The Little White House Turns 85!

1932 was a pivotal year in US History. The Great Depression was in its third year. It was an election year. Governor Roosevelt of NY built a new cottage for himself in Warm Springs, Georgia.

In December, 1931, FDR sent a check for $1500 to begin construction work on his new cottage.

His first cottage (below) that he had built in 1927, was quaint and comfortable, but small. He built it before he reentered politics and as governor of New York, he needed more room, for guests, family and official business. This cottage was known as the Franklin D. Roosevelt Cottage.

At the same time, in 1931, while the United States was in the midst of the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt was considering a run for the office of President. During the previous seven years, he had witnessed the effects of a crippling economy in the south. He saw the lack of education, lack of electricity, banks folding and family farms being foreclosed on.

It was during these early years in Warm Springs, Georgia that FDR developed many ideas to combat the problems faced by millions of Americans.

Citizen Roosevelt was powerless. Governor Roosevelt was able to implement some of his ideas into programs aimed at relief, recovery and reform in his home state. He knew that the presidency was where the power was, if he were to be able to achieve such a goal.

Although his therapy had all but ceased as official duties grew, he still visited Warm Springs as often as possible. He just needed a bigger residence.
In a letter from the Warm Springs Construction Company, a basic description of the cottage and Servants Quarters is seen. Fire protection was the main concern being addressed with asbestos shingles, a terra cotta flue and the location of the fire hydrant and water lines.

Early in 1932, it was decided that the Sherrill’s would live in Roosevelt’s new cottage while he was on the campaign trail and that they would furnish their own electric stove. Meanwhile, Roosevelt sent a telegram expressing his delight that Dr. Hoke would rent his new cottage while he was away, as described in the telegram below. So it is not exactly clear who occupied the house first.

In February, 1932, questions arose whether or not FDR would like a fence and gate for the loop road for protection.
FDR arrived in Warm Springs in April, 1932 and the new cottage was completed. FDR and was well on his way to beginning his campaign for president. He had even announced his intentions before patients and locals in front of the Meriwether Inn. Shortly thereafter, he decided to throw a housewarming party to celebrate his new home.

Instructions (below) were given to the Foundation telephone operators to call locals in Meriwether, Harris and adjoining counties to join him and Mrs. Roosevelt on May 5th for a “small informal house warming.” A Special Bulletin was posted in the local papers inviting those who did not have a telephone in Warm Springs.

The statement (right) for the party that FDR received on May 6th was for $31.09. This included sugar, lemons, crackers and ice, as well as, paper plates. The special even made a headline in the Atlanta newspapers.

Roosevelt hired Daisy Bonner (lower right) to cook for him while in Warm Springs and she became fondly known as “Queen of the Larder” by FDR.
Franklin D Roosevelt’s New Cottage Gets A Name

Governor Roosevelt approved the final costs of just over $7000 for the cottage on May 7, 1932. He now owned two personal cottages and while he was away, he wanted to rent them out. The Accounting Dept. at the Foundation tried to figure out how to keep the income from the rents separated and Arthur Carpenter established the rules for doing so. Keep in mind that FDR was running for President of the United States and everyone in Warm Springs, Georgia knew that Roosevelt was going to win.

With that in mind, read the instructions given to Fred Botts below explaining how to separate the two Franklin D. Roosevelt cottages from one another. In doing so, Carpenter officially gave the new cottage it’s name: The Little White House, and it stuck.

Footnote

A Presidential Image

Atlanta photographer Thurston Hatcher was hired by Clark Howell to photograph FDR as he needed some official portraits to begins his campaign for president. These are the first images of Franklin D. Roosevelt inside his new “Little White House” just as he begins what will be a rendezvous with destiny. These are on display in our museum.