

= Lucy Mercer Rutherfurd =

Lucy Page Mercer Rutherfurd ( April 26 , 1891 ? July 31 , 1948 ) was an American woman best known for her affair with US President Franklin D. Roosevelt .

Lucy Mercer was born to wealthy parents who lost most of their fortune and separated in the years following her birth . Mercer then worked briefly in a dress store before taking a position as the social secretary of Eleanor Roosevelt , Franklin 's wife , in 1914 . Mercer and Franklin are believed to have begun an affair in mid @-@ 1916 , when she was 25 years old and he was 34 . The relationship was discovered by Eleanor in September 1918 , when she found a packet of their letters when unpacking his luggage upon his return from an inspection trip to the war zone in Europe while Assistant Secretary of the Navy near the end of the First World War in September 1918 . Though Eleanor offered Franklin a divorce and Franklin considered accepting ; political , financial , and familial pressures caused him to remain in the marriage . Franklin terminated the affair and promised not to see Mercer again .

Mercer soon married wealthy socialite Winthrop Rutherfurd , ( 1862 ? 1944 ) , a widower then in his fifties , but despite her marriage and Franklin 's promise , the two remained in surreptitious , albeit infrequent contact in the three decades that followed . Especially during the War years , Franklin 's daughter Anna Roosevelt Halsted arranged for her father to meet with his former mistress , more frequently after Rutherfurd 's death in 1944 . Mercer was in Warm Springs , Georgia , at the " Little White House " the President 's long @-@ time cottage and retreat , at the time of Roosevelt 's death in April 1945 . He was having his portrait painted , at Mercer 's request , by the artist Elizabeth Shoumatoff in the living room ? with Mercer and two female cousins attending . While sitting at a card table by the fireplace , reading an upcoming speech , Roosevelt said , " I have a terrific pain in the back of my head . " He then slumped forward in his chair , unconscious . Madame Shoumatoff , who maintained close friendships with both Roosevelt and Mercer , rushed Mercer away to avoid negative publicity and implications of infidelity . Mercer 's presence in the house was not mentioned in the immediate press reports nor in any of the early published biographies .

Lucy died of leukemia on July 31 , 1948 . Despite rumors , her affair with Roosevelt did not become widespread public knowledge until the publication of Jonathan W. Daniels ' 1966 memoir *The Time Between the Wars* .

= = Background = =

Born in Washington , D.C. , Lucy Page Mercer was the daughter of Carroll Mercer , ( 1857 ? 1917 ) , a member of Theodore Roosevelt 's " Rough Riders " cavalry military unit in the campaigns in Cuba , on the south shore of the island near Santiago during the brief Spanish ? American War in 1898 , and Minnie Mercer , ( 1863 ? 1947 ) , an independent woman of " Bohemian " exotic , free @-@ spirited tastes . Lucy had one sister , Violetta Carroll Mercer ( 1889 ? 1947 ) . Though they were both from wealthy , well @-@ connected families , Mercer 's parents lost their fortune through the Financial Panic of 1893 and subsequent great recession / depression which curtailed their lavish spending . The pair separated shortly after Lucy 's birth , and Carroll became an alcoholic . Minnie then raised the girls alone .

= = Affair with Franklin D. Roosevelt = =

As a young woman , Lucy Mercer worked in a dress shop . In 1914 , Mercer was hired by Eleanor Roosevelt to become her social secretary . Mercer quickly became an established part of the Roosevelt household , and good friends with Eleanor . According to historians Joseph Persico and Hazel Rowley , the affair between Mercer and Franklin likely began in 1916 , when Eleanor and the children were vacationing at Campobello Island to avoid the summer heat , while Franklin remained in Washington , D.C. In 1917 , Franklin often included Mercer in his summer yachting parties , which Eleanor usually declined to attend .

In June 1917 , Mercer quit or was fired from her job with Eleanor and enlisted in the US Navy ,

which was then mobilizing for World War I. Franklin was at that time the Assistant Secretary of the Navy , and Mercer was assigned to his office . Mercer and Franklin continued to see one another privately , causing widespread gossip in Washington . Alice Roosevelt Longworth ? daughter of Theodore Roosevelt , and a cousin of Eleanor 's ? encouraged the affair , inviting Mercer and Franklin to dinner together several times . She later commented , " He deserved a good time . ... He was married to Eleanor . "

In 1918 , Franklin went on a trip to Europe to inspect naval facilities for the war . When he returned in September , sick with pneumonia in both lungs , Eleanor discovered a packet of love letters from Mercer in his suitcase . Eleanor subsequently offered her husband a divorce .

Franklin 's mother , Sara Delano Roosevelt , was adamantly against the idea of divorce , however , as it would mark the end of Franklin 's political career ; she stated that she would cut him off from the family fortune if he chose to do so . Historians have also debated whether , as a Roman Catholic , Mercer would have been willing to marry a divorced man . Eleanor Roosevelt biographer Blanche Wiesen Cook expressed skepticism that this had been a serious obstacle , noting the depth of Mercer 's feelings . Persico also doubts that this was a factor , observing that Mercer 's mother Minnie had divorced and remarried , and that the family had come to Roman Catholicism only recently .

In the end , Franklin appears to have told Mercer disingenuously that Eleanor was not willing to grant a divorce . He and Eleanor remained married , and he pledged never to see Mercer again . The Roosevelts ' son James later described the state of the marriage after the incident as " an armed truce that endured until the day he died " . Eleanor later wrote , " I have the memory of an elephant . I can forgive , but never forget . " The incident marked a turning point in her life ; disillusioned with her marriage , she became active in public life , and focused increasingly on her social work rather than her role as a wife .

= = Marriage and continued contact with Roosevelt = =

Mercer left Washington after the affair and became the governess for the children of Winthrop Rutherford , ( 1862 ? 1944 ) , a wealthy New York socialite . Winthrop Rutherford was famous for winning the heart of socialite / heiress Consuelo Vanderbilt , ( 1877 ? 1964 ) , back in 1896 , only to see her social @-@ climbing mother instead force her into marriage with Charles Spencer @-@ Churchill , 9th Duke of Marlborough , ( 1871 ? 1934 ) , ( cousin to later British prime minister Winston Churchill ) . Now in his fifties , Rutherford was considered one of society 's most eligible widowers . About a year and half later , on February 11 , 1920 , Mercer became his second wife . Franklin Roosevelt learned of the marriage by overhearing news of it at a party . The Rutherfords had one child , Barbara Mercer Rutherford Knowles ( 1922 ? 2005 ) .

Despite Franklin 's promise to Eleanor , he kept in contact with Lucy Rutherford after her marriage , corresponding with her by letter throughout the 1920s . Historian / author Persico speculates that these letters may have been the cause of the 1927 nervous breakdown of Franklin 's long @-@ time unmarried first secretary Marguerite " Missy " LeHand , ( 1898 ? 1944 ) , as LeHand was also reputedly in love with Roosevelt and no medical cause for her breakdown was found .

In 1926 , Roosevelt mailed Rutherford a copy of his first public lecture after his affliction with polio , privately dedicating it to her with an inscription . At his first memorable presidential inauguration on March 4 , 1933 , Roosevelt made arrangements for Rutherford to attend and witness his swearing @-@ in . When her husband later suffered a stroke , she contacted Roosevelt to arrange for him to be cared for at well @-@ regarded Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington , D.C. Historian / author Doris Kearns Goodwin speculated that an entry in the White House ushers diary for August 1 , 1941 included a code name for Lucy Rutherford , suggesting that she attended a private dinner with the president then . After her husband 's death when the two began seeing each other more occasionally , Rutherford also arranged for her friend Elizabeth Shoumatoff , ( 1888 ? 1980 ) , a well @-@ known artist , to paint Roosevelt 's portrait .

Winthrop Rutherford died in March 1944 after a long illness . Lucy continued to meet with Roosevelt in the months that followed more frequently . In June 1944 , Franklin requested of his daughter Anna

, who was then managing some White House social functions and acting as hostess , that she help him arrange to meet Lucy without Eleanor 's knowledge . Aware of Rutherford 's role in her parents ' early marriage , Anna was at first angry that her father had put her in such a difficult position . However , she ultimately relented and set up a meeting in Georgetown . To her surprise , Anna found that she liked Lucy immediately , and the pair became friends . There were supposedly several dinners in the White House 's second floor private quarters during Roosevelt 's last year which were attended by Rutherford in a group with Anna 's presence and obvious acceptance . When Eleanor discovered shortly after FDR 's death from the female cousins of Anna 's role in arranging for these meetings , the relationship between Eleanor and Anna became strained and cool for some time .

In early April 1945 , Anna arranged for Rutherford to come over from her South Carolina estate in Aiken to meet her father at his " Little White House " in Warm Springs , Georgia , the small plain rustic cottage built at the polio therapy center by the heated mineral water springs resort that Roosevelt helped develop beginning in the 1920s . Rutherford and Shoumatoff along with two female cousins were sitting there as the artist worked on her painting of FDR as he sat at a card table by the living room stone fireplace , fine @-@ tuning a future speech and reading over some other papers on the early afternoon of April 12 , 1945 . In this quiet domestic scene as the two had just been smiling at each other , Roosevelt suddenly placed his hand up on his forehead and temple , saying " I have a terrific headache " , then slumped over losing consciousness . Later his two doctors called in quickly said he suffered a fatal cerebral hemorrhage . Since a thorough medical exam a year before , which he had been under increasing more intensive care and concern by the young recently recruited private physician in his last year . The two women , Mercer and Shoumatoff immediately packed and left the cottage . Eleanor nonetheless soon later learned the truth from the cousins and felt doubly betrayed to learn of her daughter 's role in the long @-@ time deception . Finding Shoumatoff 's unfinished preliminary watercolor among Franklin 's possessions some time later however , she mailed it to Rutherford , to which Rutherford responded with a warm letter of thanks and condolences .

In 1947 , Rutherford 's sister Violetta committed suicide after her husband requested a divorce . Mercer / Rutherford herself died from leukemia at the young age of 57 on July 31 , 1948 , just 3 @-@ 1 / 4 years later after FDR , having destroyed almost all of her correspondence with Franklin . Rutherford is buried along with her husband in Green Township , New Jersey .

= = Public revelation of affair = =

Following Roosevelt 's death , his administration concealed from the press the fact that Rutherford had been present during his death , fearing the scandal that would ensue . Shoumatoff 's presence became known , and she gave a press conference to address questions , but managed to hide Rutherford 's role and was even not mentioned in early post @-@ war biographies and administration histories for almost two decades . Roosevelt 's second private secretary Grace Tully , ( 1900 @-@ 1984 ) , who had also been at Warm Springs for his death , did briefly mention Rutherford 's presence in " F.D.R. , My Boss " , her 1949 memoir , but gave no further hint of the relationship . Though it was reported several times in Eleanor 's lifetime that Roosevelt had had a serious affair with an unnamed Catholic woman , this remained only a rumor for decades .

The Mercer @-@ Roosevelt affair became wider public knowledge in 1966 , when revealed in " The Time Between the Wars " , a memoir of the decades 1920s and 1930s , written by Jonathan W. Daniels , ( 1902 @-@ 1981 ) , a former Roosevelt aide from 1943 to 1945 . When the news of the memoir 's contents broke , Franklin Delano Roosevelt , Jr . , ( 1914 @-@ 1988 ) , said that he had no knowledge of an affair between Rutherford and his father , while Rutherford 's daughter Barbara flatly denied that any such romance had occurred . Well @-@ known historian / author Arthur Schlesinger Jr . , ( 1917 @-@ 2007 ) , stated of the affair that if Rutherford " in any way helped Franklin Roosevelt sustain the frightful burdens of leadership in the second world war , the nation has good reason to be grateful to her " .

= = Popular culture = =

Mercer 's friendship with Franklin Roosevelt is portrayed in the well @-@ regarded TV mini @-@ series " Eleanor and Franklin " starring Edward Herrmann and Jane Alexander from 1976 , ( a second series was also subsequently broadcast in 1977 entitled " Eleanor and Franklin : The White House Years " with flash @-@ backs to earlier episodes ) and based on the earlier best @-@ selling biography of the same name by Eleanor 's personal friend Joseph - in 1971 .

In addition , the relationship was covered in a documentary film in XX - " FDR " for " The Presidents " series of multi @-@ part video retrospectives for the " American Experience " series on American history and biography on the Public Broadcasting Service ( PBS ) .

Also , two decades later in the 2014 documentary film , also televised for the Public Broadcasting Service ( PBS ) , The Roosevelts , directed by noted documentary film @-@ maker Ken Burns , with an accompanying companion pictorial book by Geoffrey Perrett