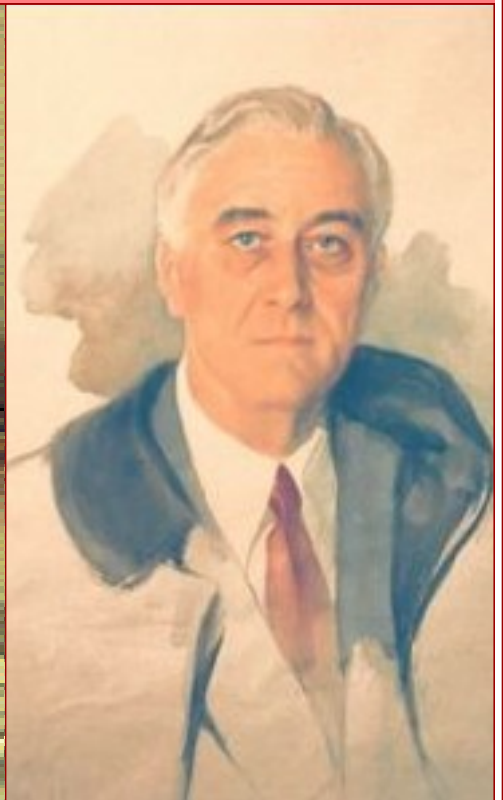


## IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF OUR "COUSINS" ...



## AMERICA'S LEADING POLITICAL FAMILY OF THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Theodore Roosevelt (1858 – 1919) /  
Eleanor Roosevelt (1884 – 1962) /  
Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882 – 1945)

— *Bradley Rymph*

In the early 20th century, probably the most dominant extended family in the political life of the United States was the Roosevelt family.

Two ancestral branches — informally known as the “Oyster Bay” and “Hyde Park” Roosevelts — descended from two grandsons of their common Dutch immigrant ancestor, Claes Maartenszen van Rosenvelt (1623 – 1659), who arrived in New Amsterdam (now New York City) sometime between 1638 and 1649. The “Oyster Bay” Roosevelts —

descended from Johannes Roosevelt (1689 – 1750) — generally were Republican in identification; the “Hyde Park” Roosevelts — descended from Johannes’ brother, Jacobus (1692 – 1776) — generally were Democratic in identification.

### THEODORE ROOSEVELT

The politically most famous and dominant member of the Oyster Bay branch was **Theodore Roosevelt**. Unlike Ulysses Grant and Benjamin Harrison, Theodore was born into wealth. In fact, in the more than two

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*Theodore Roosevelt,  
25th Vice President and  
26th President of the  
United States*

In response to his physical weakness, Roosevelt intentionally embraced a very physical, strenuous life. While a student at Harvard College, he took boxing lessons and was also active at rowing.

After Roosevelt had graduated from college in 1880, he underwent a physical examination. His doctor advised him that he had serious heart problems and urged him to avoid strenuous activity and find a desk job. Roosevelt disregarded the advice.

Roosevelt entered Columbia Law School in 1881. He would have graduated in 1882 (the law school curriculum only took two years at that time), but instead he dropped out in 1881 when he was offered a chance to run as a Republican candidate for New York State Assemblyman.

Once in office, Roosevelt quickly became a major player in New York politics. As a state assemblyman, he wrote more bills than any other state legislator. He served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention, participating in a reform faction that unsuccessfully tried to keep the party's presidential nomination from the more conservative James G. Blaine. He left that convention disillusioned with party politics, but declined at the time to join other reformist Republicans in endorsing the Democratic candidate, Grover Cleveland.

Roosevelt temporarily retired from politics and built a ranch outside the then-boomtown

centuries since his ancestors had been among the early settlers of New Netherland, the Roosevelt family had amassed considerable wealth, power, and influence from their various businesses.

Theodore was born on October 27, 1858, in New York City. As a child, he was sickly and asthmatic. He frequently had to sleep propped up in bed or slouching in a chair. He was also hyperactive and often mischievous. As a young child, he began a lifelong interest in zoology. With two cousins, he created a "museum" at home filled with animals that he killed or caught, studied, and then prepared for display using the rudiments of taxidermy that he taught himself.

of Medora, North Dakota. He learned to ride a horse Western-style, to rope, and to hunt. He also became a deputy sheriff in North Dakota and began writing about frontier life for magazines back east.

However, after a severe winter wiped out his cattle herd and the \$60,000 he had invested in the ranch, Roosevelt returned to New York City. He ran as the Republican candidate for mayor of New York City in 1886, but came in third.

In the 1888 presidential election, Roosevelt campaigned on behalf of Benjamin Harrison (*see profile, "Reluctant First Lady and a Presidential Grandson"*). After his election, President Harrison appointed Roosevelt to the United States Civil Service Commission, where he served until 1895. As a commissioner, Roosevelt vigorously fought against patronage-based government jobs. One Roosevelt biographer, James Bucklin Bishop, wrote of commissioner Roosevelt:

The very citadel of spoils politics, the hitherto impregnable fortress that had existed unshaken since it was erected on the foundation laid by Andrew Jackson, was tottering to its fall under the assault of this audacious and irrepressible young man.... Whatever may have been the feelings of the President (Harrison) — and there is little doubt that he had no idea when he appointed Roosevelt that he would prove to be so veritable a bull in a china shop — he refused to remove him and stood by him firmly till the end of his term.

Roosevelt enthusiastically supported Harrison for reelection in 1892. Nevertheless, the

victorious Grover Cleveland reappointed him as commissioner.

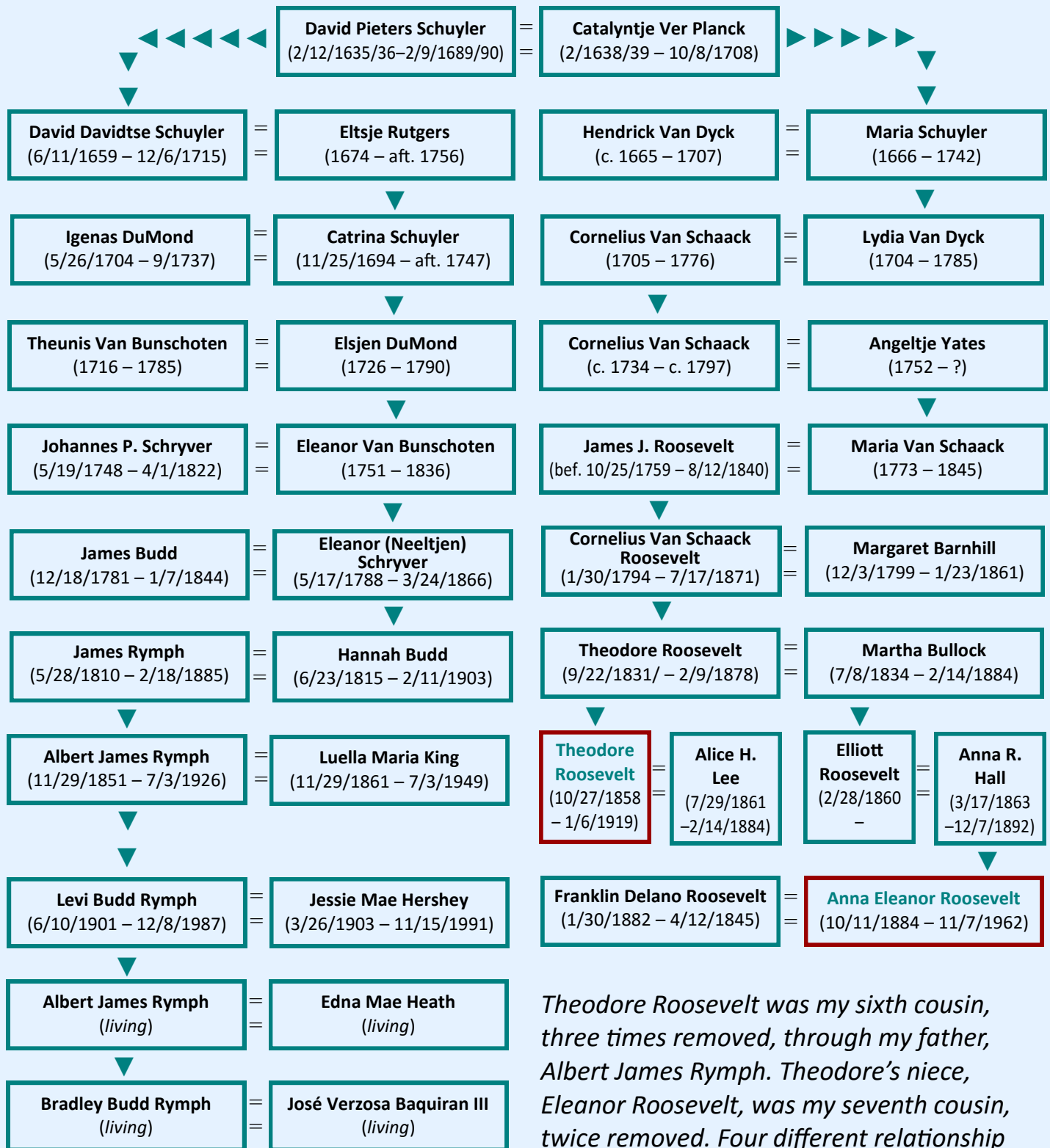
In 1895, Roosevelt became president of the board of New York City Police Commissioners. While in this post, Roosevelt radically reformed the police department, which previously had been considered one of the most corrupt in the United States.

In the coming years, Roosevelt increased his presence on the national stage. In 1897, Republican President William McKinley appointed him Assistant Secretary of the Navy. In 1898, when the Spanish-American War was launched, Roosevelt resigned that position and found cowboys and Ivy League friends who together formed the First U.S. Volunteer Cavalry Regiment — dubbed by journalists the "Rough Riders."

Once he left the cavalry and returned to New York, Roosevelt quickly returned to Republican politics. He was elected Governor of New York in 1898. His success as a corruption fighter led other Republican leaders to force their 1900 presidential nominee, William McKinley, to select Roosevelt as his vice presidential running mate in McKinley's campaign for a second term. The McKinley-Roosevelt ticket won in a landslide.

As a vice presidential candidate, Roosevelt vigorously supported the United States' annexation of the Philippines at the end of the Spanish-American War. Countering the claim that this annexation would represent an un-American imperialism, Roosevelt contended that it was best for the Filipinos to have stability and for the United States to have a presence in that part of the world.

# HOW WE'RE RELATED: Theodore Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt



*Theodore Roosevelt was my sixth cousin, three times removed, through my father, Albert James Rymph. Theodore's niece, Eleanor Roosevelt, was my seventh cousin, twice removed. Four different relationship trails link Theodore and Eleanor Roosevelt to the Rymph family. The trail shown here is the most direct link.*

Roosevelt only served as Vice President for six months. President McKinley was shot on September 6, 1901, and died a few days later. On September 14, at age 42, Roosevelt became the youngest President in American history. In 1904, he was elected President in his own right in a landslide victory.

As President, Roosevelt continued his reformist ways. Among his accomplishments in the White House were advancing consumer well-being by passing laws such as the Meat Inspection Act of 1906, which banned misleading labels and preservatives that contained harmful chemicals, and the Pure Food and Drug Act, which banned food and drugs that were impure or falsely labeled.

Roosevelt declined to seek reelection in 1908 and instead supported William Howard Taft's successful quest for the Republican nomination and the White House.

After leaving the presidency, Roosevelt embarked on a safari in east and central Africa. Roosevelt and his companions are said to have killed over 11,000 animals, ranging from insects to big game animals. Tons of salted animals were shipped to Washington, DC, for exhibition in the museums of the Smithsonian Institution.

When Roosevelt had supported Taft's presidential campaign in 1908, Roosevelt certified his successor to be a true "progressive." When Roosevelt returned to the United States from Africa, he quickly became disillusioned with Taft's conservative policies. In 1912, he challenged Taft for the Republican presidential nomination. At the Republican National Convention, when it

*Theodore Roosevelt's face on Mount Rushmore.*



became clear that Taft would win the nomination, Roosevelt led his followers in walking out of the convention, where he announced a new Progressive Party, commonly known as the "Bull Moose Party."

Roosevelt failed to win the presidential election, but he came in second in the popular vote — the best showing ever by a third party candidate. He received 27 percent of the popular vote, compared to Taft's 23 percent. However, the Democratic nominee, Woodrow Wilson, received 42 percent. In the Electoral College voting, it was Wilson, 435; Roosevelt, 88; Taft, 8.

## ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

**Anna Eleanor Roosevelt** — the daughter of Theodore's brother Elliott — was born in New York City on October 11, 1884. From her childhood days, she preferred to be called by her middle name.

As a small girl, Eleanor was so serious that her mother, Anna (Hall) Roosevelt, called her "Granny." Anna Roosevelt died from diphtheria when Eleanor was only eight years



*Eleanor Roosevelt,  
First Lady of the United States*

Theodore was then President), Franklin and Eleanor began dating. Eleanor had already been doing volunteer social work in New York City's East Side slums. While dating Franklin, she took him along on her rounds of the city's squalid tenements — a walking tour that is believed to have profoundly affected the previously sheltered young man.

Eleanor and Franklin became engaged in November 1904. Franklin's mother, Sara Delano Roosevelt, strongly opposed the union, and persuaded the young couple to delay announcement of the engagement until December 1, 1904. The two were married in New York City on March 17, 1905, with Eleanor's uncle, the President, giving her away during the ceremony.

After the wedding, Eleanor and Franklin moved into the home of Franklin's mother in Hyde Park, New York. The living arrangement was particularly awkward for Eleanor, who did not gain any significant independence from her mother-in-law until Franklin was elected to the New York State Senate in 1910, and the couple moved to Albany, New York's state capitol.

Franklin and Eleanor's marriage clearly started out filled with love, and Eleanor intensely desired to be a good wife. Nevertheless, their marriage almost dissolved after Eleanor discovered in September 1918 that her husband was having an affair with her own social secretary, Lucy Mercer. In an ultimatum, Eleanor told her husband that she

old. Her alcoholic father died less than two years later. As a result, Eleanor was raised from adolescence by her maternal grandmother, Mary Ludlow Hall. As a youth, Eleanor reportedly was insecure and starved for affection, considering herself "ugly." Nevertheless at age 14, she once wrote, "no matter how plain a woman may be if truth and loyalty are stamped upon her face all will be attracted to her."

In 1902, at age 17, Eleanor met her father's fifth cousin, Franklin Roosevelt (of the family's "Hyde Park" branch). She was overwhelmed when the handsome Harvard University undergrad demonstrated affection for her. After a New Year's Day reception and dinner at the White House (where her uncle

would insist on a divorce if he did not end the affair immediately. In addition, Franklin's mother (although no fan of Eleanor's) warned her son that she would disinherit him if he got a divorce. Franklin — knowing that a divorce would not reflect well on his family — ended the relationship with Mercer and pledged to never see her again. (Eventually, however, Franklin broke this pledge.)

Eleanor, Franklin, and their children typically spent summers at Campobello Island, in New Brunswick, Canada. During one of these visits, in August 1921, Franklin was stricken with a severe illness which resulted in the permanent paralysis of his legs (*discussed below in profile of Franklin Roosevelt*). Eleanor was so devoted to Franklin during this time of travail that her husband's attending physician, William Keen, told her, "You have been a rare wife and have borne your heavy burden most bravely" and proclaimed her "one of my heroines."

Following Franklin's illness, as described in Wikipedia's biography of Eleanor, "It was Eleanor who prodded Franklin to return to active life. To compensate for his lack of



*Eleanor Roosevelt speaking at the United Nations, July 1947*

mobility, she overcame her shyness to make public appearances on his behalf and thereafter served him as a listening post and barometer of popular sentiment."

In the aftermath of her husband's affair, Eleanor had emerged a different woman. She insisted on severing all physical relationship with her husband, although their relationship otherwise remained close. More important, Eleanor realized that she could achieve personal fulfillment only through her own influence.

Ironically, her husband's paralysis placed his future partially in her own hands. During the 1920s, Eleanor (who had been raised in one of New York's most politically dominant Republican families) became a prominent face among Democratic women and a force in New York state politics on behalf of the Democratic Party.

In the years that followed, as Franklin recovered and resumed his own political career, he frequently paid tribute to her, as described in the Wikipedia biography, for "her care for him during the worst days of his illness, her help to him in his work, ... and to her ability to connect with various groups of people. He respected her intelligence and honest and sincere desire to improve the world, even if he sometimes found her too insistent and lacking in political suppleness. 'Your back has no bend,' he once told her."

When Franklin was elected President of the United States, Eleanor was determined not to lead the circumscribed life that had traditionally been expected of First Ladies. She had seen how this role had been pressed on her aunt Edith when her uncle Theodore

was President, and Eleanor set out on a different course. In an era when few women had careers (and with the full support of her husband), Eleanor continued with the active business and speaking agenda that she had begun before the move to the White House.

As First Lady, she made frequent personal appearances at labor meetings to assure Depression-era workers that the White House was aware of and attempting to assist with their plight. She held weekly press conferences (to which only female journalists were invited, since they were not allowed at the male-only press briefings with the President and other officials).

Eleanor also became an important connection to the country's African American population while her husband was President. Although Franklin felt compelled to placate white Democrat, Southern sentiments, Eleanor was a vocal supporter of the young civil rights movement. In one particularly public incident in 1939, when the black singer Marian Anderson was denied the opportunity to sing at Washington's Constitution Hall (by the Daughters of the American Republic, which owned the hall), Eleanor arranged for Anderson to instead sing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

Eleanor was in Washington on April 12, 1945, when her husband had a stroke and died in Warm Springs, Georgia. Shortly after learning of the death, she also learned that, contrary to her husband's vow 24 years early, Lucy Mercer Rutherford had been with Franklin when he died.

Rather than fade away after her husband's death, Eleanor (if anything) became an even more public presence, and on an

international scale. In 1945, President Harry Truman appointed her as a delegate to the United Nations General Assembly. In April 1946, she became chairperson of the first United Nations Commissions on Human Rights. She was one of the instrumental leaders in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 10, 1948.

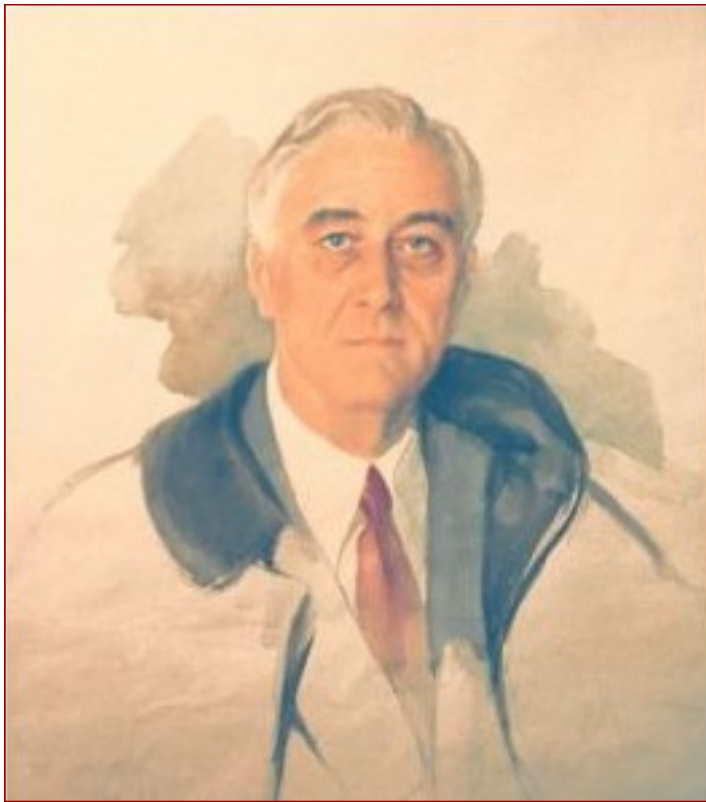
Domestically, Eleanor remained active in Democratic politics, supporting Adlai Stevenson's campaigns for President in 1952, 1956, and 1960. Once John F. Kennedy won the Democratic nomination for President in 1960, Eleanor actively campaigned for him. After his election, JFK appointed her to multiple policy-making positions, including chair of the new Presidential Commission on the Status of Women. Eleanor died on November 7, 1962, shortly before that commission released its final report.

President Truman was, it is believed, the first person to call Eleanor Roosevelt "the First Lady of the World." When she died, her funeral in Hyde Park was attended by then-President Kennedy, former Presidents Truman and Dwight Eisenhower, and former Democratic presidential nominee Stevenson. At her memorial service, Stevenson asked, "What other single human being has touched and transformed the existence of so many?"

## FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

As noted above, **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** descended from his family's "Hyde Park" (Democratic) branch. He was born January 30, 1882, the only child of James and Sara (Delano) Roosevelt. Franklin's father, who was 54 years old at the time of Franklin's





*Franklin Delano Roosevelt,  
32nd President of the United States  
(detail of “Unfinished Portrait” being  
painted of FDR by artist Elizabeth  
Shoumatoff on April 12, 1945,  
when the President collapsed  
unconscious a few hours before dying).*

In 1910 Franklin followed his cousin Theodore’s example and set out on his own political career, but as a Democrat rather than a Republican. He ran and was elected to the New York State Senate for the district around Hyde Park (a district that had not elected any Democrat since 1884). When he took office in January 1911, he became leader of a group of “Insurgents” challenging New York City’s corrupt Tammany Hall machine, which had dominated the state’s Democratic Party.

Franklin quickly became a popular figure among New York Democrats. He was reelected to the State Senate in 1912 but resigned in March 1913 to become Assistant U.S. Secretary of the Navy under President Woodrow Wilson. In 1914, he ran in the Democratic primary for U.S. Senator from New York, but was defeated by the Tammany-backed candidate.

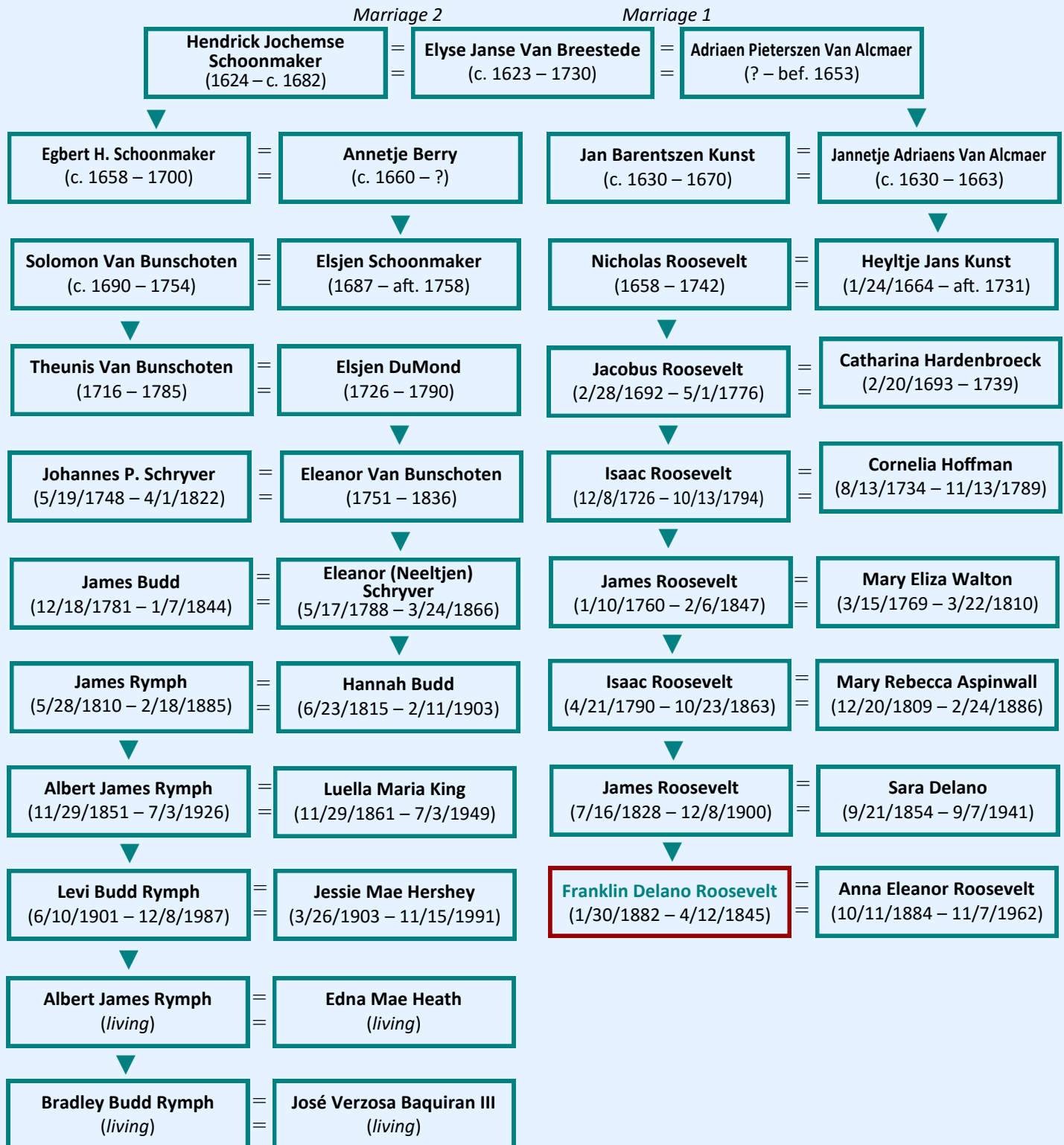
Also, earlier in 1914, Eleanor had hired Lucy Mercer as her social secretary. Soon thereafter, Franklin began an affair with Mercer. In September 1918, Eleanor found letters revealing the affair in Franklin’s luggage. As noted above, Eleanor responded by giving Franklin a choice of a divorce so he could be with Mercer or a pledge that he would never see Mercer again. Franklin’s mother, who had opposed Franklin and

birth, was remote, while his mother was possessive and the dominant force in his early years.

As a child, he attended the elite Episcopal boarding school, Groton, in Massachusetts, then went to college at Harvard University. While he was at Harvard, Franklin’s fifth cousin Theodore became President. As described in Wikipedia’s biographical profile of Franklin, “Theodore’s vigorous leadership style and reforming zeal made him Franklin’s role model and hero.” Also while at Harvard (as described above), Franklin met Theodore’s niece Eleanor in 1902, began dating her shortly thereafter, and married her in 1905.

Roosevelt graduated from Harvard in 1904. He entered Columbia Law School but dropped out three years later because he had passed the New York state bar exam. He took a job with a prestigious Wall Street law firm, focusing primarily on corporate law.

# HOW WE'RE RELATED: Franklin Delano Roosevelt



Franklin Delano Roosevelt shares a maternal, Dutch ancestral line with the Rymph family. His great-great-great-great-great-great-grandmother Elyse Janse Van Breestede through her first husband, Adrian Pieterszen Van Alcmaer, was my great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandmother through her second husband, Hendrick Jochemse Schoonmaker.

Eleanor's marriage, declared that she "would not give him another dollar" if Franklin brought scandal on the family by divorcing Eleanor. Franklin chose to stay with Eleanor and leave Mercer.

In 1920, Roosevelt resigned as Assistant Secretary of the Navy to run as the Democratic nominee for Vice President. Ohio Governor James M. Cox was the party's nominee for President. The Cox-Roosevelt ticket lost the election to the Republican ticket led by Warren G. Harding.

In August 1921, Franklin, Eleanor, and their children were vacationing at Campobello Island in New Brunswick, Canada, as was their tradition. He contracted a severe illness and, from that point on in his life, was paralyzed from the waist down. At the time, the illness was diagnosed as polio. In later year, many medical authorities felt that his disease was more likely Guillain-Barré Syndrome (which was not known as a disease in 1921).

As Roosevelt rehabilitated from his disease in the 1920s, he also developed contacts and mended fences to rehabilitate his political career. He gave presidential nominating speeches for New York Governor Alfred E. Smith at the 1924 and 1928 Democratic National Conventions. When Smith got the Democratic presidential nomination in 1928, he asked Franklin to run for New York governor in that year's elections. Smith lost the race for President, but Roosevelt was elected governor of New York.

Roosevelt became a popular reformist governor and was overwhelmingly reelected in 1930.

In 1932, with the nation facing the Great Depression, the popular governor decided to make a run for the Democratic presidential nomination to challenge the Republican incumbent Herbert Hoover. In his acceptance speech to the Democratic convention after winning the nomination, Roosevelt declared:

Throughout the nation men and women, forgotten in the political philosophy of the Government, look to us here for guidance and for more equitable opportunity to share in the distribution of national wealth.... I pledge you, I pledge myself to a new deal for the American people.... This is more than a political campaign. It is a call to arms.

Roosevelt won the presidential election with 57 percent of the popular vote and carried all but six states.

As President, Roosevelt embarked on an ambitious agenda to restore both public confidence and the national economy. His legislative initiatives were far too numerous to be discussed here, but some of his major "New Deal" accomplishments included:

- Establishing the *Civilian Conservation Corps* (CCC), which hired 250,000 unemployed young men to work on rural local projects.
- Delegating broadened authority to the *Federal Trade Commission*, including provision of mortgage relief to millions of farmowners and homeowners.
- Setting up the *Works Progress Administration* (WPA) as a national relief agency.
- Passage of the *Social Security Act* to

establish Social Security and promise economic security to the elderly, the poor, and the sick.

In 1936, Roosevelt was reelected as President in a landslide win over the Republican nominee, Kansas governor Alf Landon. He was then elected to a third term in 1940 — the first (and only) time in U.S. history when a President had been elected to three terms.

During Roosevelt's second term, the threat of World War II became increasingly ominous as Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy began invading and occupying their neighbors, and as Japan and China went to war. At the time, the dominant sentiment across the United States was isolationist, with people believing that this country should remain neutral in both Europe and Asia. Publicly, Roosevelt pledged U.S. neutrality, while in secret he participated in talks focusing on how to assist allies such as France and China that were being threatened.

By April 1940, when Germany invaded Denmark and Norway, Roosevelt had abandoned any thoughts of neutrality. American popular sentiment towards military involvement had also begun to shift, and leaders among both Democrats and Republicans began supporting Roosevelt's plans to build up the U.S. military.

By mid-1941, Roosevelt had committed the United States to the Allied side in Europe with "all aid short of war." Then on December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The United States abandoned all pretense of neutrality and declared war on Japan. On December 11, 1941, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. The

country had been firmly drawn into World War II in both the European and Pacific theaters.

Space also does not permit detailed discussion of the events of World War II. That said, by late 1943, it was apparent that the Allies would ultimately defeat Germany.

As the war was proceeding during Roosevelt's third term, the President's health began a continual decline. Democratic Party leaders realized that Roosevelt would be unlikely to live through his fourth term. Nevertheless, Roosevelt ran for reelection. The country, not wanting to shift leadership in the midst of the war, again reelected him, though by a narrower margin than in previous elections.

In February 1945, Roosevelt attended the Yalta Conference with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet leader Josef Stalin. While there, Churchill's physician commented of Roosevelt: "He is a very sick man. He has all the symptoms of hardening of the arteries of the brain of an advanced stage, so that I give him only a few months to live."

When Roosevelt returned to Washington, D.C., and addressed the Congress on March 1, many were shocked at how old and frail he looked, though he was still in full command mentally.

Six weeks later, on April 12, 1945, Roosevelt was at his retreat at Warm Springs, Georgia, and sitting for a portrait being painted of him. After complaining of a severe headache, he slumped forward unconscious. He was carried into his bedroom. At 3:35 p.m. that day, he died of a massive cerebral hemorrhage (i.e., stroke).

## TO LEARN MORE

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Wikipedia. "Theodore Roosevelt." ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodore\\_Roosevelt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodore_Roosevelt))