

American Wedding Anniversary (March 17, 1905)

*John Q. Barrett**

Copyright © 2010 by John Q. Barrett.
All rights reserved.

Like any presidential visit to New York City, this one produced excitement, large crowds, much cheering, congested traffic and many disruptions. Because it fell on St. Patrick's Day, and because the President had a very full schedule involving multiple movements across the city, the logistics were complicated.

The President, his wife and one of the first family's two daughters left Washington on a Pennsylvania Railroad private train around 7:00 a.m. Arriving at Penn Station in Jersey City, New Jersey, about five-and-a-half hours later, they climbed into a carriage which took them onto a ferry boat. It crossed the Hudson River, landing at the 23rd Street ferry house. The carriage then took them north and east. At 42nd Street, the trotting team was halted briefly by the St. Patrick's Day parade crowd. At 5th Avenue, the carriage headed north and turned onto 57th Street, where the President and his party entered his aunt's home for a private visit.

At mid-afternoon, the presidential party began to move again. They traveled, again by carriage, from 57th Street to Park Avenue to 76th Street, where they attended a family occasion. Shortly after 5:00 p.m., the President returned to his aunt's home on 57th Street. Within the hour, he traveled to Delmonico's (5th Avenue and 44th Street), where he was the guest of honor at the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick dinner and delivered a speech. A few hours later, the President's carriage took him to the new Hotel Astor in Times Square, where he attended the Sons of the American Revolution dinner and delivered another speech. By midnight, the President and his family were back in Jersey City. They took a night train to Washington and were home at the White House by morning.

* Professor of Law, St. John's University School of Law, New York City, and Elizabeth S. Lenna Fellow, Robert H. Jackson Center, Jamestown, New York (www.roberthjackson.org). An earlier version of this text was posted to my Jackson Email List on March 17, 2010.

For an archive of selected Jackson List posts, many of which have document images attached, visit www.stjohns.edu/academics/graduate/law/faculty/profiles/Barrett/JacksonList.sju.

To subscribe to the Jackson List, which does not display recipient identities or distribute their email addresses, send a note to barrettj@stjohns.edu.

AMERICAN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Although President Theodore Roosevelt, his wife Edith and their daughter Ethel came to New York on March 17, 1905, for all of these events, the reason for the trip was the family occasion, a private gathering, that afternoon. At 3:30 p.m., President Roosevelt escorted his only niece—the orphaned daughter of his brother—down the aisle at her wedding. It occurred at 8 East 76th Street, home of a cousin of the bride and her husband (and the house where the bride had been living), and in the connected house of the cousin’s mother—the wedding ceremony, and the reception that followed, occurred in a large salon, running the width of both houses, that was created by opening the sliding doors that separated the second floor drawing rooms in each house.

The bride, Eleanor Roosevelt, age 20, married her distant cousin (and thus the President’s distant cousin) Franklin Delano Roosevelt, age 23, a first year law student at Columbia University. The star of the day was, by all accounts, her uncle the President.

* * *

In March 1905, Robert H. Jackson was a twelve-year-old boy living in Frewsburg, New York. Of course he knew of, and as a young Democrat he was politically opposed to, President Theodore Roosevelt—young Jackson was a William Jennings Bryan Democrat. His knowledge, if any, of the President’s niece and her intended could have been based only on seeing their names in recent press. Eleanor Roosevelt and Franklin Roosevelt had been, just two weeks earlier, named in newspaper stories (he sometimes as “Franklin B. [sic] Roosevelt”) as two of the relatives who attended the President’s March 4th inauguration, the White House lunch and the parade review later that afternoon, the inaugural ball that evening, and a White House family dinner the next evening.

Six years later, Jackson, then an eighteen-year-old law apprentice, met “Frank” Roosevelt, then a freshman New York state senator, in Albany. Jackson later, probably in the 1920s, met Mrs. Roosevelt. In time, Jackson came to know Governor, then President, Roosevelt and Mrs. Roosevelt quite well, and to work with them quite closely. And the Roosevelts, of course, came to be two of the most consequential people in United States and world history.

The lives, the marriage, the complex relationship and the accomplishments of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt have been, and should

AMERICAN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

always be, much studied. Regarding FDR, the many books include Justice Jackson's *THAT MAN: AN INSIDER'S PORTRAIT OF FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT*. Recent biographies include Jean Edward Smith's *FDR* and H.W. Brands's *TRAITOR TO HIS CLASS*. Alan Brinkley's *FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT* is a compact, excellent synthesis of FDR's life and the issues, policies and achievements of his presidency. Regarding Eleanor Roosevelt, the starting points include her own writings, Blanche Wiesen Cook's two volumes of biography and, under the leadership Allida Black, *THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PAPERS PROJECT*. Regarding both Roosevelt lives, separate and together, a classic to read is Joseph Lash's *ELEANOR AND FRANKLIN*.

* * *

On March 17, 1945, the Roosevelts celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary by hosting a small White House dinner. Robert Jackson, by then a Supreme Court justice, and his wife Irene were among the guests. At dinner, the President discussed, among other topics, the importance to an American politician of observing St. Patrick's Day properly. After dinner, they went downstairs to watch movies. One was a commercial release. More interesting were home movies, taken by members of the President's family and his staff, on his just-completed trip to confer with Churchill and Stalin in Yalta and, thereafter, at his meetings with Middle Eastern leaders.

As the Jacksons drove home that evening to their Hickory Hill home in northern Virginia, Irene said, "I do not think we will ever see the President alive again." When Robert disagreed, she explained that her seat opposite FDR at dinner had given her a full view of his face, and "the moment he isn't thinking of it, his face looks awfully bad."

In less than a month, FDR was gone. His deep impact, and ER's, remains—March 17th will always be an occasion to celebrate St. Patrick, the Irish, and the Roosevelts.