



# THE View FROM VAL-KILL COTTAGE

Vol.6 No.1

The newsletter of *Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt* A Project to Preserve Her Val-Kill Home

Winter 2011



## Scenic Bus Trip and Special Tour of Val-Kill

By Claudine Bacher & Georgie Gatch

On Saturday, Nov. 5th, we were delighted to see many faces gathered early in front of the Park Avenue Armory in New York City, ready to board the comfortable Campus bus generously donated by owner Patti Kenner for a fall outing to Val-Kill Cottage. The fact that it was a gorgeous day augured well for the meaningful visit that it turned out to be.

As Maurine Beasley notes in her latest book, *Eleanor Roosevelt, Transformative First Lady*, "To understand Eleanor Roosevelt you have to appreciate Val-Kill: what it meant to her both as a physical place and the people she shared it with. It was indeed the only home she ever had."

*Continued on page 7*



Val-Kill Supervisory Park Ranger Fran Macsalli-Urbin greeted visitors.



Silda Spitzer was the guest speaker.



Carol and Hildie

## NOTES FROM THE CHAIR

CAROL HILLMAN

Dear Friends of Val-Kill:

It's been a very busy year for *Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt* and our National Park Service partners at Val-Kill. Following our successful May event in Massachusetts honoring three very special women, we participated in the annual wreath laying at Mrs. Roosevelt's grave, which takes place on her birthday every year on October 11. Then, on November 5th, Claudine Bacher and Georgie Gatch led a large group of supporters on a bus trip to Val-Kill. More about that on pages one (front cover) and seven.

We are continuing to plan for the coming year and the production and installation of brand new exhibits in the Stone Cottage which will illuminate that building's important role in ER's life. As we go forward with the NPS on this project, we are hoping to interest major donors in providing support for this important effort. A plaque at the entrance to the Cottage will recognize those supporters.

As the holiday season approaches, the Park Service is again decorating Val-Kill Cottage as Mrs. Roosevelt decorated it for her family and friends to commemorate the season (see page four for pictures and ER's 1941 *My Day* column on page eight). We hope you will take the time to visit Val-Kill during this holiday season, which was so important to Mrs. Roosevelt and her family.

Warm regards,  
*Carol*

## MAKE A DIFFERENCE



### A LEGACY WORTH PRESERVING

For more than 12 years *Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt* has been a major contributor to the Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site. Programs made possible by our fundraising efforts include the acquisition and preservation of museum collections, exhibit development and interpretive planning.

We urge you to join our efforts to preserve ER's legacy by underwriting new and exciting preservation work and public programs for Val-Kill.

Please use the enclosed reply envelope to make your year-end gift. Thank you from all of us.

*All donations made payable to the National Trust for Historic Preservation with "Val-Kill Cottage" on the memo line, are 100% tax deductible.*

# Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt

A Project to Preserve Her Val-Kill Home

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*Save America's Treasures*

Claudine Bacher, Founding Chair,  
*Honoring ER*

Carol Hillman, Chair, *Honoring ER*

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### **Staff**

Judith Ross Morris, Editor & Designer,  
*The View from Val-Kill Cottage*

We welcome your comments. Please contact [judithross\\_morris@yahoo.com](mailto:judithross_morris@yahoo.com).

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1. Presentation of Wreaths, Sarah Malcolm, Archives Technician, FDR Presidential Library. 2. Mr. and Mrs. David Roosevelt 3. Susan P. Curnan, HER. 4. Master of Ceremonies, Franceska Macsalli-Urbin, Supervisory Park Ranger Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Sites. 5. Great granddaughters Isabel and Grace Roosevelt.

# Eleanor's 127<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebrated at Hyde Park

On October 11th, about seventy five people visited the Hyde Park gravesite of Eleanor Roosevelt to honor her memory and legacy on the anniversary of her 127th birthday. Presentations were made by park officials, Roosevelt family members and, representing HER, Professor Susan P. Curnan, who grew up on the Roosevelt estate where her father, Charlie Curnan, worked as a caretaker.

6. Skye O'Halloran, Alexander Skrok, Haviland Middle School. 7. From left: Kathleen Durham, Executive Director, Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill and Mary Travis, president of the Center's Friends board. 8. (From left) Doris Mac, Professor Susan P. Curnan and Superintendent Sarah Olson. 9. Presentation of community flowers by area residents.

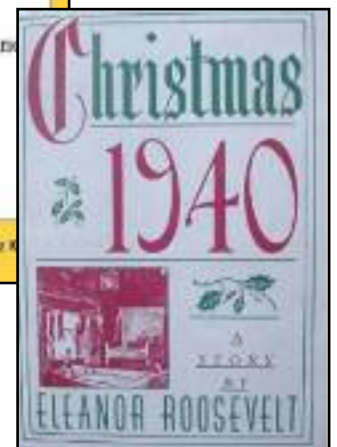
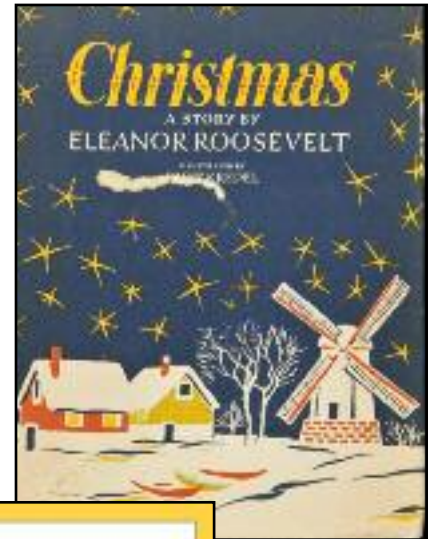




# Christmas at Val-Kill

As noted on the National Park Service website, Eleanor Roosevelt's favorite holiday was Christmas, "Christmas is something we can carry in our hearts", she once said. She would shop year round finding unique gifts on her world travels, storing them in her special Christmas closet at Val-Kill.

To keep ER's love for Christmas alive, every year Val-Kill gets "all dressed up" for the holiday season just the way ER herself would have done it . We are pleased to present a little glimpse into Val-Kill at holiday time and encourage you to share this beautiful time of year with this beautiful woman by making a personal visit. While we can't promise snow, we can certainly guarantee you a delightful, thought-provoking visit.



In 1940 ER expressed her love for Christmas in a short book, *A Christmas Story*. Reprinted with different cover designs through the years, this heartwarming tale is currently available in bookstores and online.



Val-Kill in winter truly is a winter wonderland.

THE FUTURE  
BELONGS TO  
THOSE WHO  
BELIEVE IN THE  
BEAUTY OF  
THEIR DREAMS...

-ELEANOR ROOSEVELT



*Season's Greetings  
from  
Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt  
to our many friends  
and supporters.*

YESTERDAY  
IS HISTORY.  
TOMORROW  
IS MYSTERY.  
TODAY  
IS A GIFT.

Eleanor Roosevelt



# PERSONAL REMINISCENCE

By Angelina Perri Birney

*Editor's Note: Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt A Project to Preserve Her Val-Kill Home hits a particularly personal chord for Carol Hillman, chair of the organization, because it directly involves her mother. Presented here is an excerpt of an interview between Carol and Ms. Birney in which Carol explains how her mother influenced her lifelong interest and commitment to Eleanor's legacy. The interview is an excerpt from Ms. Birney's blog, "Pure Vision: Powerful Women Changing the World."*

As Carol explains it, "First Lady Hillary Clinton asked Claudine Bacher, our founding chair, to oversee the project. Claudine then spoke to others, including my mother, Elsa Hoppenfeld Resika, to get them on board. Not long before my mother passed away, she urged me to join in."

Incredibly, the history of that legacy includes both how her mother as well as Carol was affected by ER. "My mother met Eleanor Roosevelt at a reception in New York City in honor of the play *Sunrise at Campobello*. Mom had Mrs. Roosevelt autograph a program and then sent it to me at the University of

Wisconsin where I was studying. A year or so later, I hosted Mrs. Roosevelt at the university," Carol relates with a sense of awe. "We invited her to speak, and she arrived in a blizzard—the pilot told her she might not land in Madison but in Minneapolis instead. Nonetheless, she took the flight. She told the pilot she had 1300 students waiting for her and would attempt to get to Madison. I met her at the airport with Governor Gaylord Nelson. As it turned out, her speech, which I chaired in the Memorial Union Theater, was a rousing success. It was packed to the hilt, standing room only."



THE THEATRE GUILD AND DORE SHARY PRESENT

To Carol  
Eleanor Roosevelt

Memo from  
ELSA HOPPENFELD

Dearest,  
This Friday I went to a reception in honor of Mrs. Roosevelt and her son Franklin. It was given by Theatre Guild at their brownstone mansion, and it was lovely. Dore Shary, the producer and writer of *Campobello* was there; we discussed his play. Ralph Bellamy was there, and all took pictures. Mrs. Roosevelt is charming and greeted us cordially. I took a picture with her\* and believe me I was like one of those bobby soxers. I asked her to sign the program for you and told her how much you admired her. It was fun and delightful. I thought you might like to hear about it.

Love, Mom

Reproduction of note sent to Carol by her mother, Elsa, both pictured above. \*Unfortunately, the photo she describes is lost.

# Special Tour of Val-Kill

Continued from page 1

Upon arrival at Val-Kill Superintendent Sarah Olson welcomed us, and Silda Spitzer took the floor and enthralled us with her remarks ruminating on what Eleanor Roosevelt would think of today's world. She mused that Mrs. Roosevelt could be considered the first blogger as she wrote her MY DAY column, and would certainly have been environmentally conscious, one of the first to go green. We are gratified to have Silda as a member of our National Council. She exudes graciousness, southern charm, and, of course, keen intelligence.

We then went about touring the cottage with the Park Service interpreters, as always on top of their game as they talked about the furnishings, personal memorabilia and Mrs. Roosevelt's favorite room, her sleeping porch.

Over the years since the inception of *Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt*, we have grown to consider Superintendent Sarah Olson and Deputy Director Carol Kohan as well as superb interpreter Fran Macsalli-Urbin and curator Frank Futral as special friends. Our day was made so pleasant by their planning and dedication to our project. We also appreciate Melanie McEvoy and her staff lending their usual capable hands along with recent Council member Helen Cook's zeal in putting out the word of our event.

We also like to think that we made some new friends who took away with them the real essence of Eleanor Roosevelt and what she has meant to the world.



Founding Chair Claudine Bacher (second from left) and guest speaker Silda Spitzer (middle) enjoy the beautiful day with bus tour guests.



Guests enjoy a lovely walk on Val-Kill grounds.



A guest enjoys a walk with Curator Frank Futral.



Val-Kill Superintendent Sarah Olson addresses an enthusiastic audience.

# My Day

DECEMBER 27, 1941

By Eleanor Roosevelt



Last night we had a rather large gathering of various family groups at Christmas dinner. The number of cousins was really quite amusing. I think the complications of family relationships, as regards my husband and myself, became completely baffling to our English guests. I tried to explain to Lord Beaverbrook, what relation my husband is to Mrs. Theodore Douglas Robinson, and I think at the end he was as mystified as if I had never attempted an explanation!

When you tell someone, that the lovely lady sitting opposite him is your husband's half-niece, that she married your first cousin, and that he was her sixth cousin, whereas you are married to your fifth cousin once removed, and are also her sixth cousin and that her children, in order to simplify life, say "Uncle Franklin and Auntie Eleanor," when the relationship is really only that of a half great-uncle; you may well imagine that you have

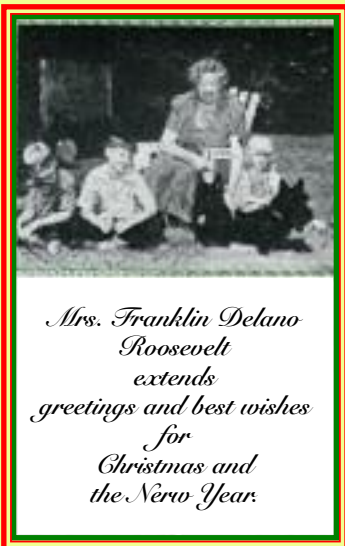
led anyone, no matter how great his interest in genealogy, through a maze from which there is no emerging!

Field Marshal Sir John Dill, celebrated his birthday as well as Christmas here last night. I wish I had known sooner; I would certainly have provided him with a birthday cake.

A few old friends were here with us as usual, and we drank the usual toasts to absent family and friends, adding one toast in tribute to our British guests. After dinner, we had newsreels, featuring both the Prime Minister and the President, and then sang some Christmas carols together before saying goodnight and letting the President, the Prime Minister and Lord Beaverbrook go back to work again.

*This is an excerpt. To view the full column as well as other My Day columns, please visit [www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday](http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday). World Copyright, 1961, United Feature Syndicate, Inc.*

All correspondence:  
Carol Hillman  
Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt  
287 Kent Street, Suite 2  
Brookline, MA 02446



Christmas card sent by ER  
(year unknown)



Honoring Eleanor Roosevelt A Project to Preserve Her Val-Kill Home is a priority project of Save America's Treasures and a project of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. We support Val-Kill through a public private partnership with the National Park Service.

All donations made to the "National Trust" with "Val-Kill" in the memo line are 100% tax deductible.