



“FIRST LADY OF THE AMERICAN SCREEN”  
Ruth Elizabeth “Bette” Davis (1908 – 1989)

— *Bradley Rymph*

Often referred to as "The First Lady of the American Screen," Bette Davis was an actress that could play a variety of difficult and powerful roles. She set a new standard for women on the big screen. Independent off-screen as well, her battles with studio bigwigs were legendary. With a career spanning six decades, few in the history of film have rivaled her longevity and appeal.

Ruth Elizabeth (“Bette”) Davis was born April 5, 1908, in Lowell, Massachusetts. Her parents separated just before her tenth birthday. Bette's mother, despite a limited income, sent her to a boarding school. After graduating from it, Bette enrolled in John Murray Anderson's Dramatic School. She then made

her Broadway debut in the play "Broken Dishes." The next year, she moved to Hollywood to screen test for Universal. (The was in the era when Hollywood actors and actresses signed contracts with specific studios to appear only in its films unless the studio agreed otherwise.)

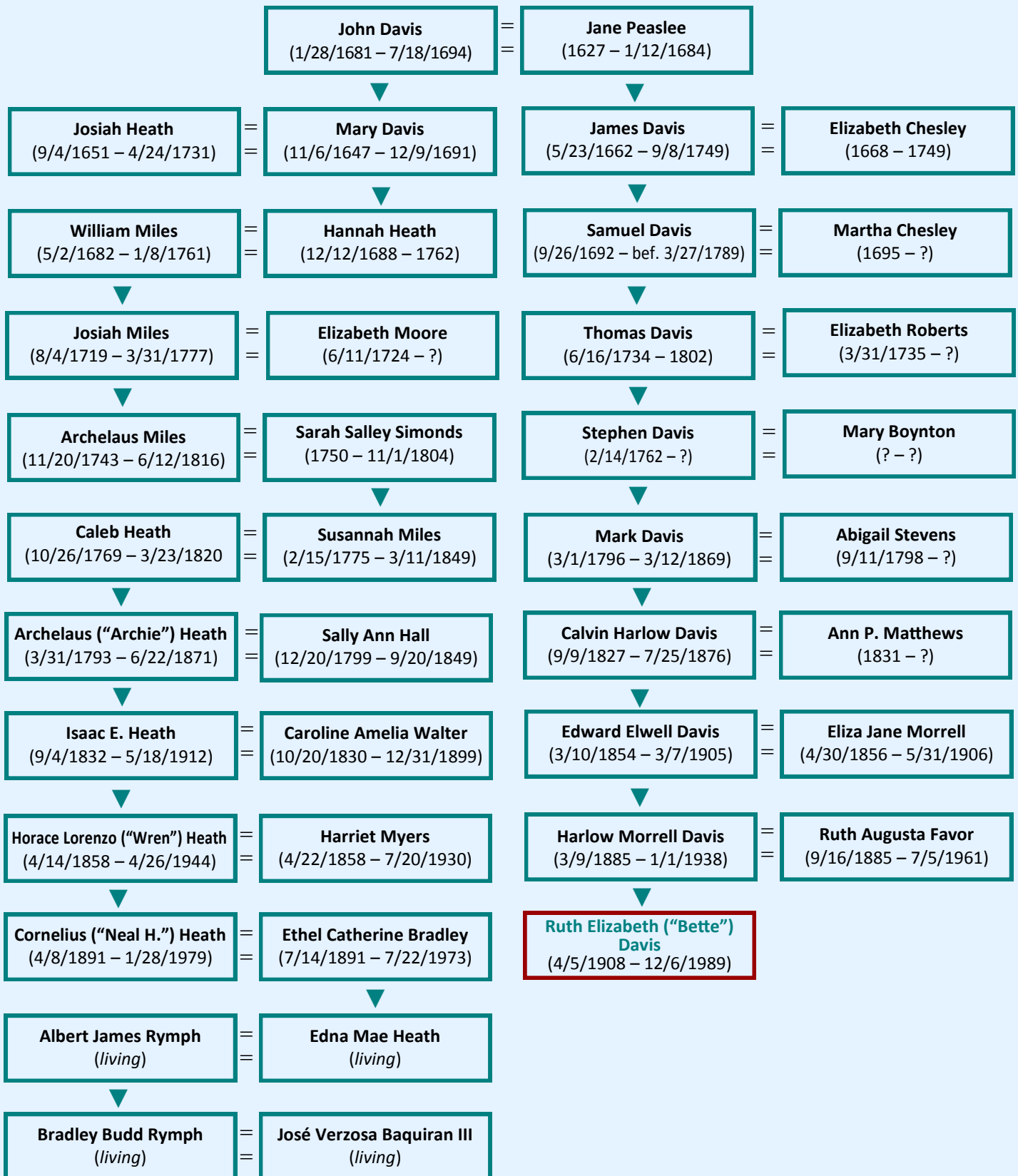
In 1932, after six small films with Universal, she changed studios and signed a seven-year contract with Warner Brothers. With Warner's movie "The Man Who Played God" (1932), she began her path to stardom. Warner lent her to another studio, RKO, to play the role of Mildred in "Of Human Bondage" (1934), which became her first critically acclaimed hit. With her role in "Dangerous" (1935), she was nominated for a

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# HOW WE'RE RELATED: Bette Davis

Bette Davis was my eighth cousin, twice removed, through my mother, Edna Mae Heath.



Best Actress Oscar and became the first Warner Brothers actress to win that award. In 1939, while still at Warner Brothers, she won a second Oscar for "Jezebel" (1938). Davis received Oscar nominations the next five years in a row.

Davis developed a reputation for being difficult to work with, but she also set a new precedent for women. By 1942, she was the highest paid woman in America.

After a lull in major roles during the World War II era, when Davis focused on entertaining the troops, she made her comeback playing the role as Margo Channing in "All About Eve" (1950). For this role, she received her eighth Academy Award nomination. In 1962, her career was resuscitated yet again in 1962 with "Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?"

Across her career, Davis made a total of more than 100 films. In 1977, she was the first woman to be honored with the American Film Institute's Lifetime Achievement Award. She was also the first woman to be president of the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences.

*Bette Davis,  
in  
"All About  
Eve" (1950)*



#### TO LEARN MORE

Bette Davis: The Official Web Site.

"Biography." (<http://www.bette-davis.com/about/bio.htm>)

Internet Movie Database. "Bette Davis." (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000012/>)

Wikipedia. "Bette Davis." ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bette\\_Davis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bette_Davis))