

**Silver Craft: Nicholas Roosevelt  
and Dutch Silversmiths in Colonial New York**  
by  
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Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. Over the past three years, I have done a fair amount of research about silversmiths in Colonial New York. I've run across all the big names: Myer Myers, Charles Le Roux, Elias Pelletreau, Peter Van Dyck, Juriaen Blank (Sr. and Jr.) ... and Nicholas Roosevelt. Aha! I thought – here's an ancestor of one of the two Presidents. No – he was but a relative: a great-great-great-great-great uncle. (His cousins, Jacobus and Johannes, were the ancestors of presidents – as you'll see from the abbreviated family tree in your packets.) All right then – he was fabulously wealthy and famous. But no – he tried to sell off his property and shops – several times.

Now I was getting interested. What was it about this man that made him so compelling to me across the centuries? He certainly had a rare skill – only 21 silversmiths were working in New York City during the middle of Nicholas' career (around 1740). He was well known and respected: served on the Common Council, on a coroner's jury, and was even commissioned at one time to make six gold presentation boxes for the Council. But he wasn't rich or famous (or even infamous): he had good times and bad times, personal and financial ups and downs: his first wife died, he married again, one of his daughters died in infancy and he named a second after her -- a not-untypical practice. He seemed to have made silver pieces that folks didn't pick up, given his inventory listed in a newspaper article from which I'll read a bit later.

And, sadly – but this is purely subjective -- his designs for the most part don't come up to the aesthetic standards of a Peter Van Dyck or Simeon Soumaine, as you'll see from the pictures scattered around. You'll see examples of Roosevelt's works in your packets, including the truly charming gold and silver baby rattles in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

So I return to my original question: who was Nicholas Roosevelt? And I think that the answer is that, like most of us in this room -- he was a NEW YORKER – with good points, flaws, skills, financial successes, financial reverses, and, unfortunately, failing health in his later years. Allow me a just few minutes to set him into the larger context of his profession, and city life in general.

Between 1723-1745, the highest concentration of silversmiths were working in the city. Overall, between 1640 and 1750, there were a total of 60 silversmiths in New York City; the earliest – and the majority – were of Dutch heritage. Here are the numbers:

- 32 were of Dutch heritage
- 10 of French Huguenot background
- 7 English

(You might be interested to know that Dutch silversmiths held civic office as early as 1692, when Jacob Boelen was elected alderman. And silversmith Gerrit Onckelbag [bpt. 1670, d. 1732] served as an assistant alderman from 1708-1713, completing his term two years before Nicholas Roosevelt was born.)

Here are three examples of Dutch silversmith “dynasties”:

The first recorded gold smith was Jeuriaen Blanck, Sr., who is recorded as working in NYC as early as 1643. His granddaughter, Hannah Bicker, married Cornelius Cornelison in July 1713. Cornelison was a silversmith, as described in his will probated 21 Nov. 1720. The tradition continues!

Another example:

Jacob Boelen, “goldsmith,” d. 1729/30; married Catharina Clock

Son: Hendrick Boelen, who took up his father’s business after 1729; m. Jannetje Waldron in 1718

Grandson of Jacob: Jacob II, 1733-1786 - a contemporary of Nicholas Roosevelt

And last but not least:

Benjamin Wynkoop (1675-1728): m. 21 Oct. 1697 to Femmetje Van de Heus

Son: Cornelius Wynkoop (1701-c. 1740): successor to Benjamin Wynkoop and, we believe, MASTER TO NICHOLAS ROOSEVELT

NR’s only son, Nicholas, Jr., became a merchant in New York State, probably Johnsbury, having relocated there in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. He is buried there along with his sister Elizabeth and her husband, Robert Gilchrist. See the article by Helen Burr Smith in your packet.

The Dutch metalsmiths were skilled craftsmen and good businessmen. According to Kristan H. McKinsey in her essay “The LaRoux and Van Dyck Families: Life as a Silversmith in New York City before 1750,” the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were the very best times for silversmiths. Three-quarters of all Dutch silversmiths who began working here in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, “eventually owned shops as independent craftsmen, either as masters of large shops with journeymen and apprentices, or as independent small producers.”

Joining Nicholas Roosevelt, here are other men on the “honor roll” of notable Dutch gold and silversmiths in the Province of New York:

Cornelius Vander Burch, bpt. 1653, d. 1699

Everardus Bogardus b. 1675

Jacobus Van der Spiegel, 1668-1708

Bartholomew Schaats, 1683-1758

Peter Van Dyck, bpt. 17 Aug. 1684; lived in Broadway next to Jacob Boelen; d. 1751

Peter Van Inburgh, 1689-1740

Jacob Ten Eyck, 1705-1793, son of Konraet Ten Eyck, also a silversmith

Richard Van Dyck, 1717-1770

Daniel Van Voorhis, 1751-1824 (very active business; numerous locations over time)

Now back to Nicholas. Here are his vitals:

- Baptized New York Dutch Church, NYC 6 Feb. 1715
- Married 5 June 1737 Catherine Comfort, daughter of Gerardus and Catharine Hennejon – first marriage
- Married for the second time – 24 Nov. 1754, also at the DRC, Elizabeth Thurman, daughter of John Thurman and Elizabeth Wessels. Author Helen Burr Smith maintains that Roosevelt made silver for the Rev. Johannes Ritzema, who is thought to have officiated at Roosevelt’s second marriage.
- Nicholas and Catherine had three children: Catherine, Sarah, and Gerardus
- Nicholas and Elizabeth also had three children: Elizabeth, who died young; Nicholas; and the “second” Elizabeth, baptized in 1762. All of the children were baptized in the DRC here in the City.

You probably know that the Roosevelt family entered public service during the earliest days of New York City. The first Roosevelt known to serve the city was Nicholas’ grandfather, Nicholas, who was a miller by profession and an Alderman of NYC in 1700-01, becoming Treasurer of the city in 1701. However, his “very violent and passionate expressions against the Mayor (probably Isaac de Riemer) were one cause of his not continuing in office. But, as we know, his grandson and namesake Nicholas continued the family tradition.

Sometimes that service could be quite dramatic. He sat on the coroner's jury at a dramatic, well-publicized coroner's inquest in 1763. This was the case of Jacob Jordan, which garnered a fair deal of printer's ink in the *New-York Gazette* of 23 May 1763. Jordan committed suicide in a Workhouse, but charges were brought that he had been beaten, scourged and whipped before he took his own life. In a long, detailed article, we learn that the Coroner's jury, including Nicholas Roosevelt, determined that the charges were not true. He was in good company: on the panel that day were other familiar names: John De Peyster, Jacob Duryee, Hermanus Schuyler, and others. The Coroner, for the record, was Thomas Shreive.

On the financial front – and compared to his cousins Nicholas and Christopher (sons of Jacobus, the ancestor of Franklin Delano Roosevelt) -- Nicholas seemed to be of humbler means despite his skill. Nicholas and Christopher had a thriving business on the East River. Here's an example of what they advertised:

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**T O B E S O L D,** by  
*Christopher & Nicholas Roosevelt,*  
Between the Coenties Market and Royal Exchange,  
**C**HOICE Madeira, Tenerief, and Fyal Wines, by  
the Pipe, Quarter-Cask, or 5 Gallons, Shrub,  
Brandy, and Jamaica Spirits, West-India Rum, Geneva  
by the Case, double and single refin'd Lump and Loaf  
Sugars, Powder and Muscovado ditto, Chocolate by  
the Box or Dozen, Raisins by the Cask, best French  
Indigo.——Likewise fine, middling, and Cornel  
Bolting-cloths.

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Until he moved to Maiden Lane late in his life, Nicholas did not live in the fashionable part of town, near Hanover Square. He lived on the North (now Hudson) River, on Thames Street (which still exists, near Trinity Church). True, he did own property in Bergen County, NJ, but it was a “a tract of salt meadow and Cedar swamp” -- not exactly habitable. He first tried to sell in an ad of 15 August 1768, *New-York Gazette*. He advertised again almost a year later, and yet again with a special offer of a discount and payment terms still later, just a few months before NR’s death.

Sadly, Nicholas was in poor health in his later years. By March 1769, he must have been in New Rochelle, because he ran an ad for the sale of his Manhattan property with the dateline “New Rochelle, Feb. 18, 1769.” His advertisement is both informative – it catalogues his stock of silver pieces – and is rather heart-rending. Here’s a bit of the ad from the *New-York Gazette and Weekly Mercury* of 13 March 1769, in which Nicholas advertises his property shortly before he dies:

*To be L E T, and enter'd upon the 1st of May next;*  
**T**HE house in which Nicholas Roosevelt now lives, at the lower end of Thames Street, on the wharf fronting the North-River: The conveniency and commodiousness of the situation excell any on the river; it fronts two slips, one of which is near 100 feet broad, and the greatest part of the year is fill'd with boats and crafts, from the Jerseys and North-River. The house will suit a merchant or shopkeeper, and great quantities of rum, sugar, molasses, and salt, with all manner of dry goods, have a ready sale. Is a roomy and convenient house, with seven fire-places; a large yard, in which is a pump and cistern, and a garden, and grass plot. Likewise a silvermith's shop to be let, and the tools of the trade to be sold. Also to be sold by said Roosevelt, a parcel of ready made silver, large and small, viz. Silver tea-pots and tea-spoons, silver hilted swords, sauce-boats, salts and shovels, soup-spoons both scollep'd and plain, table-spoons, tea-tongs, punch ladles and strainers, milk pots, snuff-boxes, and sundry other small articles, both gold and silver, as buckles, clasps, buttons, broaches, rings, and lockets, both plain and set with paste mico, &c. &c. which he will sell very reasonable, as he intends declining business, and to move in the country in the spring.  
New-Rochelle, Feb. 18. 1769.

After his death, an ad was placed advertising his property and goods, which included a wealth of silver pieces and the property on Thames Street. His will was proved in New Jersey on 1 June 1769, though he was identified as “Nicholas Roosevelt of New York City, Esq.” Most likely he died in Bergen County, New Jersey, though I cannot find a record of the exact spot. His will does not say much about his estate, but he does designate one or two objects that must have been special to him, including some silver pieces.

I am happy to say that Nicholas Roosevelt’s memory lives on in his work – and, as often happens, he might be more famous today than he was almost 300 years ago. A tankard of his is scheduled to go on auction this May, and the estimated price is in the neighborhood of \$25,000 for this single piece! You’ll see a picture of it in your packet – a fitting memorial to the man, his life, and his work.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today.