most valuable inventions."

### **ABOUT LIGHTNING RODS**

Though a ubiquitous item on many American homes, farms, churches and municipal buildings since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, these antique lightning rods have only piqued the serious interest of collectors since the mid-1990s. The story of the introduction of lightning rods into American homes is a reflection of Franklin's own eclectic passions and pursuits; merging science, industrial artistry and unbridled free market commerce.

Lightning rods were manufactured by hundreds of regional companies across the country, with a spike of interest and sales in the years immediately preceding the Great Depression. The rods and the brightly colored and intricately detailed glass balls and other decorative items that were used to adorn them, were sold by door-to-door salesmen, traveling in the early years by horse-drawn wagons.

Many of these fiercely competitive showmen took the self-appointed title of “Professor” to add scientific authenticity to their pitch, positioning the lightning rods as a valuable instrument of protection from the threat of lightning strikes and the fires they created.

Owner Josh Sapan commented, “My own interest in collecting lightning rods stemmed from reading Walter Issacson’s biography of Benjamin Franklin, and also my own decades-long interest in American folk and industrial art. Aside from their obvious beauty and diversity, the creation and growth of the lightning rod business is a fascinating illustration of how science, art and commerce can fuse to bring the world inventions of both great value and eternal beauty.”

An inveterate collector and the creator of America’s first museum dedicated to “discarded art,” Sapan is also the author of the forthcoming book, “The Big Picture: American Panoramic Group Portraits,” published by Princeton Architectural Press, a collection of historic group panoramic photography.

In his professional life, Mr. Sapan serves as the President and Chief Executive Officer of AMC Networks, a national programming network group which owns and operates the cable television networks: AMC, IFC, Sundance Channel, WEtv and IFC Films.

**Media Contacts:**

Stefanie Santo

The Franklin Institute, 215.448.1152 [ssanto@fi.edu](mailto:ssanto@fi.edu)

Sean Tobin

The Franklin Institute, 215.448.2375 [stobin@fi.edu](mailto:stobin@fi.edu)

Sal Cataldi

Kaitlin Lindsey

Cataldi PR, 212.244.9797 [sal@cataldipr.com](mailto:sal@cataldipr.com) [kaitlin@cataldipr.com](mailto:kaitlin@cataldipr.com)

The Franklin Institute

Founded in honor of America’s first scientist, Benjamin Franklin, The Franklin Institute is one of America’s oldest and premier centers of science education and development in the country. Today, the Institute continues its dedication to public education and creating a passion for science by offering new and exciting access to science and technology in ways that would dazzle and delight its namesake. For more information please visit [www.fi.edu](http://www.fi.edu).