

Fortieth Wedding Anniversary (1945)

*John Q. Barrett**

Copyright © 2015 by John Q. Barrett.
All rights reserved.

On March 17, 1945—seventy years ago today—Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt hosted a small White House dinner. It was their 40th wedding anniversary.

The guest of honor that evening was Crown Princess Juliana of Holland, who had been living in Canada and frequently visiting the United States while the Nazis occupied her homeland. (On this date, she remained at the White House as the Roosevelts' overnight guest.¹) She was accompanied at dinner by her private secretary Mr. Willem van Tets and his wife, and by the Dutch ambassador to the U.S., Dr. Alexander Loudon, and his wife Betty.



The Roosevelts hosting Princess Juliana at Val-Kill, Hyde Park, New York, circa October 1943.

* 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). I emailed an earlier version of this essay to my Jackson List on March 17, 2015.

For an archive of selected Jackson List posts, many of which have document images attached, visit <http://thejacksonlist.com>.

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

¹ White House Ushers Log, Mar. 17, 1945, available at Franklin D. Roosevelt Day by Day, www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/daybyday/; *Roosevelts 40 Years Wed*, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 18, 1945, at 32 ("the Crown Princess Juliana of the Netherlands arrived to be a guest over the week-end").

The Roosevelts also hosted a small number of American guests. They included their daughter Anna and her husband John Boettiger; Mrs. Belle Roosevelt, whose late husband Kermit had been the First Lady's first cousin; Mrs. Pauline Emmet, widow of the President's former senior law partner Grenville Emmet; Judge Marvin Jones, the federal Food Administrator; Assistant Secretary of State Nelson Rockefeller and his wife Mary; and U.S. Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson and his wife Irene.

Justice Jackson found the President to be in a cheerful mood that evening. They, plus the Roosevelts' three dogs, gathered in the Red Room. The President mixed martinis and they discussed current events, including of course World War II, which was progressing well toward Allied victory.

Following the cocktails, the President was wheeled into the dining room. He sat between Princess Juliana and Mme. Loudon. Jackson sat on the other side of the Princess. Irene Jackson sat across the table, next to Ambassador Loudon, facing the President.

In front of them all, the table was covered with St. Patrick's Day decorations, including pipes, green hats and shamrocks. Jackson, speaking with faux seriousness, accused the President of "diplomatic error." "How is that?" he asked. "Here you are, entertaining the House of Orange," Jackson replied, "and you have the shamrock and the Irish decorations." Roosevelt, laughing, said, "Oh, what a blunder!" and then explained to Juliana, at length, the significance of Irish-Americans in U.S. politics and how important it is for a politician to make no failure in observing St. Patrick's Day.

Following dinner, the Roosevelts and their guests moved to the White House basement to watch movies. (White House servants joined them, sitting in rear seats.) They watched a Hollywood film, "The Suspect," starring Charles Laughton and Ella Raines. It involved several murders. The President joked that the film might spoil his sleep.

Then they watched home movies, taken by members of the President's family and his staff on the Yalta trip. These films showed, in color, his ocean crossing, including ship maneuvers to avoid Nazi U-boats; arrivals in Algiers and other ports; scenes on the island of Malta; Yalta

conference scenes; and F.D.R. receiving King Ibn Saud, the King of Egypt, Haile Selassie of Abyssinia, and other potentates.

As the film played, the President made comments, often humorous, on various scenes. He spoke quite a bit about Ibn Saud and his forty-five sons; the President found him an intensely interesting character. F.D.R. mentioned that he was not allowed to have any cocktails or to smoke while the King was aboard his ship—four hours without a cigarette. Because no women were allowed aboard the ship while the King was there, female members of the President's travel party were taken off board for the occasion.

Jackson commented that, interesting as the President's account of the King was, Jackson would be much more interested in hearing the King's account of Roosevelt. This intrigued the President. He speculated on whether he could ever obtain those reactions through diplomatic channels or otherwise.

At the end of this long, late evening—according to the White House usher's log, the President retired at 1:00 a.m.—the Jacksons drove home to Hickory Hill in McLean, Virginia.

During the drive, Irene commented, "I do not think we will ever see the President alive again." Robert said that was wrong—that despite the weariness of Roosevelt's appearance, Jackson thought the President was in no danger. Irene insisted. She explained that her dinner seat opposite F.D.R. had given her a full view of his face, and "the moment he isn't thinking of it, his face looks awfully bad." She said that some of his comments during the films also supported her impression.²

Sadly, Irene Jackson was correct. In less than a month, on April 12th, President Roosevelt was gone.

Shortly thereafter, Justice Jackson dictated this letter to a close friend who had sent his condolences on the President's death:

It was a great shock, but the burden was becoming pretty heavy and it was plain that he would have difficulty getting through the whole four years. We dined with the

² See generally ROBERT H. JACKSON, THAT MAN: AN INSIDER'S PORTRAIT OF FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT 152-54 & 254-55 nn.25-28 (John Q. Barrett, ed., 2003).

FORTIETH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY (1945)

President and Mrs. Roosevelt the night of their wedding anniversary, March 17, and as we drove home Irene said we would never see him again. I thought it was nonsense, but it seems to have been a woman's intuition, which is a dangerous thing for a man to challenge. He died as dramatically as he lived. The element of surprise in which he delighted was with him to the last, and I am not sure that the timing of his death was not as fortunate as the timing of many of life's events. Victory was in sight, and the great burden of the chaos of the world had not yet fallen upon him.

Truman has taken hold of the job in masterly fashion, and it must be a great relief to the country.³

³ Letter from Robert H. Jackson to Donald A. Dailey, Rochester, NY, Apr. 25, 1945 (typed, unsigned carbon copy), *in* Robert H. Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C., Box 11, Folder 9.