

## TALKS BY MRS. ROOSEVELT

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

Participants: ER, Genevieve Forbes Herrick

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[Virginia Barr:] [fade in] --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.

[ER:] Good evening. The great majority of questions which you've sent me have been on various phases of life in the White House, and tonight I am 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. Now, suppose we divide our questions into two parts: formal and official entertainments and then the informal or unofficial ones. (0:49)

Genevieve Forbes Herrick: Well in the first place Mrs. Roosevelt, what are the formal affairs held every year in the White House?

[ER:] 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 the official receptions are given for the diplomats, the judiciary, one for Congress, the departmental reception, and one for the Army and Navy.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Now when you have a dinner and a reception for the same group do they both occur on the same evening?

[ER:] No, as a rule we have the dinners on Tuesdays and the receptions on Thursdays so as to leave a free night in between. And these affairs really don't duplicate each other. In the case of the diplomat, for instance, the dinner is often given in December and just ambassadors and ministers and their wives attend, but the reception comes in January when the members of the staffs of each embassy and delegation are introduced to the President and to me by their chiefs. (1:52)

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] When do you have formal luncheons?

[ER:] Yes, during the season usually on Wednesdays. Generally, the invitations go to the wives of foreign officials and to those of our own government officials. I usually mix them all up at the table so that we can 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 I think in common. (2:33)

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Mercy, do you have to speak many different languages in the White House?

[ER:] I don't have to often 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.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Now what about invitations? Are they engraved separately and how are they sent out?

[ER:] They're formal, engraved invitations of course. But at the White House we have Mr. Towley 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're to escort to the table. White House invitations to people in Washington are delivered personally by messengers. If you're living in town, and were invited to the White House, you might see a White House car draw up at your door, a messenger would get out, ring your bell, and hand you the invitation personally.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Now is it true that no one can refuse a White House invitation?

[ER:] Unless you're 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.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Now just what happens at a White House official dinner? What do you do?

[ER:] When you arrive you're 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. 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. When you reach the East Room--

Genevieve Forbes Herrick: Uh when you reach the East Room--when you reach the East Room Mrs. Roosevelt, do you go around and greet the guests or do you stand in one place?

[ER:] 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 into dinner. He leads the procession and I follow with the ranking gentlemen. 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 mix-ups take place. (5:15)

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] How many people can be seated in the state dining room?

[ER:] I've had one hundred and two there at the diplomatic dinner, but when we had 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's only one rule: nobody can sit with his back to the president. At these dinners all people of rank are seated according to precedence for the state department. People without official position sit at the end of the table. That's where my children always sit.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick laughs]

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Who decides on the china to use? What do you have to eat?

[ER:] The head butler gets out the china, glass, and silver but custom decides what it shall be. At the diplomatic dinner, for instance, the gold service bought by President Monroe is used. At some dinners the large silver boat and silver bowls are used. Mrs. Nesbit, the housekeeper, and I decide what we have to eat. If honored guests have a favorite dish 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. (6:12)

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Oh what's that?

[ER:] [ER laughs] Corn on the cob! [ER laughs]

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Oh.

[ER:] After dinner there's 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.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Do any additional guests ever come in just for the entertainment?

[ER:] 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 then come upstairs into the East Room. The president and his wife stand at the door of the East Room and greet them as they enter.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] What happens after the concert? (6:42)

[ER:] 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.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] And are people told what to do at these parties? Well how do they know when they're supposed to go home?

[ER:] The president's departure is the signal, no one is supposed to leave before he does. But there's 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 she was much more troubled at having upset the party and having to go before the president left the room than she was for the fact that she really was ill. (7:26)

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Who arranges the music at the White House?

[ER:] 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 Youngie (spelling?) 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 someone to take their place. The programs having all been printed. Many 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 say.

[Virginia Barr:] Thank you Mrs. Roosevelt. You know a lot of us are thinking about vacations right now, but vacations or not we're 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. Just the same, you're not going to let it get coarse and dry and harsh. Here's a letter from a girl who's traveled 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 the sun and wind burned skin. Pond's cold cream was a godsend to me on my trip." 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.

[ER:] Now Geno, on the informal entertaining. In the first place it's just the kind of entertaining you would do in your own home. People come in for lunch and dinner or tea in a perfectly informal way.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] But are there any special informal affairs?

[ER:] 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.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] You've been having a number of garden parties lately, haven't you?

[ER:] Yes, I think I enjoy them as much as any entertaining we do. They're so free and open and relaxed, after the receiving line has past by me. We usually have three of them: one for the women executives in Washington, one for the veterans, and one for people who've called and left their cards at the White House and have not been invited earlier in the season.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Yes, but aren't those garden parties formal to some extent?

[ER:] Yes, on the whole. 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. That's very, 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.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Does the president ever come to your luncheon parties?

[ER:] 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.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] And do you have guests for breakfast?

[ER:] I always breakfast with my houseguests. 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 houseguests because immediately afterwards the routine of the day begins and I have very little time for them.

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Now tell me, Mrs. Roosevelt, what are the difficulties of being a White House hostess?

[ER:] 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. I remember one evening when I came down feeling very ill. And before I had even said "how do you do" to the cabinet I had to go upstairs again. Twice during the reception the room became entirely black and I had to retire each time for a few minutes. I came back, however, and even made my rounds of all the rooms because I was afraid that the press would say I was very ill. I was quite well the next morning. [both laugh]

[Genevieve Forbes Herrick:] Mrs. Roosevelt how many guests were entertained at the White House in the year?

[ER:] I'm glad you warned me about that question ahead of time. I had Mr. Muir the head usher check the numbers for me and I think you'll 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 lowe-lower part of the house. Now Mrs. Herrick and I must leave you. I'm 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 baccalaureate address at your schools. Much as I would 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. We are going to have a baccalaureate conversation. I hope you'll consider it as my special baccalaureate word to members of the class of 1937. Good night.

[Virginia Barr:] The Pond's company will bring you Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt next week at this same time. Her guest, as she said, will be a high school girl graduate and together they will discuss-- (fade out). (13:35)

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