

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

32nd U.S. President (1882 – 1945)

Roosevelt was born in Hyde Park to Sara and JAMES ROOSEVELT, both of whom were from wealthy and aristocratic families. Franklin attended Groton, Harvard and Columbia Law School, and on St. Patrick's Day 1905 he married Eleanor Roosevelt, a fifth cousin once removed. Eleanor's uncle, THEODORE ROOSEVELT (Also Franklin's cousin), stood in at the wedding for Eleanor's deceased father Elliot.

Franklin entered politics in 1910, winning election to the state Senate. In 1913, President WOODROW WILSON appointed him Assistant Secretary of the Navy, a position he retained until 1920. At the Democratic convention he was picked as the vice presidential candidate to run with James M. Cox, but the Republicans and Harding won the election.

In the summer of 1921, disaster hit—he was stricken with polio. He fought valiantly to regain the use of his legs, mostly through swimming, and at the 1924 Democratic convention he dramatically appeared on crutches to nominate Alfred E. Smith as “the happy warrior.” In 1928, Roosevelt became New York's Governor, and he was reelected in 1930.

Roosevelt won the nomination for President in 1932, and, with the Depression an election issue, he defeated HERBERT HOOVER. He named WILLIAM H. WOODIN to the important Secretary of the Treasury post, and in the first hundred days Roosevelt pushed through

the New Deal, a sweeping program. By 1935 the country had achieved some measure of recovery, and in 1936 he was re-elected by a wide margin.

The two-term tradition had been an unwritten rule since George Washington declined to run for a third term in 1796, but Roosevelt skillfully undercut prominent Democrats who were after the nomination in 1940. He was nominated at the convention and easily defeated Republican WENDELL WILLKIE.

By mid-1941, Roosevelt had committed the U.S. to the Allied side with a policy of “all aid short of war.” He ordered HENRY L. STIMSON, Secretary of War, to begin planning for total American involvement, and when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt directed his country's resources for a global war.

In 1944, FDR was in declining health and, with the little-known Harry Truman replacing the pro-Soviet Henry Wallace as Vice President, he won a fourth term defeating Governor Thomas Dewey. On April 12, 1945, Roosevelt died in Warm Springs, Arkansas. That year Centurions purchased a silver cup in memory of FDR, which was famously misinscribed “Franklyn D. Roosevelt.” Despite the cup being replaced a few times, the error has faithfully been retained.



BILL VANDEN HEUVEL noted in his 2002 talk to the Club that FDR's time at the Century began in 1921 with a letter:

*“My dear Roosevelt:
Now that you are back in private life and in a suburb of your own home town, I want you to join the Century. Tell me who will propose and who will second you, and I will write them and tell them to do it.*

W.C. Brownell, the literary critic of Scribner's, was in an elevator at the New York Athletic Club and he heard one man say to another:

“Did you ever hear of the Century Club?”

“Yes, it's down in 43rd Street.

“What sort of a club is it?”

“It's a club of eminent men.

“Ain't that a hell of a club!”

*Sincerely yours,
C.C. Burlingham”*

The next day, FDR wrote Burlingham that he accepted the invitation to be proposed as a member, writing that he felt “very highly honored... for in spite of the remark of the man in the elevator, there is only one Century Club in the world.”