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The Roosevelt Heritage

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Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt were both Hudson Valley natives. Despite stays in the governor's mansion and the White House, Hyde Park was their true home, and it is to Hyde Park that they retreated whenever possible. Their legacy remains, preserved in Springwood, the family home of FDR, Val-Kill, Eleanor's home after Franklin's death, Top Cottage, Franklin's private retreat, and the FDR Presidential Library and Museum. Admission to all the sites is \$14 for adults; kids under 15 are free and seniors get a discount.

Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site
 4097 Albany Post Road (Route 9), Hyde Park
 (845) 229-9115
www.nps.gov/hofr

The family home of Franklin Delano Roosevelt is one of the most significant and moving historic sites in the Hudson Valley. A visit here provides real insight into the life and times of the extraordinary man who led America through the Great Depression and World War II. Roosevelt donated Springwood, the house where he was born and raised, and where he returned often throughout his life, to the nation in 1943. Springwood is preserved today much as it appeared at Roosevelt's death in 1945. Although the Roosevelt family was wealthy and the house is substantial, it is modest and unostentatious, particularly in

comparison to the neighboring Vanderbilt estate a few miles north on Route 9. The ground floor rooms include the art-filled entry hall, Dresden Room parlor, and formal dining room, along with the large combined living room and library that was the real center of life at Springwood. Roosevelt often worked at a desk in this room. Upstairs are several bedrooms, including Roosevelt's boyhood room, and rooms where notables such as Winston Churchill and King George VI stayed. The Rose Garden near the house contains the simple graves of both Franklin and Eleanor. Tiny tombstones mark the graves of Roosevelt's beloved dogs Chief and Fala.

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum



The first presidential library, and the only one to be used by a sitting president, the FDR Library and Museum was designed by FDR himself and opened in 1941. The Dutch Colonial style building contains FDR's private study, preserved as he left it in 1945. Displays in the museum portion of the building detail Roosevelt's life, including material from his early years and outstanding exhibits on the Great Depression, New Deal, and World War II. The Eleanor Roosevelt Gallery details the inspiring life the woman often called "First Lady of the World." A highlight is FDR's 1936 Ford Phaeton, specially outfitted with hand controls that allowed the President to drive despite his paralyzed legs. The library portion of the building contains more than 17 million pages of documents, including the papers of President and Mrs. Roosevelt and many of their associates, along with an extensive collection of photos and audiovisual materials and a significant collection of books related to the Roosevelts.

Top Cottage



FDR built Top Cottage in 1938 on a hilltop at the easternmost end of his estate. Designed by FDR himself in the Dutch Colonial style, it was his private retreat. It is quite possibly the first home in America designed from the start to be wheelchair-accessible. In 1939, FDR famously hosted a cookout here for King George VI, Queen Elizabeth, and 150 other dignitaries. Hot dogs were served—on silver trays.

Val-Kill, Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site

The only National Park Service site dedicated to a First Lady, Val-Kill was the home of Eleanor Roosevelt from 1945 to her death in 1962. The original Dutch Colonial style stone cottage was built in 1925 on what was then the Roosevelt estate as a residence for Eleanor's friends Nancy Cook and Marion Dickerman. The house was christened Val-Kill after the Dutch name of nearby Fall Creek. In 1926, a larger building went up to house Val-Kill Industries, a small factory that employed local residents to manufacture replicas of Early American furniture. When the operation folded in 1936 under the weight of the Great Depression, the factory was converted to an apartment and several guest rooms to accommodate the overflow at Springwood, the main Roosevelt home, and as a refuge for Eleanor during the hectic Presidential years. After FDR's death in 1945, Eleanor converted Val-Kill into a modest home and moved in permanently. It was the only home that was ever entirely hers. During the rest of her active life, Eleanor traveled widely on behalf of the United Nations and humanitarian causes. She entertained many notables at Val-Kill, including Nikita Khrushchev, Jawaharlal Nehru, and John F. Kennedy. After her death, the furniture and contents of the cottage were dispersed and the property changed hands several times. In 1970, concerned citizens in the area united to preserve the property; it became a national historical site in 1977. Today the cottage has been restored to its appearance in 1962. Many of the original furnishings have been returned, including the 1950s Philco television, several pieces of Val-Kill furniture, and many mementoes of Eleanor's career and family.

Visiting the Roosevelt Sites

A visit to the Roosevelt sites begins with the purchase of a ticket at the Henry A. Wallace Visitor and Education Center. (Wallace was Secretary of Agriculture from 1933 to 1940 and Vice President during FDR's third term.) The ticket includes admission to the house and the FDR Presidential Library and Museum; in season, it also includes admission to Top Cottage and Val-Kill. The FDR home and library are open year-round, seven days a week; they're closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years Day. Springwood can be seen only by guided tours led by park rangers. The tour takes about an hour; the last tour of the day starts at 4 p.m. Top Cottage and Val-Kill are open seasonally May through October and can be seen only by guided tour. During the peak months of July, August, and October and on holiday weekends, the tours often sell out. Make an advance reservation if you can: (877) 444-6777 or www.recreation.gov.

Author bio:

Milan resident Sheila Buff is the author of Insider's Guide to the Hudson Valley, which will be published by Globe Pequot Press early in 2009. She is the writer for Milaninsider.com.

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