A Look at Colonial Printing:
Stone House Day.
Showing several of America's oldeſt private homes

"Houſe"? …"Oldeſt"?
What's with that oddly-misplaced "f" character?
Isn't that a typo? …Shouldn't that be an "s"?
Just FYI, here's the answer: It *is* an "s".

WELCOME TO THE 1700'S. The typeface that was used for the Stone House Day tickets is a faithful recreation of the type that was created by William Caslon in England in 1722. It was widely used throughout this country for early printing. It has been shown here with slight imperfections, including some misaligned characters, to more faithfully recreate the common printing of the day. The wording is also intended to be slightly archaic by today's standards.

The tickets feature long "s" characters (and "sh", "ss", and "st" combination characters, called s-ligatures), which were rigorously used for all of the printing of the day. A long "s" [ſ] may look to our modern-day eye rather like an "f", although they are truly separate and distinct characters—notice that the crossbar doesn't extend through the character on a long "s".

The first book in this country to *not* use the long-s character was John Bell's "Shakespeare," published in 1785. Usage of this "27th letter of the alphabet" slowly declined throughout the 1800's.

The decline was not universally accepted, however. Many printers refused to drop this character, primarily because they had already invested in a large selection of lead type with that character. Furthermore, if they were to stop using the long-s characters, they would need perhaps three times as many standard-"s" characters—they would run out. Many printers were unwilling to make that investment until the type eventually wore out.

Others fought on the basis of style. One outspoken proponent of the continued use of the long-s character was Benjamin Franklin. Although he was noted as a scientist, a statesman, and a writer, he most enjoyed his career as a printer. He spoke out strongly against the notion of dropping the long-s character, saying that dropping it would make a printed page "too even," and that the printed page would lose all of its character and personality. He compared it to cutting off men's noses to make them all look alike. But ultimately, Franklin lost.

A long-s, by the way, is *never used at the end* of a word, which is why you also see some standard "s" characters on the tickets. See other usage rules for long-s characters and ligatures on the other side of this page.

As a sidenote, the borders on the Stone House Day tickets are also purposely a bit inaccurate, as was typical of older printing. They were actually scanned from a 1906 publication (yes, modern!), and reworked to fit the dimensions of these tickets.

f="f"   ſ="s"   *f*="f"   *ſ*="s"   ſh="sh"   ß="ss"   ſt="st"

—Jon McGrew, Typographic Historian, Kingston; July 2006

Proper usage of long-s characters and ligatures:

1. The long s ["ſ"] is used in place of a lowercase s. However,
    (a) never use the long s at the end of a word or immediately before an apostrophe.
    (b) never use the long s immediately before an f (e.g., transfer).
    (c) never use the long s immediately after an f (e.g., offset).
    (d) never use the long s immediately before a b (e.g., husbandry).
    (e) never use the long s immediately before a k (e.g., task).
2. Use a ligature wherever possible.
3. Use the longest possible ligature (e.g., use ffi in ſufficient, not ff followed by the letter i).
4. If two ligatures would be of the same length, use the one that comes earlier in the word (e.g., use ss followed by i in poſſible, not s followed by si).
5. Only use a ligature containing the long s if a long s belongs in that location (e.g., use ss in neceſſary, but not in receſs.)

Examples:

ct	practical	exact	objection	ſections	directions	ſubtract
ff	offended	offset	different	ſtaff	effect	affable
fi	find	beneficial	field	deficient	ſuperficies	confine
fl	chiefly	reflect	flower	flat	fly	rifling
ffi	ſufficient	difficult	officers	affiance	chaffing	muffin
ffl	afflict	ruffled	shuffle	affluent	ſafflower	ſnaffle
ſ	eaſy	ſurvey	preſent	inſpects	alſo	uſes
ſh	ſhow	ſhilling	publiſh	cruſh	lordſhip	waſh
ſi	curioſity	ſince	beſides	buſineſs	deſign	conſider
fl	aſleep	ſlope	ſluice	tranſlate	ſlight	iſle
ſſ	neceſſary	groſſly	aſſign	paſſing	poſſeſs	leſſer
ft	firſt	ſtretch	inſtrument	moſt	waſte	diſtance

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✱ NOTE: The f-ligatures (ff, fi, fl, ffi, ffl) are still in very common usage today in proper printing.