***Theodore Roosevelt, an introduction:***

Theodore Roosevelt (TR) lived in Manhattan, at 28 E 20th St., from his birth until about 13 years of age. His family, life circumstances, and experiences influenced the adult he eventually became: hunter, rancher, rough rider, politician, family man. This unit, will explore how various aspects of TR’s childhood affected the famous man he becomes later in his life. Use these lessons individually, or as a unit, and explore how this National Park Service site can augment classroom teaching.

Theodore Roosevelt (TR) was born on Oct. 27, 1858 at 28 E. 20th St. in Manhattan to a wealthy family and spends the first 13 formative years of his life at this address. In 1872, after a trip overseas, he moves with his family to a home at 6 West 57th St.

TR’s paternal (father’s) lineage can be traced back to Claes Martenzen van Rosenvelt who immigrated to New Amsterdam in 1644. TR’s grandfather, Cornelius Van Schacck (“CVS”) Roosevelt was a wealthy merchant involved with importing plated glass, real estate, and banking. CVS’ wife, Margaret Barnhill Roosevelt was of the Quaker religion, and instilled certain family values into her sons. TR’s grandparents lived on the corner of 14th St. and Broadway. It was at CVS’ home where TR, as a young boy would look upon Abraham Lincoln’s funeral procession as it passed up Broadway. CVS and Margaret’s youngest son (TR’s father), was Theodore (“Thee”) Sr., a 6th generation Roosevelt. A well-known philanthropist, Thee helped found the American Museum of Natural History, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and was involved with a NewsBoys Lodging home. In his autobiography, TR described his father as “…the best man I ever knew. He combined strength and courage with gentleness, tenderness, and great unselfishness.” TR’s mother, Martha Bulloch (“Mittie”) Roosevelt was raised in Roswell, Georgia to a planter family that owned enslaved individuals. Mittie’s sister, Anna Bulloch, would later become the Roosevelt children’s Governess/tutor.

Thee and Mittie moved into their home at 28 E. 20th St. in 1854 and proceeded to raise four children: Anna (“Bamie”), Theodore Roosevelt Jr. (“Teedie”) Elliot (“Ellie” or “Nell”), and Corinne (“Connie”). The family lived in the residence until 1872, when the family left the 28 E 20th St. address and moved into a residence at 6 West 57th St. It was in this residence where TR loses his father to stomach cancer (1878). Additionally, on February 14, 1884, TR loses both his mother (to typhoid fever) and his first wife Alice Hathaway Lee Roosevelt (to Brights Disease) within hours of one another. Furthermore, Alice died two days after giving birth to her first child, a baby girl named “Alice.”

As a young boy, “Teedie” as TR was nicknamed, suffered from a severe case of asthma. He recalls being given cigars to smoke and black coffee to drink as some of the treatments for asthma. Eventually, Thee would challenge his son telling him he “must make his body” with a custom made gym at his childhood home, TR built his body and went on to live an adventurous life including such activities as boxing, hiking, rowing hunting and exploring.

Growing up, Teedie had an instinctive interest in natural history and adventure. Theodore began his collection, classification and display of taxidermy samples early in his life, and this collection continued throughout his life. He recalls an adventure with a seal in his childhood:

“I was walking up Broadway….I suddenly saw a dead seal laid out on a slab of wood. That seal filled me with every possible feeling of romance and adventure … I had vague aspirations of in some way or another owning and preserving that seal… I did get the seal’s skull and with two of my cousins promptly started…the “Roosevelt Museum of Natural History.” *Theodore Roosevelt, an Autobiography*

As a boy, “Teedie” had an innate attraction for, and interest in, the natural world. Severely nearsighted, at the age of 13, Teedie received a pair of spectacles and an “entirely new world”[[1]](#footnote-0) opened up to him. Mr. Bell (a companion to James D. Audubon) helped Theodore Roosevelt with some lessons in taxidermy at the age of 13. Today, some of TR’s taxidermy (formerly part of the Roosevelt Museum of Natural History which was in his bedroom), is on display at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City in the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Hall. One piece on display is a Snowy Owl that TR collected while on Long Island and taxidermied when he was 12 years old. Other taxidermied specimens are birds that Theodore collected while on the Nile River in Egypt, as part of the family’s second trip overseas.

Upon return to America from their second trip overseas, Teedie spent time studying hard so as to attend Harvard University. TR began as a student at Harvard in 1876. While in school, TR studied to become a naturalist. It was during this time that Theodore published his first of many books, [The Summer Birds of the Adirondacks in Franklin County, N.Y.” and Notes of some of the birds of Oyster Bay](https://adirondack.pastperfectonline.com/library/FC17E512-6CFC-4809-96DA-350516804696)[[2]](#footnote-1). While attending school, Theodore met a woman named Alice Hathaway Lee and exclaims (While at a Hasty Puddings Club social gathering): “See that girl? I am going to marry her. She won’t have me, but I am going to have her!”. Theodore marries her after graduating Harvard University (*Magna Cum Laude*). Together, they have a daughter, baby “Alice”.

After the devastating loss of both his mother and wife (Feb. 14, 1884), Theodore spent some time out west. While he was gone, he left his older sister Anna in charge of caring for his baby daughter Alice and overseeing the completion of the home he was building for Alice. This home today is part of the National Park Service: [Sagamore Hill National Historic Site](https://www.nps.gov/sahi)[[3]](#footnote-2).

Theodore Roosevelt (TR) was a public servant for most of his life, and served largely as an elected or appointed official, including: New York State Assemblyman (age 23), US Civil Service Commissioner (1889-1895), New York City Police Commission (1895), Assistant Secretary of the US Navy (1897), an Officer in the United States Army (part of the volunteer regiment called the “Rough Riders”(1898), Governor of New York State (1899-1900), Vice President (1900) and US President (1901-1909). During his political appointments, much was said about TR. For example, the Times ran an article on him as a New York City Police Commissioner when he was patrolling at night and caught cops sleeping!

Theodore Roosevelt became president when William McKinley was assassinated in September 1901. As President, Roosevelt pushed progressive reforms, such as [**conservation of public lands**](https://www.nps.gov/thrb/learn/historyculture/trandthenpsystem.htm)[[4]](#footnote-3)and trust busting, and negotiated an end to the war between Russia and Japan, for which he won a Nobel Peace Prize. Early on, he demonstrated concern for factions of society who, at that time, were held in low regard: These include women (he appointed the first woman to an administrative position in the New York City Police Department), African-Americans, (he invited Booker T. Washington to dine as his guest in the White House, the first black person to be entertained as a presidential guest; he appointed blacks as judges in the South). He championed a good life for all Americans, regardless of their social background or employment situation.[[5]](#footnote-4)

Additionally, during his presidency, one of his chief accomplishments was his emphasis on conservation and preservation, particularly of natural resources. To that end, he used the Antiquities Act (1906) and other means to more than double the amount of land held for preservation and conservation by the federal government (as National Parks or Monuments, National Forests, wildlife preserves, and the preservation of archaeological sites throughout the land, especially in the Southwest). His record for conservation included 230 million acres of land. As of 2019, this record has only been surpassed by the Obama administration, which protected 550 million acres of land.

Apart from being involved with public service, TR was a father to six children: Alice, the oldest, was from TR’s first marriage to Alice Hathaway Lee. After Alice Hathaway died, a couple of years later, TR was re-acquainted with a childhood sweetheart, Edith Kermit Carow, and they marry. TR and Edith enjoyed a happy and flourishing relationship for more than 30 years. Together, they raised five children at Sagamore Hill, in Oyster Bay, New York:

* Alice Roosevelt Longworth was an ambassador for her father and later in life, a colorful Washington, D.C. doyenne who earned the moniker, “The Other Washington Monument”;
* Theodore “Ted” Roosevelt, Jr. (born in 1887) was a noted political and business leader who fought in both World Wars and posthumously received the Medal of Honor for his actions on Utah Beach during the D-Day landings in World War II;
* Kermit Roosevelt (born in 1889) was an explorer, soldier, writer and businessman who joined his father on African safari and on the fateful River of Doubt expedition in Brazil;
* Ethel Roosevelt Derby (born in 1891) was a pioneering World War I nurse and Red Cross volunteer who later led the successful campaign to preserve Sagamore Hill;
* Archibald Roosevelt (born in 1893) was a distinguished Army officer who was seriously wounded in battle during both World Wars and also was a successful businessman;
* Quentin Roosevelt (born in 1897) said to be the child most like Roosevelt, dropped out of Harvard to volunteer as a pilot during World War I, and died heroically in battle at age 20.[[6]](#footnote-5)

At the age of 60, Theodore Roosevelt succumbs to a pulmonary embolism, and dies in his sleep at [Sagamore Hill](http://www.nps.gov/sahi) on January 6, 1919. At which time, his two sisters, Anna and Corinne, alongside his wife, Edith, started to raise funds to buy back the properties at

28 E 20th and 26 E 20th st (Which formerly was TR’s Uncle Robert’s brownstone) with the goal to construct a memorial museum for their late brother. The Women’s Roosevelt Memorial Association raise $225,000 to purchase the properties. Theodate Pope Riddle, a friend of TR’s sister Anna, is hired to reconstruct the birthplace. Using Uncle Robert’s identical brownstone OFf of which she could reconstruct the birthplace, she successfully oversaw the creation of a memorial museum that contained TR memorabilia, exhibits, and a research library. Asking for heirlooms to return to the rooms, she was successful in recreating 5 period rooms with the help from family members recalling stories of growing up there, as well as research into TR’s autobiography. Today, Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site is one of over 400 National Park Service sites.

***Further TR sites and resources:***

* [Sagamore Hill National Historic Site website](https://www.nps.gov/sahi)
* [Theodore Roosevelt National Park's Website](https://www.nps.gov/thro)
* [Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site’s website](https://www.nps.gov/thrb)
  + [TR Stories](https://www.nps.gov/thrb/learn/historyculture/stories.htm)
  + [Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace's Historic Structures report](https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/DownloadFile/472654)
  + [Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site’s Foundation document](https://pubs.etic.nps.gov/eTIC/STMA-WEFA/THRB_420_148199_0001_of_0004.pdf)
  + [Virtual Tour of the Birthplace](https://www.nps.gov/thrb/learn/photosmultimedia/virtual-tour.htm)
  + [Booking a free ranger-guided tour at Birthplace](https://www.nps.gov/thrb/planyourvisit/hours.htm)
* [TR center](https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/)
* [Theodore Roosevelt Association](https://www.theodoreroosevelt.org/)
* [Manhattan Sites Archive](http://www.mhsarchive.org/)
  + [Theodore Roosevelt archival items](http://www.mhsarchive.org/collection.aspx?rID=THRB.COLLECT.001&db=exhibt&dir=CR%20NPNYH)
  + [Women's Roosevelt Memorial Association archived items](http://www.mhsarchive.org/collection.aspx?rID=THRB.COLLECT.002&db=exhibt&dir=CR%20NPNYH)
    - [Finding Aid: Women's Roosevelt Memorial Association collection](http://www.mhsarchive.org/FullImages/THRBWRMA-Finding-Aid.pdf)
* [National Park Service Museum Collections](https://www.nps.gov/museum/)

**Books:**

* [Suggested reading- adult and student](https://www.nps.gov/thrb/learn/education/suggestedreading.htm)

**National Park Service- Additional Teacher Resources**

* [National Park Service: Teaching with Historic Places](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/teachingwithhistoricplaces/lesson-plans.htm)
* [National Park Service: For Teachers](https://www.nps.gov/teachers/index.htm)

[National Park Service: Teacher Resources and Lesson plans](https://www.nps.gov/teachers/teacher-resources.htm?)

* [Teacher Ranger Teacher program](https://teacherrangerteacher.org/)

1. Theodore Roosevelt An Autobiography [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Adirondak Experience: Library Record

   https://adirondack.pastperfectonline.com/library/FC17E512-6CFC-4809-96DA-350516804696 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Https://www.nps.gov/sahi [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. https://www.nps.gov/thrb/learn/historyculture/trandthenpsystem.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. [Sagamore Hill Curriculum Guide](https://www.nps.gov/sahi/learn/education/upload/SagamoreHillPrepPacketSecondary.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. [Theodore Roosevelt Association website](https://www.theodoreroosevelt.org/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=991271&module_id=339339): “TR: The Family Man” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)