Home of FDR: 60 Years Serving a “Splendid Public Purpose”

By Sarah Olson, Superintendent Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites

This year we are celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the opening of the Roosevelt Home to the public. FDR’s gift to America of his family home was extraordinary on many levels, not least of which is that he was the first sitting president to set aside his home for public purposes. He took the first steps establishing his home as a unit of the National Park System in 1930, around the same time he was setting up his Presidential Library. Additional legislation followed, in 1943, 1944, and 1945, completing the property transfer to the United States government.

In considering the name of the site, FDR wrote Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, “I think it should be turned around to read: Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site. I do not like Franklin D. Roosevelt Home National Historic Site, because it sounds like a home for discarded politicians . . . Most certainly it is not an estate or a mansion.”

The gift included the “Big House,” the estate buildings, and thirty-three acres of land adjoining the Library property and Post Road. Clearly, he conceived the two Presidential gifts, the Home and Presidential Library, together and planned that they would serve the public in complementary ways. Curiously he did not include the riverfront property needed to protect the view of the Hudson River he so cherished, or the rest of the nearly 1400-acre family estate, which included Val-Kill and his Top Cottage retreat on Dutchess Hill. FDR did protect his family’s right to use the house which Eleanor Roosevelt gave up soon after the Home opened in 1946.

FDR himself had laid the groundwork for bringing his home within the National Park System by signing the Executive Order in June, 1933 reorganizing the Park Service to include historic sites, monuments, and national military parks managed until then by other agencies, most under the War Department and Agriculture Department. With this act FDR redefined and greatly expanded the National Park Service to include cultural as well as natural treasures. The new park system now embraced not only Yellowstone and Yosemite but also the Statue of Liberty and Gettysburg Battledfield.

FDR talked of the National Park Service reorganization in a radio address he delivered at Glacier National Park in 1934. “There is nothing so American as our national parks,” he said. “The parks stand as an outward symbol of this great human principle . . . that the country belongs to the people.” He talked of the primary public purposes to which the parks were dedicated, and concluded his remarks by artfully extending the “splendid public purpose” to some of his New Deal initiatives—the development of power sites, improving of navigation, and flood and erosion control on agricultural fields.

A year to the day after his death, on April 12, 1946, Franklin Roosevelt’s home opened to the public. President Truman traveled to Hyde Park to participate in the ceremony. Eleanor Roosevelt, with FDR’s beloved Fala in tow, formally presented the house to Secretary Council, and representatives from twenty-three foreign nations. On the great lawn stretching from the house to the Post Road were five thousand others, mainly residents of Hyde Park and Dutchess County, who felt a special kinship to their neighbor, FDR. A school holiday was declared so that local children could witness the historic event and school girls worked side by side with their mothers in a canteen tent set up to benefit the Red Cross.

The newly opened home of America’s only four-term president drew enormous public interest at first. Over 100,000 people visited in August, 1949 alone and, on a single day in October, 1947, 10,000 people filed past FDR’s grave. Public access to the Roosevelt Home has continued uninterrupted, every day, year-round, for sixty years. Today, the Home remains among the most visited places in the Hudson Valley region although numbers of visitors have fallen from the early decades to around 110,000 people a year. Over the years, many organizations have worked with the National Park Service reassembling key parcels of the historic Roosevelt lands to protect the river views, provide land for visitor and administrative facilities, and preserve and open to the public Val-Kill and Top Cottage. Park Service staff often work side by side with Presidential Library staff to provide public services and programs and the two agencies are proud partners in sharing the Roosevelt legacy.

In its 60th anniversary year, the Roosevelt Home embodies the “splendid public purpose” which FDR envisioned for most of the nation’s most valued resources.
News from the Archives: Ever Seen a Document Rotate?

(continued from page 1)

The exhibit presently appearing in the Roosevelt Library and the William J. Vanden Heuvel Gallery, Freedom from Fear: FDR Commander in Chief (which runs through November 6, 2006), has on display over fifty original documents from the Library's archival collections. Many of these documents have never been on display before. Others, such as the draft of the Day of Infamy Speech and the Einstein Letter, are such important documents that they frequently are on display for special anniversaries or exhibits, both at the Library and when loaned to other institutions.

Displaying documents in an exhibit, though, exposes the items to the harmful effects of light. Although light levels in the William J. Vanden Heuvel Gallery are kept purposefully low, visitors still need to be able to read the documents. Prolonged exposure to light at any level can cause acidic paper to discolor (just like your newspaper turns yellow on your front porch), cause colored inks and dyes to fade (red is a particularly fragile color), and even cause fine particles to disappear right off the page (iron gall ink turns from blue to brown and then fades away). So how do archivists and curators balance the need to make these documents accessible to the public with the need to preserve them for posterity?

One way is to rotate original at-risk items in and out of the exhibit, thus reducing their overall exposure to light. The Library's archival and museum staffs have identified fifteen documents in the Freedom from Fear exhibit that either are at-risk because of their inks and paper quality or are of such high intrinsic value to the nation (such as the Day of Infamy draft that special preservation measures are called for to ensure their permanence. Beginning January 3rd, five of these documents will be rotated out of the exhibit for a three-month period. After the initial period is over, the first set will be returned to the exhibit and another five documents will be rotated out. This rotation will continue until all fifteen documents have had three months of rest away from light exposure.

Don't worry, though. While these few documents are off exhibit for their brief periods, high quality color digital reproductions will be installed in their place so that museum visitors can still enjoy a rich and complete exhibit experience. There will be some forty-five original documents on display during each rotation period, and all of the original documents will be returned to the exhibit for the final three weeks of its run, October 16 - November 6, 2006.

For details of the document rotation schedule, including dates and the list of documents for each rotation, please contact Cliff Laube, Public Affairs Specialist, (845) 486-7745.

FDR Presidential Library

The CHAIR

by Delores Thomas

ABANDONED, ABSTRACT, COVERED WITH FINE PARTICLES OF

OF THE INITIALS THIS OL’ WICKER WHEELCHAIR BEHOLDS

A WATCHFUL EYE; COMPASSIONATE, DELICATE, CARESSES

CAREFULLY

RESTORES THE LIFE OF A MONUMENTAL TREASURE THAT WILL SOON

BE REVEALED

THE ART, THE DETERMINATION

MIST-FILLED EYES, PASSIONATE SIGHS GIVES REVELATION OF WHAT

HAS BEEN HIDDEN; IS STARTING TO UNFOLD

OF THE INITIALS THIS O’ WICKER WHEELCHAIR BEHOLDS

FOR F.D.R., THE MONARCH OF LONG AGO

SUCH A GRAND HONOR THIS CHAIR WILL RESTOW

FOR A SLEEPING LEGEND HAS NOW BEEN AWAKENED

TO THE HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CHARMS

THAT NOW CAN NOT BE FORSAKEN

FROM OUT OF THE SHADOWS, AN HONORED SOLDIER STANDS PROUD

AND ERECT

QUIETLY WINKS AND WHISPERS IN GREAT MAGNITUDE

WELCOME HOME; MR. PRESIDENT, WELCOME HOME...

Delores J. Thomas is an award-winning poet, playwright and author.

She currently resides in Aurora, Illinois.

The Research Room at the Roosevelt Library receives over 1500 researcher visits a year. Yet the president's gift of history is much more than a research archive. He provided within the Library for permanent museum galleries to show his personal collections, which he believed had educational value. And he gave his own home. Both are places where the public is welcome to seek answers to the questions of everyday living in the Roosevelt era. In so doing our visitors deepen their understanding of the historical basis of civic life today, which in turn helps them shape our nation's future.

Over the past sixty years the National Park Service and the National Archives have operated as neighbors in carrying out FDR's great vision for the future of his Home and Library at Hyde Park. I am proud that as we achieve these significant institutional milestones the National Park Service and the National Archives/Roosevelt Library are enjoying a strong partnership.

FDR Presidential Library

Museum Catalogue Database Completed

In December 2005 the FDR Presidential Library reached an important record-keeping milestone when Registrar Michelle Frauenberger completed work on a seven-year project to enter card catalogue records for nearly 29,000 objects in the museum collection into a new computer database.

The museum's new IO computer database is an electronic card catalogue which contains all of the vital information about museum objects, including physical descriptions, historical background, digital images, donor information, and storage locations. The database makes it possible for museum staff to instantly access and sort collection information using keyword searches and other specialized functions and create customized reports. It has already saved hundreds of hours of staff time in research, loan, and exhibition work. The museum will retain the original paper card catalogue as a historical record, but all new collection records are now entered into the IO database.

The museum is currently moving forward with another major record-keeping project that got underway in June 2005—a detailed museum collection inventory. The inventory is resulting in the addition of new details to many older museum records, including new information on thousands of rare World War I and World War II posters, hundreds of naval portraits from President Roosevelt's personal collection, and unusual items like a motorized speech reading machine (an early version of a teleprompter) presented to FDR in 1935. Every item being inventoried is also photographed and measured.

In the future, the museum will make its computer database available to other museums and cultural institutions, as well as individual researchers.

FDR Presidential Library

Thousands of rare World War I and World War II posters were entered in the IO database. In honor of Women's History Month, a collection of WWII-era posters relating the role of American Women in the war effort are on display in the museum through April 30, 2006.

The exhibit currently moving forward with another major record-keeping project that got underway in June 2005—a detailed museum collection inventory. The inventory is resulting in the addition of new details to many older museum records, including new information on thousands of rare World War I and World War II posters, hundreds of naval portraits from President Roosevelt's personal collection, and unusual items like a motorized speech reading machine (an early version of a teleprompter) presented to FDR in 1935. Every item being inventoried is also photographed and measured.
Red Tailed Angels Film Premiere and Dinner a Success

On February 24, The Roosevelt Library and Catharine Street Community Center presented the Red Tailed Film Center première of Red Tailed Angels: The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen, in commemoration of Black History Month. The film was shown to a sold-out audience in the Memorial Auditorium of the Henry A. Wallace Center. Nearly eighty guests attended a benefit dinner with four of the original Tuskegee Airmen following the première.

Proceeds from the premiere and dinner benefited jointly the Pare Lorentz Film Center of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and the educational programs of the Catharine Street Center.

Red Tailed Angels is a documentary short that tells the story of the dedicated, determined young men who enlisted to become America’s first black military airmen, at a time when many people thought that black men lacked intelligence, skill, courage and patriotism. Using historical footage and interviews with original Airmen, the film is the latest in a series of documentary films produced by the Pare Lorentz Film Center of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library.

After the film was screened, Josh White Jr., son of Josh White, Sr., the legendary Blues guitarist, Josh White, Jr., performs to a sold-out audience at the Wallace Center.

Included in the curriculum guide packet is the DVD, Red Tailed Angels: The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen. The guide presents an exciting array of creative ideas that will enrich the teaching of the story of the Tuskegee Airmen at a variety of grade levels and through standards relating to many subject areas including history, civics, citizenship, government, economics, geography, fine arts, and writing and journalism.

Red Tailed Angels Curriculum Guide Now Available

The Education Department of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum presents a new curriculum guide for educators entitled, Red Tailed Angels: The Story of the Tuskegee Airmen. The guide presents an exciting array of creative ideas that will enliven the teaching of the story of the Tuskegee Airmen at a variety of grade levels and through standards relating to many subject areas including history, civics, citizenship, government, economics, geography, fine arts, and writing and journalism.


The Hyde Park Free Library donated a novel once owned by Eleanor Roosevelt to the Roosevelt Library last fall. The book had been in the possession of the late Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. and was among a collection of books his widow donated to the Hyde Park Free Library.

The novella, Olivia, published in 1949 by Hogarth Press, was written by British author and historian Dorothy Strachey Bussy, herself once a student of Marie Souvestre and later a teacher at Souvestre’s Allenwood School, which Eleanor Roosevelt attended in London. The book is inscribed “For Tottie, in memory of old days from D.S. (Olivia).” “Tottie” was Eleanor Roosevelt’s nickname at the Allenwood school.

Hyde Park Free Library Donates Olivia Book

The Hyde Park Free Library donated a novel once owned by Eleanor Roosevelt to the Roosevelt Library last fall. The book had been in the possession of the late Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. and was among a collection of books his widow donated to the Hyde Park Free Library.

The novella, Olivia, published in 1949 by Hogarth Press, was written by British author and historian Dorothy Strachey Bussy, herself once a student of Marie Souvestre and later a teacher at Souvestre’s Allenwood School, which Eleanor Roosevelt attended in London. The book is inscribed “For Tottie, in memory of old days from D.S. (Olivia).”

NPS Offers Shuttle from POK Train Station

The National Park Service will offer the Roosevelt Ride, shuttle service from the Poughkeepsie Train Station to the Roosevelt sites in Hyde Park, Thursdays through Mondays, May 1, 2006 - October 31, 2006. A National Park Service escort will meet travelers at 10:30 a.m. at the station and shuttle them to the Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the FDR Presidential Library and Museum.

In the afternoon, guests will be escorted to the Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site (Val-Kill) and Top Cottage (FDR’s personal retreat). The shuttle will return to Poughkeepsie Train Station to connect with the 5:30 p.m. train back to Grand Central Terminal.

Reservations for the Roosevelt Ride shuttle service are required. Call (845) 229-5320 to reserve your ride.

Subscriptions to the Email Bulletin

To learn about programs and events at the FDR Presidential Library and Museum and the Henry A. Wallace Visitor and Education Center sign up for our Email Bulletin by sending an email to clifford.lasbe@nara.gov and typing “SUBSCRIBE” in the subject line.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE EMAIL BULLETIN

On Monday, November 6, Museum Exhibits "Freedom from Fear": FDR Commander in Chief FDR Presidential Library William J. Vandenberg Gallery

Friday, May 26 - ESO Show Wallace Center; 7 PM

Saturday, May 27 - Sunday, May 28 - Bivouac - Living History 9 AM to 4 PM FDR Library Lawn

Saturday, June 24 - Roosevelt Reading Festival III 10 AM to 4 PM Wallace Center

Upcoming Events
JOIN THE WORLD OF THE ROOSEVELTS

Become a member of the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute. Enjoy the benefits—and the knowledge that you are providing vital support to the FDR Presidential Library and Museum.

Membership Benefits

Individual $35
- Unlimited free admission for one adult to the FDR Presidential Library for one year. Children 16 and under admitted free.
- 10% discount at the New Deal Museum Store.
- Subscriptions to The View from Hyde Park, the FERI newsletter, and Rendezvous, the Roosevelt Library newsletter.
- Discounts for conferences, lectures, and seminars sponsored by FERI and the Roosevelt Library.
- Free admission to all Presidential Libraries administered by the National Archives and Records Administration.

Family $60
- Includes all of the benefits of individual membership plus unlimited free admission for two adults.

Ambassador $100
- Includes the benefits of family membership plus unlimited free admission for four adults.

New Dealer $250
- Includes the benefits of Ambassador membership plus free admission to all Roosevelt Library and FERI seminars, conferences or lectures, where a fee is required.

Cuff Links Club $500
- Includes the benefits of New Dealer membership plus behind the scenes tour for up to four people of the Roosevelt Library archives.

Brain Trust $1,000
- Includes the benefits of Cuff Links Club plus one complimentary ticket to the FERI’s annual fundraising event (odd-numbered years will be the Four Freedoms Medals Ceremony and Laureates Banquet).

Student (age 17-22) $15
- Includes all of the benefits of individual membership, for students with valid student ID.

Membership Form

To become a member, please fill out and return the form below, or join online at www.feri.org. Call (845) 486-7769 for information.

Name _____________________________________________________________________
Address____________________________________________________________________
City _______________________________________ State ________ Zip _______________
Telephone  ______________________________  Email_____________________________
Checks should be made out to FERI and mailed to:
Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute
4079 Albany Post Road
Hyde Park, NY 12538
Please charge $__________________________________     to my __ Mastercard     __Visa
Card #_________________________________    Expiration Date_____________________
Name (as printed on card)_____________________________________________________
Signature ___________________________________________________________________
__ New Membership
__ Renewal Membership
__ My company matches my charitable contributions. I will contact my corporate giving office to have a form for matching gifts sent to FERI.
__ I wish to give but not become a member.

Please send a Gift Membership to:
Name _____________________________________________________________________
Address ___________________________________________________________________
City _________________________________________State ________  Zip _____________
Telephone  ______________________________  Email_____________________________
Membership Category  _______________________________________________________