

1945

The President's Room

Visitors to the Library take a special interest in the President's Room, for this room reflects in a very personal way the tastes and interests of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the man. He furnished and arranged it, piece by piece, over the period since the opening of the Library in 1941. He took his time about it, bringing over a chair or a table, and a few weeks later, a picture, or a vase, or some books. He chose the furniture for it from his home: he picked out the pictures for the walls, the ornaments for the mantelpiece, and the various boxes, ashtrays and other articles on the desk and tables and shelves.

After a first general look about the room, the visitor always notices the President's wheel chair, which stands to the left, near the doorway through which he came from his home. Under the right side of the seat can be seen an ash tray which slides out of sight. This ingenious device was made in the shop of the Library for the convenience of Mr. Roosevelt, who often smoked a cigarette, in the familiar long holder, as he went about the building. A foot rest, also made in the Library shop, stands to the left of the fireplace.

The rug, given to President Roosevelt by the Shah of Iran, at the time of the Teheran Conference, turned out to be the exact size needed for this room. The small rugs had belonged to his mother. Secretary Ickes gave him the clock for the mantelpiece. The hangings were specially made by a Work Projects Administration project in Norfolk, Virginia.

The old Dutch tiles around the fireplace, all relating to marine life, were collected by Mr. Roosevelt himself. The andirons and the fire set once belonged to President John Adams, and were given by a relative to Mr. and Mrs. Roosevelt as a wedding present. The portrait of his mother, an excellent likeness, was painted by Douglas Chander in 1940. The Chippendale chair facing the desk, and the silver urn on the book shelf, formerly belonged to Benjamin Chew (1722-1810), Chief Justice of the Provincial Court of Pennsylvania. The Chew family of Philadelphia were intimate friends of George Washington and his family, so it is very probable that President Washington has sat on this chair. Every distinguished guest who has come to the Library, has used it when talking to the President, for Mr. Roosevelt invariably sat at his desk when in this room. Only on a few rare occasions has he used the red sofa or the blue velvet chairs.



The painting over the mantelpiece (by Claude Lorrain) was left to Mr. Roosevelt by his godmother, Miss Nellie Blodgett. The glass transparency standing on the window sill, shows the USS Houston in the Panama Canal. The President used the Houston in October 1935 and in July 1938 to review the U. S. Fleet on the West Coast, and to inspect the defences of the Panama Canal. En route he enjoyed some of his favorite sport, fishing. The painting over the bookcase shows the destroyer Dyer in 1918, in the harbor of Ponta Delgada in the Azores. This is the vessel used by Mr. Roosevelt, then Assistant Secretary of the Navy, on his official trip to inspect U. S. Naval forces in European waters. On the north wall are two interesting gouache paintings of Paestum and Naples in Italy, and in the far corner to the right the small colored picture is an old print showing a View of the Hudson River from the residence of James Roosevelt Esq. The little picture in the black frame, just below, is a water color on ivory of the old factory site in Canton, China, about 1843. The building in the middle was the office of Russell & Co., the Delano business firm.

In the bookcases are first editions, family books, books written by members of the President's cabinet, books used by him as a child, writings of his own and of other members of his family, a complete set of first editions of Winston S. Churchill's writings, each volume signed by both the Prime Minister and President Roosevelt.

Whenever President Roosevelt brought distinguished guests to see the Library, he asked them to sign their names in his Visitors Book. This book was kept in one of the cupboards, and was brought out only when the President asked for it.

In 1919, after the last war, President Wilson went to Europe twice, on the George Washington. On both trips he used a desk which was an exact replica of one of President Washington's desks. Later, when the furnishings of the presidential suite on the George Washington were offered for sale, Mr. Roosevelt bought the desk and chair (for \$100.), put them in his study at Hyde Park, and used them there until he sent them over to this room in 1941. After his death they went to his eldest son James, together with a tall secretary which stood against the north wall between the book cabinets. These two pieces will eventually be returned to the Library. The present desk is a substitute exactly the size of the George Washington desk. Everything on it is placed just as Mr. Roosevelt had it on the other one. In the box surmounted by a Scotty, is a package containing 10 Camel cigarettes put there by the President on his last visit. The last thing to be put on the desk by him is the stand with the flags of the "Big Four": the United States, Great Britain, China and Russia. The place of the secretary has been filled with the mahogany bookcase, and the picture above the bookcase has been chosen from Mr. Roosevelt's naval collection, to fill that space. The room is otherwise substantially as the President left it, on his last visit, March 28, 1945.

September 8, 1945

Margaret L. Suckley