

TALKS BY MRS. ROOSEVELT

June 9, 1937

Description: ER and Genevieve Forbes Herrick, reporter for Country Gentlemen magazine, discuss formal and informal entertaining in the White House.

Participants: ER, Genevieve Forbes Herrick

BARR:

The Pond's Program Virginia Barr of the Pond's Company speaking from New York and bringing you -- Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt! This evening Mrs. Roosevelt is going to tell us about something many have asked to hear about. Entertaining in the White House -- Official and Informal.

First, may I say a word to women who were in those long lines of cars we saw on the roads everywhere this past week-end?

When you got home, didn't you feel your skin was just covered with dust? -- And hadn't the sun and wind made it dry and tight?

Now, what your skin needs after all that punishment from sun and wind and dirt is just the gentlest kind of cleansing. Use Pond's Cold Cream. First, it softens and loosens that heavy coat of dirt that's settled on your skin, so you can wipe it completely away. Second, it actually softens and refreshes your skin. Pond's Cold Cream is such a thorough cleanser, it leaves your skin feeling so wonderfully fresh and soft, it's used by women all over the world! Pond's is actually the largest selling Cold Cream in the world! Get your jar of Pond's Cold Cream tomorrow, and keep a soft, girlish skin all summer in spite of your activities outdoors.

And now I have the great privilege of presenting -- Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt!

(8 MINUTES FROM MRS. ROOSEVELT)

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Good evening. The great majority of questions which you have sent me have been on various phases of life in the White House. And tonight I'm going to tell you about some of the entertaining we do there, and how it is done. Mrs. Genevieve Forbes Herrick, who was with me on my first broadcast, is here again this evening. She is a well-known writer in Washington, and tonight she is going to represent you in interviewing me.

Geno, suppose we divide our questions into two parts -- formal and official entertainments, and then the informal or unofficial ones.

MRS. HERRICK:

In the first place, Mrs. Roosevelt, what are the formal affairs held every year in the White House?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

There are five official dinners the Diplomatic Dinner, the Vice President's Dinner, the Judicial Dinner, one for the Cabinet and one for the Speaker of the House. Then official receptions are given for the Diplomats, the Judiciary, one for Congress, the Departmental Reception, and one for the Army and Navy.

MRS. HERRICK:

Where you have a dinner and reception for the same group, do they both occur the same evening?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

No, as a rule we have the dinners¹ on a Tuesdays², and the receptions³ on Thursdays⁴, so as to leave a free night in between. And these affairs really don't duplicate each other. In the case of the Diplomats, for instance, at the dinner, is often [unclear]⁵, just Ambassadors and Ministers attend – but the principal diplomat introduces⁶ is of the [unclear]⁶ the members of the staff of each embassy and legation are introduced⁷ to the President and to me by their Chiefs⁸.

MRS. HERRICK:

Do you have formal luncheons?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Yes -- during the season -- usually on Wednesdays. Generally the invitations go to the wives of foreign officials and to those of our own government's officials. I usually mix them all up at the table, so that we can all get to know each other better.

Sometimes a diplomat's wife will not be able to speak any English and perhaps the lady next to her can speak no language which they both know. I remember one famous occasion when two ladies whose countries were not at that time too happy together, were seated on either side of me and could talk only to me because on the other side of each of them, sat ladies who knew no foreign languages. We at least had French and German in common.

MRS. HERRICK:

Do you have to speak many different languages in the White House?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

I don't often have to. But when foreign ambassadors bring their wives to call on me, it is a great help, if they do not speak English well, to find some language which we both can talk fluently. French is a great help, but my Spanish is only good when the other person talks slowly, and I do not have to respond in Spanish.

MRS. HERRICK:

What about invitations? Are they engraved separately, and how are they sent out?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

They are formal, engraved invitations, of course, but at the White House we have Mr. Tolley, who writes so perfectly that his letters look just like engraving. He takes the formal invitations, and personally "engraves" in his handwriting on the invitation the name of the person invited. He also does all the place cards, the table seating charts and the cards which are given to the gentlemen dinner guests telling them the name of the lady whom they are to escort to the table.

White House invitations to people in Washington are delivered personally by messengers. If you were living in town, and were invited to the White House, you might see a White House car draw up to at⁹ your door, a messenger would get out, ring your bell, and hand you the invitation personally.

MRS. HERRICK:

Is it true that no one can refuse a White House invitation?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Unless you are going to be out of town, it is customary to accept. If, however, the invitation is sent on very short notice, the person invited is usually told they need not feel obliged to accept if it is inconvenient. Of course, if the President invites you on a matter of business, it is obligatory to accept.

MRS. HERRICK:

Now -- just what happens at a White House official dinner? What do you do?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

When you arrive, you are ushered into the East Room, where the White House aides show you your place in the large circle of guests which is arranged around the room according to rank. When everyone is in place, the President and I appear. The Marine Band strikes up -- the aides stand at attention, and the President and I come down the Main corridor, and when we reach the East Room

entrance, the chief military or chief naval aide standing there announces -- "The President and Mrs.--", whatever her name may be.

MRS. HERRICK:

When you reach the East Room, do you go around and greet the guests, or do you stand in one place?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Occasionally a President and his wife make the rounds. But ordinarily, we stand in front of the main door, and the guests pass before us, the chief aide on duty announcing each guest's name as he or she is about to shake hands with the President.

Then, after this is done, the President takes the ranking lady in to dinner. He leads the procession, and I follow with the ranking gentleman. At the Vice President's dinner that means The President takes Mrs. Garner, and I go with Mr. Garner. We all proceed to the State Dining Room. Each guest has been shown a chart indicating where he is to sit, and the card he has been given tells him who his dinner partner is, but there are ushers on hand just to be sure no mixups take place.

MRS. HERRICK:

How many people can be seated in the State Dining Room?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

I have had one hundred and two there at a Diplomatic dinner. But when we have that many the table is in the shape of a horseshoe. The President sits on one side, facing the fireplace, and I sit immediately opposite him in the middle of the horseshoe. There is only one rule, nobody can sit with his back to the President. At these dinners all people of rank are seated according to precedence by the State Department. People without official position sit at the ends of the table. That's where my children always sit.

MRS. HERRICK:

Who decides on the china to use and what do you have to eat?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

The head butler gets out the china, glass and silver, but custom ~~and precedence~~ decide which it shall be. At the Diplomatic Dinner, for instance, the gold service, bought by President Monroe, is used. At some dinners a large silver boat and silver bowls are used.

Mrs. Nesbitt, the housekeeper, and I decide what we'll have to eat. If honored guests have some favorite dishes I try to have that. If many are foreigners, I try to have something distinctly American. One good American dish, however, isn't very successful at dinners.

MRS. HERRICK:

What's that?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Corn on the cob. (LAUGHTER) After dinner there is probably a concert or some entertainment in the East Room. When it is time for it, the gentlemen escort their dinner partners to their seats in the East Room.

MRS. HERRICK:

Do any additional guests ever come in just for the entertainment?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Oh, yes, frequently. Members of the cabinet, for instance, come in the front door and wait in the Red Room. Other guests come in the East entrance, leave their wraps there, and come up the stairs into the East Room. The President and his wife stand at the door of the East Room and greet them as they come in.

MRS. HERRICK:

What happens after the concert?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

There are some light refreshments -- punch and little cakes, and then at a certain time, the President rises, says goodnight to his chief guests and goes upstairs. Very occasionally he may stand at the door and say goodnight to everyone, but as a rule just his wife does that.

MRS. HERRICK:

Are people told what to do at these parties. How do they know when they're supposed to go home?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

The President's departure is the signal -- no one is supposed to leave before he does. But there is really very little chance to make mistakes. There are ushers and aides on hand all the time to direct you. Everything moves like clockwork. I do remember though ... a lady nearly fainted once, and when with great concern we all went to look after her, I discovered that she was much more troubled at having upset the party and having to go before the President left the room, than she was by the fact that she really was ill.

MRS. HERRICK:

Who arranges the music at the White House?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

By custom, the Marine Band plays at practically every entertainment. The Navy Band plays when two bands are required, and occasionally they alternate with the Marine Band.

For the concerts, though, Steinway and Son have made all the arrangements through their representative, Mr. Henry Junge, for many years.

Usually, these concerts go perfectly smoothly, but I can remember one evening when a singer we expected was delayed in docking in New York and could not reach Washington in time. There was great scurrying around to get some one to take her place. The programs having all been printed, everyone went through the evening thinking a well known German singer was entertaining them, when the lady was really a young American singer.

But now, Geno, before we take up the informal entertaining at the White House, Virginia Barr has a word to say.

(INSERT MIDDLE COMMERCIAL)

MIDDLE COMMERCIAL

BARR:

Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt.

A lot of us are thinking about vacations right now. But vacations or not, we are spending more and more time in the open -- and hats have almost reached the zero point! Now what is all this doing to your skin? It has never been so exposed to sun and wind and dust as it is today. But just the same you are not going to let it get coarse and dry and harsh!

Here's a letter from a girl who has travelled across the United States several times in an open car. She says: "Why don't you tell women who are going about all summer as I did, to use just Pond's Cold Cream to clean their faces. Everybody knows how automobile dust ruins the skin, and water never helps a sun-and-wind-burned skin! Pond's Cold Cream was a God-send to me on my trips."

Now that's one girl's experience. But there are literally thousands who have learned to depend on Pond's Cold Cream for keeping their skin soft and fresh in spite of constant exposure to wind and dust.

I'll tell you why that is: Pond's Cold Cream cleans your skin gently as well as thoroughly. It gets all the dirt out....yet it actually leaves your skin softer and refreshed.

I wish you'd get a jar of Pond's Cold Cream tomorrow. See if you don't understand why women all over the world depend on it to keep their skin nice.

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

(MRS. ROOSEVELT RESUMES)

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Now, Geno – on the informal entertaining. In the first place, it is just the kind of entertaining you would do in your own home. People come in for luncheon, dinner or tea in a perfectly informal way.

MRS. HERRICK:

Are there any special informal affairs?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

There are really two large informal parties. One is the party I give for the wives of the members of the Gridiron Club, and the ladies of the press. We call it the Gridiron Widows' Party. We have skits, speeches, lampooning. It's a delightful informal affair organized just as the men organize their party which the President attends the same evening.

The other informal party is a dance we always give each spring for the newspaper fraternity.

MRS. HERRICK:

You've been having a number of Garden Parties lately.

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

Yes, and I think I enjoy them as much as any entertaining we do. They're so free and open and relaxed [unclear]¹⁰. We usually have three of them. One for the women executives in Washington, one for the Veterans, and one for people who have called and left their cards at the White House, and have not been invited earlier in the season.

MRS. HERRICK:

Well, aren't those Garden Parties formal to some extent?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

~~Oh, no, not really~~ Yes on the whole¹¹. I receive, of course, and sometimes with the Cabinet wives. The President comes only to the Veterans party.

The guests arrive by the East entrance, and are shown out to the gardens, and after I greet them, they wander about the lawn and gardens anywhere. It's That's¹² very informal. They can come and go as they please. The refreshments are served under a marquee, the Marine Band may play -- and at the Veterans Party we have some form of entertainment.

MRS. HERRICK:

Does the President come to your luncheon parties?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

He usually lunches at his desk in his office with one or two guests. He almost never lunches in the White House except on Sunday or on a special occasion.

MRS. HERRICK:

Do you have guests for breakfast?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

I always breakfast with my house guests. Sometimes I ask people in for breakfast, but only when I can see them at no other time during the day. The President never has breakfast guests. I like my breakfast time free for the family and house guests, because immediately afterwards the routine of the day begins, and I have very little time for them.

MRS. HERRICK:

~~Do you ever have Children's parties?~~

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

~~I have them for my grandchildren when they are there, or when we have other children visiting us. Then, of course, there is the Egg Rolling, which is a children's party on a large scale. We sometimes have some little entertainment for them, but like all children, the high spot of the party is the ice cream and cake.~~

MRS. HERRICK:

What are the difficulties of being a White House Hostess?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

I should say that the greatest difficulty is that you must always be well. Official dinners and receptions are set so far ahead that they cannot be broken on short notice. If it is at all possible you must go through with them on schedule.

You have to stand and shake hands with so many people that it would be difficult for anyone not in good health to stand the strain. Story.¹³

MRS. HERRICK:

How many guests were entertained at the White House in a year?

MRS. ROOSEVELT:

I'm glad you warned me about that question ahead of time. I had Mr. Muir check the numbers for me, and I think you will be amazed if you think of them in the terms of your own home life. From June 1936 to June 1937, we served 4,346 regular meals at the White House. Tea was served to 22,353 people, 16,650 people attended receptions, and it is estimated that about 653,000 sightseers went through the lower part of the house.

(PAUSE)

(OVER)

MRS. ROOSEVELT: (CONTINUED)

And now, Mrs. Herrick, and I must leave you. I am starting late tonight for Washington where I will be only for the day tomorrow, before I start off again.

Many of you have been good enough to ask me to give a Bacculaureate Address at your schools. As much as I should like to, I can't quite do that. But next Wednesday I am going to have a young lady with me who is graduating from high school this June -- and we are going to have a Bacculaureate Conversation. I hope you will consider it as my special Bacculaureate word to members of the Class of 1937.

Goodnight.

Transcribed by: Lee Febos

Proofread by: Lee Febos, Angela Baker, Matt Girardi, Meg Swenson, IK David, Crystal Brandenburgh.

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

¹ The letter "s" is a handwritten interlineation.

² The letter "s" is a handwritten interlineation.

³ The letter "s" is a handwritten interlineation.

⁴ The letter "s" is a handwritten interlineation.

⁵ The words "is" through the "[unclear]" are a handwritten interlineation.

⁶ The words "is" through the "[unclear]" are a handwritten interlineation.

⁷ The words "are introduced" are a handwritten interlineation.

⁸ The words "by their Chiefs" are a handwritten interlineation.

⁹ This is a handwritten interlineation.

¹⁰ The "[unclear]" is a handwritten interlineation.

¹¹ The words "Yes" through "whole" are a handwritten interlineation.

¹² This is a handwritten interlineation.

¹³ This is a handwritten interlineation.