

*Anna
Tuthill
(Symmes)
Harrison*



*Benjamin
Harrison,
23rd
President
of the
United
States*



RELUCTANT FIRST LADY AND A PRESIDENTIAL GRANDSON Anna Tuthill (Symmes) Harrison (1775 – 1864) / Benjamin Harrison (1833 – 1901)

— *Bradley Rymph*

ANNA TUTHILL (SYMMES) HARRISON

Anna Tuthill Symmes was born on July 25, 1775, in Flatbrookville, New Jersey, but she grew up on Long Island, New York — the island where her great-great-great-great-grandparents (and our ancestors) John and Katherine (Brown) Budd and Barnabas and Mary (Langton) Horton had been among the original European settlers a century and a half earlier.

Her father, John Cleves Symmes, was a Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court. After Anna's mother died on July 25, 1776

(i.e., on her first birthday), her father disguised himself as a British soldier so that he could carry her through the British lines to move her from New Jersey to the home of her grandparents on Long Island. They cared for her during the war.

As a child on Long Island, Anna received an unusually broad education for a young girl of the times, attending private schools on Long Island and then in New York City.

When he was 13 years old, her father and stepmother moved west to Ohio and settled in the community of North Bend. In 1795, while visiting relatives in Lexington, Kentucky,

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she met a young lieutenant, William Henry Harrison. He was stationed at nearby Fort Washington. They quickly fell in love with each other.

Lieutenant Harrison came from a prestigious Virginia family — his father, Benjamin Harrison (1726–1791) had been a signer of the Declaration of the Independence. Nevertheless, Anna’s father strongly disapproved of the relationship because he didn’t want his daughter to have to endure the hardships of army camp life. John Symmes forbade Anna and Lieutenant Harrison to see each other. However, they disregarded the decree and continue to court each other behind the father’s back.

Anna and Lieutenant Harrison married each other in North Bend on November 22, 1795, while her father was away in Cincinnati on business. They honeymooned at Fort Washington, since Harrison was still on duty. Two weeks later, after John Symmes learned of the marriage, he confronted his new son-in-law and demanded, “How, sire do you intend to support her?” Harrison replied, “My sword is my means of support, sir!”

After their marriage, Harrison served in Congress as territorial delegate from Ohio (1799–1800) and was then appointed as territorial governor of Indiana (1801–1812). With the outbreak of the War of 1812, the Harrison family moved back to the family farm at North Bend, Ohio. During the war, Harrison gained fame as a military hero, as well as an Indian fighter.

After that war ended, Harrison represented Ohio’s first district in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1816 to 1819, then served as an Ohio state senator from 1819 to

1821 and a U.S. senator from Ohio from 1825 to 1828. After serving as the U.S. minister to Columbia from 1828 to 1829, Harrison retired from public service to live with his family on their farm at North Bend.

In 1836, Harrison left his retirement to run as the Northern Whig candidate for President. (Southern Whigs ran an alternate candidate.) The Democratic candidate, Martin Van Buren, won the election.

In 1840, Harrison ran for President again, and this time the Whig Party united behind him. Harrison defeated Van Buren in a landslide victory. Upon learning that her husband had been elected the 9th President of the United States, Anna declared, “I wish that my husband’s friends had left him where he is, happy and contented in retirement.”

At the time of her husband’s inauguration on March 4, 1841, Anna (who was fighting an illness) decided to stay at home in North Bend. She planned to join her husband in Washington, D.C., in May. Unfortunately, her husband became seriously ill after his inauguration and died on April 4, 1841, exactly one month after he had become President. As a result, William Henry Harrison bears the distinction of serving the shortest term of any President.

After William’s death, Anna lived with her son John Scott Harrison in North Bend and helped to raise his children, including the young Benjamin who would himself become President in 1889 (*see below*). Anna lived for almost 23 years after being widowed, dying on February 25, 1864.

BENJAMIN HARRISON

As the grandson of William Henry and Anna Tuthill (Symmes) Harrison, **Benjamin Harrison** has a unique place in American history. He is the only grandson of a U.S. President to become President himself.

The Harrisons had been among the earliest and most prominent families in colonial Virginia. By the time that Benjamin was born in 1833 in North Bend, Ohio, his branch of the family (at least) was no longer wealthy. The income that Benjamin's father made from his farm went largely into the educational expenses of Benjamin and his siblings. Benjamin's early schooling took place in a one-room schoolhouse near his home. Eventually, however, his family got him a tutor to help him with studies in preparation for college.

Benjamin attended Farmer's College in Cincinnati, Ohio, then Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, from which he graduated in 1852. After graduating, he began studying law in a Cincinnati law office, but before he had finished, he married his college sweetheart on October 30, 1853. After his marriage, he and his wife returned to live on his father's farm, where Benjamin finished his law studies. In 1854, the Harrisons moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, where he was admitted to the bar and began practicing law.

In the following years, Benjamin Harrison began active involvement in local politics with the newly established Republican Party — for example, being elected Indianapolis City Attorney. He served as a lieutenant in the Indiana Infantry during the Civil War. After the war, he returned home to Indianapolis to

resume practicing law. He also increased his involvement in Republican politics and began building a prominent image in the party nationally.

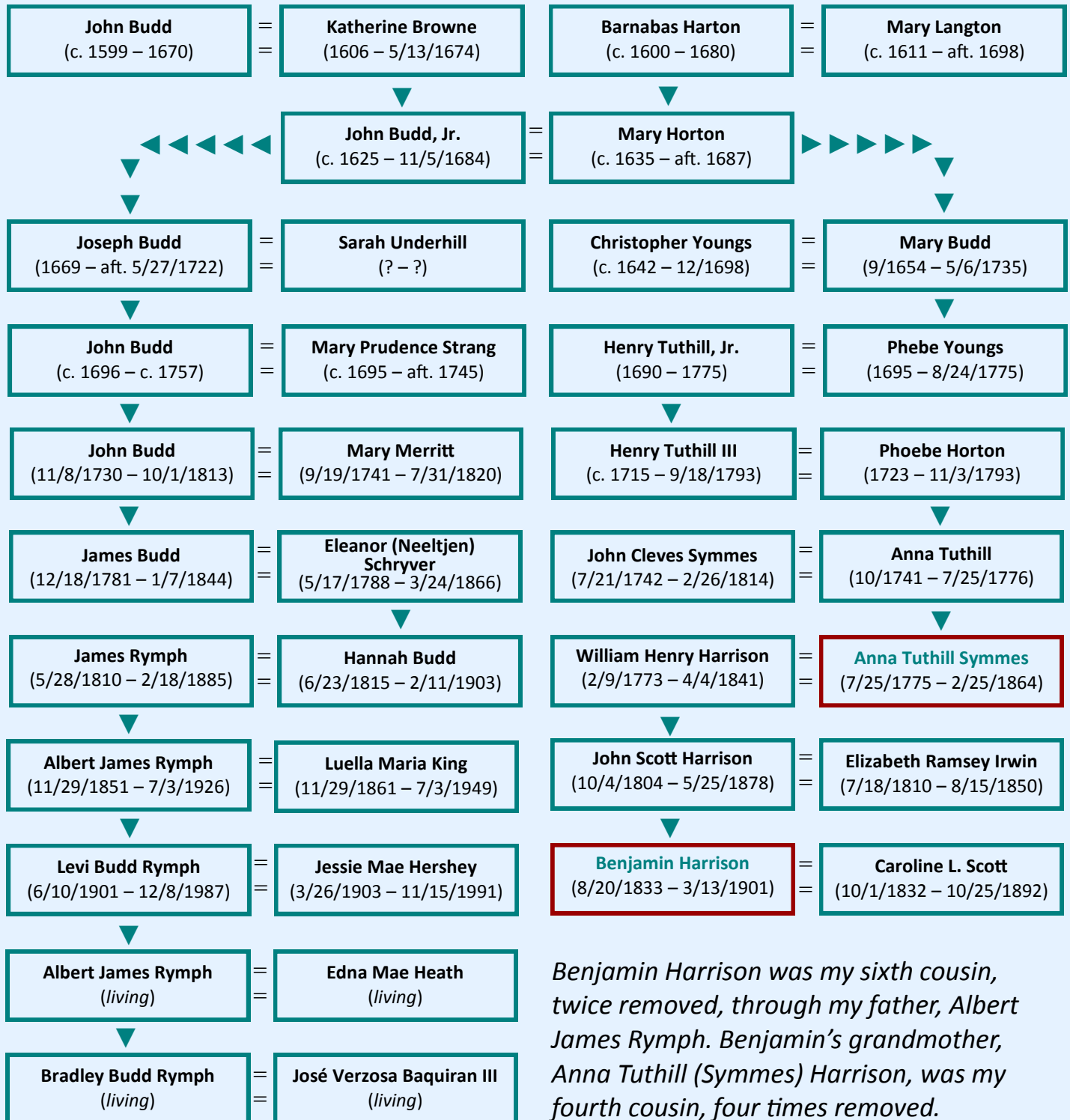
After some unsuccessful campaigns to become governor of Indiana and U.S. senator from that state, he was finally elected to the Senate in 1880. After his election, Harrison was also offered a Cabinet position by the newly elected Republican President, James Garfield. Harrison turned down the offer, choosing instead to take his Senate seat. Harrison served in the Senate from March 4, 1881, to March 4, 1887. As a senator, Harrison advocated for generous pensions for Union veterans and their widows. He also supported, unsuccessfully, efforts to provide aid to educate Southerners, especially the children of freed slaves. Harrison believed that education would be necessary to make the white and black populations truly equal in political and economic power.

In 1886, Harrison was defeated in his bid for reelection to the Senate. He returned to his Indianapolis law practice, but remained active in Republican politics.

The Republican National Convention in 1888 saw numerous candidates (including Harrison) vying for the party's nomination to challenge incumbent Democratic President Grover Cleveland in that year's election. On the first convention ballot, Harrison placed fourth among the candidates. Eventually, however, supporters of other candidates began shifting their votes to Harrison, and he won the nomination on the eighth ballot by a vote of 544 to 108.

Cleveland won the popular vote for President in 1888, receiving 90,000 more votes than

HOW WE'RE RELATED: Anna Tuthill (Symmes) Harrison and Benjamin Harrison



Benjamin Harrison was my sixth cousin, twice removed, through my father, Albert James Rymph. Benjamin's grandmother, Anna Tuthill (Symmes) Harrison, was my fourth cousin, four times removed.

Harrison. However, Harrison received 233 votes in the Electoral College versus Cleveland's 168. With this result, Harrison became only the third President in U.S. history to win the Presidency while losing the popular vote (and the last candidate to do this until the U.S. Supreme Court selected George W. Bush as President in 2000 after Al Gore had won the popular vote).

Candidate Harrison had campaigned for President partly on a platform of reducing corruption in national politics by strengthening a merit (civil service) system for government employees, rather than one based largely on political favors and appointments. Once he was in office, President Harrison was reluctant to take much action on the issue due to deep divisions of opinion on the issue in Congress. Harrison appointed a couple of reformers (including Theodore Roosevelt, see "*Rough Rider / Bull Moose*" and "*First Lady of the World*") to the government's Civil Service Commission, but otherwise he did little to further the cause. As President, Harrison was able to see the enactment of the Dependent and Disability Pension Act of 1890, providing the pensions to disabled Civil War veterans that he had unsuccessfully sought while a U.S. senator.

As President, Harrison continued to speak on behalf of civil rights for African Americans. He

endorsed a Federal Elections Bill to advance these rights. However, the bill was defeated in the Senate; this bill was the last civil rights legislation even attempted by Congress until the 1920s.

In 1892, Harrison ran as the Republican nominee for reelection to the Presidency. His opponent was Grover Cleveland — the man who had been President in 1888 and who had won the popular vote in their original match-up. Harrison's wife Caroline was ill through much of the election period and died of tuberculosis just two weeks before the voting. Harrison chose to remain with his wife, rather than actively campaign. When this election was held, Cleveland won both the popular and electoral votes. Harrison left the White House in March 1893, and Cleveland returned to it.

TO LEARN MORE

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