

**Supplementary material 1.**

Handwritten letter from Eleanor Roosevelt to her son James (dated August 12, 1921). To facilitate its understanding, the text is transcribed at the end of the document. Eleanor describes the clinical situation of her husband. Given that clinical records are not available, it is worth mentioning that Eleanor describes how, in addition to paralysis, the clinical picture included “so much pain in his back and legs [...] [and his legs] felt numb.” As argued in the text and retrospectively, this sensory semiology (both positive and negative) is evidence against the hypothesis that FDR suffered from paralytic polio. Document taken from Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, where it is stated that this document is in the public domain and can be used without further permission.

Source: Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum [Internet]. New York; 2016. Available from: <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/> [accessed Jun 2024].

Clear No. 1  
 EASTPORT  
 MAINE  
 Sunday  
 Aug. 14<sup>th</sup>  
 /21

dear Moly,  
 we have had a benjamin  
 few days at on bed. seeing  
 Franklin was taken ill. It  
 seemed a chill but Thursday  
 he had some pain in  
 his back & legs that I took  
 for the doctor, by Friday evening  
 he lost the ability to walk

M. knew his legs <sup>but</sup> though he knew  
 felt numb he can still feel  
 in them. Yesterday a. e.  
 Dr. Burnett & I decided we  
 wanted the best opinion we  
 could get quickly so I  
 Home (who, thank heavens,  
 is here, for he has been the  
 greatest help) went with  
 Dr. Burnett to Luke & they  
 canvassed the nearby schools  
 & decided that the best  
 available diagnostician

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was the famous old Dr. W.P.W.  
 from Philadelphia & he  
 agreed to motor up & spend  
 the night. He arrived about  
 7<sup>30</sup> & made a heart exam, &  
 thorough examination. He  
 found that knowing & he thinks  
 a clot of blood, from a  
 sudden congestion has blocked  
 in the <sup>lower</sup> spinal cord temporarily  
 removing the power to move  
 though not to feel. I have tried

to New York for a massiveness  
 as he said that was vital to  
 the nursing I could do in  
 the meantime Louis & I are  
 Subtrigheim as well as we  
 can - The doctor feels sure  
 he will get well but it may  
 take some months, I have  
 only told Franklin he said  
 he could severely go down  
 the 15<sup>th</sup> of Sept. He did say  
 to leave then but not before  
 the account of what I'd go  
 to New York but it may have

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to be done on a ~~strait~~ <sup>blue chair</sup>. The  
doctor thinks absorption  
has already begun as  
he can move his toes on one  
foot a little more which  
is very encouraging. He has  
told the S. here just what  
medicines to give & what  
treatment to follow & we  
should know in the next few

days or two weeks <sup>looking</sup>  
 are going —  
 do you think you can  
 meet Maria when she  
 lands? She has asked  
 us to cable just before  
 she sails & I have decided  
 to say nothing, no letter can  
 reach us now & it would  
 simply mean worry all  
 the way home & she will  
 have enough on her <sup>back</sup>  
 at least when she can do <sup>things</sup>

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I will write her a letter &  
Guarantee saying he is  
ill but leave explaining  
before if you can't meet  
her I wish you or whoever  
does meet her. I hope you  
will think I am doing  
right & have done all  
I could, of course write me  
if you think of anything



else. I do not want par-  
 ticulars to get in the papers  
 So I am writing to say  
 that he is ill from the  
 effects of a chill & that  
 will soon be better, but I  
 shall write to Ned what  
 I have told you & Langdon  
 Marvin as I cannot be  
 at the office to believe him  
 Affly always,  
 Aug. 14<sup>th</sup> 1877  
 Dear Son to Abby - Marion

MS. A. 9. 2. 58 - 297 V-8

**This letter was sent to me by Kevin R. Thomas (Archives Technician FDR Presidential Library and Museum). Kevim located the letter in the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers - File: [Condolence Letters After FDR's Polio Attack: Letters to ER \(Box 2\)](#)**

Also using in part the translation by Goldman and Goldman (Appendix D, number 2), the literal partial text of the letter is as follows:

*Dear (nickname unintelligible),*

*We have had very anxious few days as on Wed. evening Franklin was taken ill. It seemed a chill but Thursday he had much pain in his back and legs that I sent for the doctor, by Friday evening he lost the ability to walk or move his legs but though they felt numb he can still feel in them. Yesterday a.m. Dr. Bennet and I decided we wanted the best opinion we could get quickly so Louis Howe (who, thanks heavens, is here, for he has been the greatest help) went with Dr. Bennet to Lubec and they canvassed the nearby supports and decided that the best available diagnostician was the famous old Dr. W.W. Keen of Philadelphia and he agreed to motor up and spent the night. He arrived around 7:30 and made a most careful thorough examination and the same morning and he thinks a clot of blood from a sudden congestion has settled in the lower spinal cord temporarily removing the power to move but not to feel. The doctor feels sure he will get well but it may take some moths. I have only told Franklin he said he could surely go down by mid-September... The doctor thinks absorption has already begun as he could move his toes on one foot a little more which is very encouraging. He [Keen] has told the doctor here [Bennet] just what medicines to give and what treatment to follow and we should know in the next ten days or two weeks things are going..."*

**P.S.** The most important part of this letter is that Eleanor Roosevelt, who attended FDR's illness from the onset, referred to that one of the presenting symptoms was severe back and leg pain accompanied by numbness. Regrettably, over the clinical course no one of the attendant doctors carried out examination of sensation. That involvement of sensory system was an integral part of the disease is further reinforced by Roosevelt own description (see [Supplementary material 2](#)).