

TALKS BY MRS. ROOSEVELT

May 19, 1937

Description: ER gives an interview to Kate Spicher describing the history of the White House.

Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt, Virginia Barr, and Kate Spicher.

BARR:

This is Virginia Barr of the Pond's Company, speaking from Washington, D.C., and bringing you - Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt! Tonight Mrs. Roosevelt is going to give us another of those intimate glimpses into the White House that you have expressed so much appreciation of. First may I say a word.

Almost every day I find on my desk some reminder of the far away places where women are caring for their skin with Pond's Cold Cream. This morning there was a 3 page letter from a fashionable society and tourist resort in the Argentine, where Pond's Cold Cream is in constant demand. And under that were messages from Beauty Editors of two Society magazines in the English colony in Cape Town where women depend all the year round on Pond's Cold Cream, the climate is so hard on their skin.

It always gives me a thrill to get letters like these. It just seems to me that wherever women want to be beautiful - there Pond's Cold Cream gets to be known about. Pond's Cold Cream is actually the largest selling Cold Cream in the whole world!

Won't you try a jar of Pond's Cold Cream? And find out for yourself why so many women all over the world are using it in preference to all other creams. Get a jar tomorrow morning.

And now, I have the honor to present - Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt!
(8 MINUTES FROM MRS. ROOSEVELT ENDING WITH INTRODUCTION
OF VIRGINIA BARR.)

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Good evening. I have said each week that I would welcome any questions of a generally interesting nature you would care to send me, because, of course, I want to talk about things you want to hear about most.

The majority of your questions seem to be about the White House and the life there. I think that is only natural. The White House belongs to all of you and, though the life there has to be very different from what it would be in your own home, still any of the official parties given there are an expression of the hospitality of the people of the United States.

The White House has been the actual home of every President of the United States except George Washington. A few days before his death in 1799, he and Mrs. Washington made what was then a long trip from Mount Vernon, to inspect the construction of the building.

Now, I thought it might be interesting to take you on a tour through the parts of the White House you can't ordinarily see. On this radio tour I'll be the guide, and with me will go a young lady who is here in the studio -- a ~~very~~ young lady, Miss Kate Spicher. Kate, have you been through the White House?

KATE:

No, I never have, but I'd love to, especially the second floor!

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

All right, we'll certainly go there. But when you first arrive as a guest in the White House, Kate, an usher would show you into one of the reception rooms, the Red Room, the Green Room, or on very formal calls, the Blue Room or the East Room.

~~At a large reception I would stand either in the Blue Room or the Red Room, and greet the guests as they passed by. When there's some particular group, the president of that group, and a military aide stands with me, and the aide repeats the name of each person as he comes along the line.~~

KATE:

How do guests know what they're supposed to do when they come to the White House?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

The usher receives them at the door, and tells them exactly what is going to happen. He will say for instance, "Will you please let me have your wraps, and then will you go through that door and wait in the Green Room. Mrs. Roosevelt will receive you in the Blue Room, and I will tell you when she is ready." I try to see the guests very soon after they arrive, and usually everything goes smoothly. But I remember one house guest who stayed in her room all morning, because she didn't know what would happen if she went out.

KATE:

Is that the East Room there?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Yes, at the end of the corridor.

KATE:

That's where one of the President's wives hung out the wash, isn't it? I read about that.

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

I think that was Mrs. John Adams -- Abigail Adams, the wife of the second President. The house wasn't finished when she lived here, and that was the only purpose for which she could use the room at the time.

Mrs. Adams, you know, was the only woman who was ever both the wife and the mother of a President.

She must have had an uncomfortable time in the White House for when she moved in in 1800, only two rooms were completed, and there were no stairs.

But she held the first White House Reception on New Year's Day, 1801. The White House was in the midst of a swamp, and the only road to it was a path six foot wide from the Capitol. Guests had to travel in their coaches and carriages over cow paths and several were upset or mired.

KATE:

We're not going to miss the kitchens, are we?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

No, they are in the basement---on the Northwest side. To get to them we can go down the stairs from the end of the hall.

KATE:

They're all changed now, aren't they?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Yes, we remodelled them entirely. Now they have complete electrical equipment. Before they cooked first over a wood fire and then over coal stoves. When the electrical units were being installed, it occurred to me that it might be a little difficult to feed the guests if all the electricity went off just at dinner time.

KATE:

Did that ever happen?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

No, fortunately, and I was reassured that once you've started to cook, the heat would remain for two hours.

But now, Kate, let's go up to the second floor. We can walk up the State staircase or take the elevator.

KATE:

Oh, I'd like to walk up the State staircase -- The second floor is where you and the President really live, isn't it?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Yes, and of course, each family which moves in, arranges these rooms according to their preferences and needs. Here for example at the end of the West Hall, there was a conservatory when we came in 1933. We changed that into a family living room.

KATE:

Does the President work on this floor at all?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

During the daytime, he is usually in the office wing of the White House, But often, in the evening, or Saturdays or Sundays-he works in his study here. It's an oval room right in the center of the House, and the same shape as the Blue Room directly below it.

KATE:

Was that all fixed up for him, Mrs. Roosevelt, or could he put things he liked in it?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Oh, that's his room, and all over the walls are his favorite sailing pictures, and on the table near his desk is a ship model which he cherishes very much.

KATE:

Where do you do all your work?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

I'll show you now. I have a large sitting room at the wouth west end of the House. The most important piece of furniture here is my desk. I can always find work to be done on it. I don't think I could count the number of pictures of friends and relatives. And also I have several pieces of Val Kill furniture which I brought with me from Hyde Park.

KATE:

Does your secretary work in your room too?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

We work here together often, but Mrs. Scheider has a cubby hole of her own on this floor but it's so full of letters and packages that I don't quite see how she gets in or out.

KATE:

I guess when they built the White House, they didn't think about the ladies being so busy with so many things.

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Probably not, Kate, but in 1848 the wife of the President was his personal secretary. That was the wife of President James Knox Polk.

KATE:

Mrs. Roosevelt, you said something about movies once. Do you have them in the White House?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Oh, yes, often---right in the second floor corridor. You see the archway that leads to the family sitting room -- right in that entrance there is a screen that lets down.

KATE:

Can you have any movie you want?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Sometimes I choose them, sometimes Miss Lehand who is the President's personal secretary does. Then when the children are home, they select one. If we have too many serious ones or sad ones, the President is very apt to say: "I'm looking for entertainment. I don't like to be depressed".

KATE:

Do you ever listen to the radio?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Oh, yes, we all do. When we have time. We enjoy the symphony programs, all important speeches, and every member of the family has some favorite entertainer. I like Amos and Andy, and Burns and Allen.

KATE:

You're so very busy, but don't you and the President ever get a chance to just sit down and do nothing in the evening as my family does sometimes?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Very rarely, but if the President is free he likes to work on his stamps and I like to read, though occasionally the family plays cards, and I think our favorite game is “rummy”.

KATE:

This question sounds sort of silly, Mrs. Roosevelt, but suppose you want to ask the President something when you’re in your room and he’s busy in his office. How do you do it?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Oh, I have to make an appointment to see the President. I get his secretary on the telephone and find out whether the President is busy. If it is something I can ask over the telephone, and he is free, I am connected with him. If I want to see him I go to his office when he is free.

KATE:

Suppose the President’s room needs new curtains or something. Do you just run out to the store and buy them?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

No, not quite like that. Anything bought for the White House, except minor inexpensive things has to be bought through regular government buying channels, and bids are obtained from various sources. In our family rooms, we don’t have to consult anyone’s taste but our own, but in the official rooms downstairs, the Art Commission has to be consulted.

KATE:

I suppose I should know, but---how was the White House built?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

There was a competition for the design of the White House and it was won by a man named James Hoban. His prize was \$500. I’ve always thought it was amusing that he admitted he got his idea for the White House from the newly built mansion of the Earl of Leinster in Dublin, where Hoban was born.

Now, Kate, before we go on with our other questions, Virginia Barr is going to speak for a moment.

(INSERT MIDDLE COMMERCIAL)

MIDDLE COMMERCIAL

BARR:

Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt!

A little while ago, I told you of some of the many, many countries where women are finding out what we in America know so well - that Pond’s Cold Cream is wonderful for the complexion - that it does more than clean your skin.

Let me tell you now, very simply, just what Pond’s Cold Cream will do for you, and just how to use Pond’s Cold Cream.

You know how every woman dreads the little lines that creep in, around her eyes and the corners of her mouth. And some of us, when we look close in the mirror, are horrified because our pores look so much larger than we thought they were. Some of these pores actually look dirty! That means -- blackheads. Now here’s the encouraging thing. You can do something about those little lines. And you can find those blackheads going away and your pores becoming less and less noticeable.

This is what we advise: -

First smooth on Pond’s Cold Cream. Let it soften and loosen the dirt, and make-up, and hardened oils in your pores. Wipe it all off. Then apply more Pond’s Cold Cream, patting it in briskly. That invigorates your skin through and through. Do this night and morning, and between times whenever you want to freshen up and look specially nice. You’ll soon be amazed at the difference in your appearance. Begin this easy treatment right away ... Get a jar of Pond’s Cold Cream tomorrow morning.

And now, once again, we have the pleasure of hearing Mrs. Roosevelt!

(8 MINUTES FROM MRS. ROOSEVELT ENDING WITH INTRODUCTION OF VIRGINIA BARR)

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

I think our little tour of the White House has answered many questions, but there are a few more, and Kate has a list of them. What’s first, Kate?

KATE:

One lady wants to know how many servants there are in the White House...and who hires them?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

There are twenty-three servants who work in 8 hour shifts. Such long hours have to be kept, that some come at one hour, and work their "day" and leave, then another shift comes on. Only five of the servants sleep in the house. Mrs. Nesbitt, the housekeeper, engages and dismisses them. And every regular servant in the White House is under the Civil Service except those the President brings with him, for he may bring such personal servants as he desires.

KATE:

~~Someone wants to know who acts as hostess when you're away.~~

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

~~As a rule there are no formal functions when I am away. Twice though, I have asked my daughter-in-law, Mrs. James Roosevelt, Jr., to receive groups of people when I was not able to be at home myself.~~

~~If my husband has a few people in for a meal when I am away, he acts as the host himself, and there is no formal hostess, though if he wishes he may ask any one of the ladies present to act as hostess for the evening.~~

KATE: (GIGGLES)

This man wants to know whether you have mice in the White House and what you do about them.

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Oh, yes, there are mice there, as there are in any old house. And I'm sorry to say we have rats too. One summer two of my friends were breakfasting on the south portico, and an animal ran right across their feet, leaped to the balcony and disappeared.

They both remarked on the boldness of that "squirrel", and neither dared admit to the other until they were safely inside, that they both knew it was a rat.

Another time, Mrs. Scheider opened a cupboard door, and a mouse leaped right out and landed on her chest. Tommy almost died, but as she tells the story, she didn't dare scream because she was in the room immediately next to the President's study, and she knew that a scream would have brought every secret service man within hearing distance.

We've made a determined fight, and the [unclear word: might be: fat]⁴ mice have practically disappeared, but you have to keep at it constantly in an old building.

KATE:

A lot of people want to know about pets. How many pets do you have and who takes care of them?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

We have no pets at present in the W.H. but my [unclear phrase].⁵ Neither my husband nor I have time to take care of ~~them~~ dogs⁶, and the constant stream of people at the White House makes dogs,⁷ even those with the kindest dispositions, ver[y] nervous. We have decided that until we leave, we have no right to have any ~~pets~~. Oh, but in the sun room there are two birds and they are taken care of by the maid on that floor.

KATE:

Who does the washing at the White House?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

All the laundry in the White House is sent out to two special women. There weren't any arrangements made for laundry there, and we have other purposes for the East Room now.

KATE:

Who orders all the groceries, meat, soap, and all those things for the White House?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

The housekeeper, Mrs. Nesbitt. She buys in large quantities as far as possible, and of course is expected to buy good quality and economically but where she buys is left entirely to her.

KATE:

One lady wants to know about the flowers in the White House. Do you arrange them yourself?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Oh, my no. I'm afraid that lady doesn't know quite what a job that would be. There are 22 rooms in the White House, in which flowers are arranged every day. It takes three men a whole day to take care of the flowers in the house.

KATE:

A lady wants to ask - what do you think is the most interesting antique in the White House?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Oh, there are so many. But the one that I always think is very interesting is a rather ornate, gilt mirror hanging in the Monroe Room. It is said that during the war of 1812 when Washington was burned, and President Madison and his family had to flee from the White House - a British soldier, amongst many others, ransacked

CON'T NEXT PAGE)

MRS. ROOSEVELT: (Continued)

the building and this one carried off this mirror. He took it back to England, where it hung for many years in his home. Some time later his family sent it back to America to be hung in the building from which it was taken.

KATE:

Mrs. Roosevelt, what is your first memory of the White House?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

I'm a little vague on my first memories of the White House, but I think my first was when I was a girl of eighteen. Oddly enough that first memory is of a Roosevelt in the White House - my aunt, Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, sitting in the living room on the second floor of the White House, reading to one of her little boys.

(PAUSE)

And now, Kate and I must leave. Tonight at the White House my husband and I have only a family party but even so it is a rule that the President must not be kept waiting.

Next Wednesday evening, I am going to have with me ~~one of the most brilliant [unclear word]⁸ women in Washington~~ - Mrs. J. Borden Harriman, ~~who sails on June 2nd to take up her duties as minister to Norway.~~ Mrs. Harriman and I are going to tell you about some of the interesting women in Washington - ~~what it they do and in some cases how they do it.~~ Goodnight⁹

~~————— If you still have some questions or suggestions, I shall still be delighted to receive them, and as I have said, those which are of the greatest general interest we will try to include in our broadcasts. Goodnight.~~

CLOSING COMMERCIAL

BARR:

The Pond's Company will bring you Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt again next Wednesday night at this same time. She will tell us about some of the women who are doing specially interesting things in Washington. And once again, may I say don't forget to get your jar of Pond's Cold Cream and begin those invigorating skin treatments.

This is Virginia Barr of the Pond's Company, saying, "Goodnight".

ANNOUNCER:

This is the National Broadcasting Company.

Proofread by: Lee Fobos, Matt Girardi, Crystal Brandenburg, Keira McCarthy; Crystal Brandenburg & IK David.

Transcribed from a script held in the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library,

⁴ Unclear Word is handwritten interlineation.

⁵ "in the WH but my [unclear phrase]" is a handwritten interlineation.

⁶ This is a handwritten interlineation.

⁷ “makes dogs” is a handwritten interlineation.

⁸ “unclear word” is a handwritten interlineation.

⁹ This is a handwritten interlineation.

The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project