

Isaac Roosevelt

New York City and County

Born: December 19, 1726

You are the great-great-grandfather of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the thirty-second president of the United States. Usually one lives in the shadow of an ancestor; in your case, it is a descendant who shines the brightest.

Your American ancestry traces to Claes Martenzen van Rosenvelt, who in the mid-seventeenth century brought the family from Holland to the colony of New York, though at the time under Dutch control and called New Netherland, its principal town New Amsterdam. He was your paternal great-grandfather (d. 1659). Your paternal grandfather was Nicholas Roosevelt (1658–1742), and your father was Jacobus Roosevelt (1692–1776). You were the seventh of ten children born to Jacobus and Catharina Hardenbroek Roosevelt, and you were born on December 19, 1726.

The family prospered in its American home, primarily through trade and merchandizing. You added sugar refining to its portfolio and constructed a large-scale refinery in the city. You are of the Dutch Reformed Church, and as chairman of the building committee, you laid the cornerstone for the North Dutch Church on Fulton Street (1767). You were an early member of the New York Chamber of Commerce, the first of its kind in the colonies (1768). You helped incorporate the New York Hospital (1770), and you were one of the founders (along with Alexander Hamilton) of the Bank of New York (1784), becoming the bank's second president (succeeding Alexander McDougall) in 1786. Domestically, you and your wife, Cornelia Hoffman Roosevelt (married in 1752), are the parents of ten children, though not all have survived.

Your political career began in 1775 as a member of the Provincial Convention, an extra-legal gathering charged by the Committee of Sixty, likewise extra-legal, with electing delegates to the Second Continental Congress. That work done, the Provincial Convention disbanded, as did the Committee of Sixty, to be replaced by the Committee of One Hundred, of which you also were a member. The One Hundred, reacting to news of fighting in Massachusetts (Lexington and Concord—April 1775), called for the creation of a Provincial Congress to govern in the absence of a royal assembly (its final meeting in April) and a royal governor (away in England). The congress convened four times in 1775–77; you were a delegate to each session.

The British occupied the city in the fall of 1776 (after fierce battles in Brooklyn and Manhattan), and you moved the family to the relative safety of your wife's home in Dutchess County. There you joined as an enlisted man in the local militia. But the congress thought that better uses could be made of your talents (and camp life was not really your thing), so you were tasked with converting British pounds into paper money. The following year you were among the delegates who voted to ratify the New York State Constitution. You then served in the senate of this new government.

After the British vacated New York (November 25, 1783, Evacuation Day), you returned to the city and were gladdened to find that your properties had survived the general destruction. You drew your son James into the sugar business (renamed Roosevelt & Son) and directed your attention to banking, rising, as noted, to the presidency of the Bank of New York.

Your tenure in the senate ran from 1777 to 1786. But this year, 1788, you have resumed your seat, and you have been further honored with election to the New York State Ratifying Convention, convened in Poughkeepsie to ratify the Constitution of the United States. At least that is what the Federalists believe the purpose is—surely not the Antifederalists. You though are a Federalist, and so you will work with Chancellor Robert Livingston (party leader) and Alexander Hamilton (party lieutenant) to ensure that New York votes to ratify.