

= Francis Folger Franklin =

Francis Folger Franklin (October 20 , 1732 ? November 21 , 1736) was the eldest son of Founding Father of the United States Benjamin Franklin by Deborah Read .

In 1736 , four @-@ year @-@ old Francis contracted the smallpox virus and died shortly thereafter .

Benjamin Franklin , who had been inoculated earlier in his own life , had intended for his son to be inoculated as well . However , due to an illness affecting Francis at the time planned for his inoculation , the procedure was postponed .

His death devastated both his parents , who doted upon Francis , and after this incident , Franklin became " the most eloquent advocate of smallpox inoculation . "

= = Life = =

Francis Folger Franklin was born on October 20 , 1732 , in Philadelphia , Pennsylvania (then a colony in British America) . He was the eldest legitimate son of Benjamin Franklin , then the publisher of the Pennsylvania Gazette , and Deborah Read . Franklin also had an illegitimate son , William (born c . 1730 ? 31) , whose mother may have been a maid in the household , perhaps a woman named Barbara , or even Deborah Read herself . It has been suggested that William was Franklin 's son by Deborah , but was acknowledged as illegitimate because he had been conceived before the marriage of his parents . Some accounts argue that William 's birth was legitimized sometime after Francis ' death , possibly due to the lack of an heir .

The baby 's middle name , Folger , was the maiden name of Franklin 's mother , Abiah . Franklin was proud of his maternal family (one of the first settlers of New England) and thus , in an era when a middle name was unusual for ordinary people to receive , Francis was baptized as Francis Folger . Francis ' baptism took place on September 16 , 1733 , while Franklin was away , at the Anglican Christ Church in Philadelphia , which Deborah attended .

Francis , affectionately called " Franky " by his parents , was described as a " precocious , curious and special " child by Franklin , " a golden child , his smiles brighter , his babblings more telling and his tricks more magical than all the other infants in the colonies combined " by historian of medicine Howard Markel and as " a most engaging child , of singular beauty and wonderful knowingness " by biographer James Parton . Given that Franklin considered Francis to be a " healthy child who thrived from the start , " and " very clever , " he advertised for a tutor for his two sons in December 1734 . By all accounts , Francis was doted on by his parents ; his portrait was painted while he was still a baby . By 1734 , Franklin 's business as a writer , publisher and founder of the Library Company of Philadelphia was going well enough that he was able to build a house for his family of four , at 318 Market Street .

= = Death and aftermath = =

Franklin and his brother , James , criticized smallpox inoculation , which was performed by drawing a string , previously in contact with the pustules of a smallpox victim , through a small incision on the person being inoculated . At the time , inoculation offered a mortality chance of 2 % , while smallpox contracted naturally was fatal to 15 % of the infected . Later , while James still opposed inoculation , Franklin came to support it , believing it was a " safe and beneficial practice . " In 1736 , however , Francis contracted smallpox and died on November 21 of that year , without having been inoculated . Both Franklin and Deborah were devastated , and their devastation was compounded because they were unsure they could have another child . Ironically , Franklin had written his paper , " On the Death of Infants " , while Francis was still alive , and was inspired by his youngest son when writing about the beauty of babies . Francis was buried on the same day he died , his tombstone reading " The delight of all who knew him . "

Rumors quickly surfaced that Francis had died after being inoculated , and so , Franklin wrote in the Pennsylvania Gazette , on December 30 , that " [he] intended to get [Francis] inoculated as soon

as he should have recovered sufficient strength from a flux with which he had been long afflicted , " and that the boy " received the distemper in the common way of infection . " However , the choice of having his son inoculated was a difficult one for Franklin , as Francis could die either way . Inoculation would become a real choice only if there was a high chance of smallpox being contracted naturally . In this case , the choice of having Francis inoculated was justified , even with its 2 % mortality rate .

After Francis ' death , Franklin became involved in promoting inoculation in Philadelphia : he published many studies on its value , working with several physicians , including the famed William Heberden at the Pennsylvania Hospital , which he helped found . In 1774 , he founded the " Society for Inoculating the Poor Gratis " , in order to help the poor people of Philadelphia afford inoculation . In his autobiography , Franklin writes :

" In 1736 I lost one of my sons , a fine boy of four years old , by the smallpox taken in the common way . I long regretted bitterly and still regret that I had not given it to him by inoculation . This I mention for the sake of the parents who omit that operation , on the supposition that they should never forgive themselves if a child died under it ; my example showing that the regret may be the same either way , and that , therefore , the safer should be chosen . "

Seven years after Francis ' death , Deborah gave birth to Sarah , who was Franklin 's only surviving , legitimate child . In 1772 , Franklin 's sister Jane Franklin Mecom , wrote him with news of his grandsons . Franklin replied that it " brings often afresh to my mind the idea of my son Franky , though now dead thirty @-@ six years , whom I have seldom since seemed equaled in everything , and whom to this day I cannot think of without a sigh . "