Western Regional Button Association is pleased to share our educational articles with the button collecting community. This article appeared in the September 2014 WRBA Territorial News. Enjoy!

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BUTTON-COVERED VEST GIVEN IN 1944 TO PRESIDENT FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT BY MRS. LUELA SMITH FROM CALIFORNIA

by Jerry DeHay

The History2 television channel last month featured a program on interesting and unusual gifts sent to US Presidents. We are fortunate that Jerry DeHay of Texas happened to see the program which showed this vest covered with buttons, sent to FDR in 1944 by Luella Smith of Inglewood, California.

Perhaps some of our members in California were acquainted with Mrs. Smith! These three images and descriptions are from the museum website.

The vest is kept in the FDR Museum, along with the letter Mrs. Smith sent to the President that tells about her family connection to Roosevelt. She also requested that FDR have his picture made wearing the vest and send it to her. There is no indication of whether this was done. There is, however, a copy of the letter FDR sent back to Mrs. Smith.

This unique vest is among the many unusual gifts admirers sent to President Roosevelt. Lined with brown silk faille, it is completely covered with buttons of all sizes, shapes, and colors. On the back, “FDR 1944” is formed in white buttons.
The donor of this singular piece, Luella Smith of Inglewood, California, was a descendent of the van Stoutenburg Family, which—like the Roosevelt family—settled in the Dutch Colony of New Amsterdam. In the letter below, Mrs. Smith claims to have “adopted” both Franklin and Eleanor, hinting at the history between the two families. When Roosevelt ancestors Claes Martenzen van Rosenvelt and Jannetje Thomas died, Pieter van Soutenburg adopted and raised the Rosenvelt children.