

# America's Most Disappointed Father

**"ALL RIGHT, men, surround the house and keep a close watch."**

The company of New Jersey militia encircled the governor's mansion at Amboy while a group of officers entered. "By authority of the state assembly, we place you under house arrest!" they informed the royal governor, William Franklin.

His arrest highlighted the strange situation in which the American Revolution forever alienated a famous father from his infamous son. The father, Benjamin Franklin, risked his all to support America's desire for freedom; the son, William, worked in behalf of the British. In fact, on the very day in June, 1776, that the son was arrested for Red Coat activities, the father was in Philadelphia helping write the Declaration of Independence.

Later, Dr. Franklin had still deeper dregs of disappointment to drink. His son was branded "an enemy to the liberties of this country" and imprisoned. But even from jail, William Franklin managed to send letters "fomenting discord" until he was exchanged for an American officer and returned to England, never again to see the land of his birth.

In earlier days, the Franklins had enjoyed the warmth of an ideal father-son relationship. Benjamin was a tender father to the baby boy presented him in Philadelphia in 1731. He saw to it that young Billy had not only plenty of books to stretch his mind but a pony to exercise his body.

Franklin and his wife, Deborah Read, had two other children, daughter Sarah and a son, Francis, who died at four. William was left to carry on the Franklin line.

When Franklin went to England in 1757 to argue some tax matters, he took his son along. "Those English years were indeed a boomerang to the elder Franklin," observes one historian. "William's years in the mother country were eventually to weigh the balance in favor of England." Franklin entered his son at Middle Temple, and William was summoned to the British bar in 1758. During the next four years, while the father was kept busy as colonial agent, the



*There were warmth and love  
between Benjamin Franklin  
and his son—until war  
made one a patriot, one a Tory*

By **JERRY KLEIN**

ILLUSTRATION BY RICHARD HERDEGEN

son practiced law in London. He made a favorable impression on some of the king's advisers, and by the time Benjamin was ready to return to Philadelphia, his son had received official recognition. He was named royal governor of New Jersey.

When trouble between the colonies and Britain mounted, the elder Franklin suddenly was removed as postmaster general. He appealed to William to resign his royal appointment, too, but the governor refused. In fact, the younger Franklin actively tried to undermine the efforts of freedom-minded colonists by intercepting their letters and passing them along to friends of his in Britain as "rebel" documents.

Benjamin visited New Jersey to urge his son to resign the Crown position, but his efforts proved to be in vain. "I have lost my son," he said.

The two men had no contact all during the long War for Independence. Afterward, the son found himself not an entirely welcome ornament to English society, while the father was busily advancing American interests in France.

**B**UT FRANKLIN never did invite William to visit him in Paris. A full year passed before the obviously wounded father found it "convenient" to see his son once more, and only because he would be stopping in England en route home, a sickly man of 79 now.

A historian says the final meeting of the Franklins, after almost a decade of separation, proved "coolly civil... it is doubtful if deep in his heart, Benjamin could ever forgive and bridge the gap now between them." In 1788, the patriot drew up his will, and within two years he died.

The will cancelled William's indebtedness to his father and left him some land in Nova Scotia. But Benjamin Franklin had made the matter clear: "The part he acted against me in the late war, which is of public notoriety, will account for my leaving him no more of an estate he endeavoured to deprive me of."

The heart of America followed the father sorrowfully to his grave. The son died in London 23 years later, reviled by many, forgotten by most.

## COVER:

Actress Carroll Baker, photographed by Paul Himmel, appears in a brilliant tulip-bedecked blouse over citrus-yellow pants, part of her new designer wardrobe. She models other spring ensembles on p. 14.

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