



# Foundation Document Overview

## Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site

### New York



#### Contact Information

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## Purpose



*The purpose of THEODORE ROOSEVELT BIRTHPLACE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to preserve and interpret the site of Theodore Roosevelt's birthplace and commemorate his life through the interpretation of his early childhood and ability to overcome physical limitations and adversity to become one of the world's most influential men of his time.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

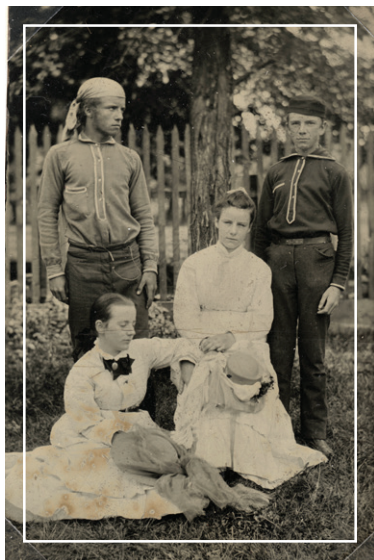
- Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., 26th president of the United States, was born on October 27, 1858, at 28 East 20th Street in Manhattan where he would spend the first 14 years of his life. His experiences there dramatically shaped and molded his life.
- Envisioned, designed, and created by the Women's Roosevelt Memorial Association and noted architect Theodate Pope Riddle, the reconstructed brownstone townhouses serve as a memorialization of Theodore Roosevelt. Built shortly after Roosevelt's death, the structures are a recreation of Roosevelt's childhood home based on descriptions from Roosevelt's autobiography and the memories of other Roosevelt family members.
- The original furnishings and extensive related collections are a tribute to Roosevelt's widespread interests and accomplishments in local, state, national, and international affairs; conservation; and the expansion of the national park system.



## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Theodore Roosevelt Birth Site and Reconstructed Townhouses.** On East 20th Street in Manhattan, Roosevelt's birthplace site now contains the reconstructed brownstone townhouse designed as a memorial and place to interpret Roosevelt's ideals and legacies and an adjacent support structure. The reconstructed townhouses contain five period rooms, two museum galleries and other museum functions, a library, auditorium, storage, and a bookstore.
- **Museum Collections.** The collections include manuscripts, published books and articles, cartoons, and photographs, as well as many of Roosevelt's letters and journals. Also included are original historic objects and furnishings from Roosevelt's childhood home, as well as other objects from his later life.
- **Collaborative Partnerships.** Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site is the result of continuous collaborative efforts to reconstruct, decorate, donate, and finally designate the site as a unit of the national park system. Collaboration between the National Park Service and the Theodore Roosevelt Association continues through preservation and management efforts today.



## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Overcoming Adversity.** The comfort and opportunities inherent in the wealthy, Victorian-era home and family life that Roosevelt experienced as a youth helped him overcome a potentially limiting childhood illness and develop into an intellectually and physically bold adult who welcomed and successfully navigated numerous challenges in his public life. That same intrepid and ambitious approach to life developed in his youth led him to build a successful political career in spite of the restrictions common to members of the upper class in the late 19th century.
- **The Conservation Movement.** Roosevelt's insatiable scientific curiosity, his appreciation of nature, and his life as an avid outdoorsman and explorer, all instilled in boyhood, largely contributed to his role as a leader of the conservation movement, culminating in his pioneering work as president in setting national standards for the preservation of cultural and natural resources.
- **Theodore Roosevelt as Reformer.** Roosevelt's strong beliefs in merit, achievement, and progress based on empirical evidence and the scientific method as applied to social problems laid the foundation for his career as a reformer and were dramatically articulated throughout his public life, beginning with his role as a state legislator, through his term as 26th president of the United States.
- **Vision for America's Future.** Heralding a vision of America as a world power and an equitable society at home, President Roosevelt guided the United States into the 20th century while creating a modern model of the presidency as the center of the nation's political life.
- **Preservation of Childhood Home.** Foreshadowing the idea of the modern presidential library, what is now Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site was established by two private historical organizations, the Women's Roosevelt Memorial Association and the Theodore Roosevelt Association, as a combined museum and research facility that would illustrate the environment that influenced Roosevelt's youth and serve to perpetuate the memory, legacy, and political principles of the nation's 26th president.



## Description

Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site is in the Gramercy Park area of Manhattan at 28 East 20th Street. The 0.11-acre site is occupied by a building rebuilt on the exterior as if it were two, four-story adjoining brownstone townhouses. On the interior, the two townhouses are connected as one.

The building is a 1923 reconstruction of the birthplace and childhood home of the 26th president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., who was born at the site on October 27, 1858, and lived there until he was 14 years old. The interior reflects the atmosphere of the original birthplace through five period rooms of mid-19th century design and furniture, including original Roosevelt family items. The rest of the building contains museum galleries, a library, an auditorium, and support facilities.

Reconstructing the birthplace was the responsibility of the Women's Roosevelt Memorial Association with funding and support from the Roosevelt Memorial Association. In creating a site to perpetuate Theodore Roosevelt's ideals and memory, the association also created a site that is a significant example of the development of historic preservation efforts in the United States. The reconstruction of the birthplace was designed by one of America's first female architects, Theodate Pope Riddle. The construction techniques, materials, and mechanical systems represent 1920's museum design, 1920's technology, and fine workmanship.

The reconstruction of the exterior and the period rooms within it was based on the memories of Theodore Roosevelt's two sisters, Anna Cowles and Corrinne Roosevelt Robinson, and his second wife, Edith Kermit Carow Roosevelt, who had been familiar with the original house. The women were instrumental in determining spatial configuration, wall and floor finishes, furnishings, and furniture placement in the rooms. The restoration was also based on house descriptions from Roosevelt's autobiography and the townhouse next door that had belonged to Roosevelt's uncle and was still extant when the reconstruction began. Original elements from that home, which was identical to the Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace, were incorporated into the reconstruction.

The site opened to the public on October 27, 1923. The focus of the building was the five recreated period rooms: the parlor, library, dining room, nursery, and master bedroom. Museum galleries were filled with Roosevelt memorabilia and exhibits pertaining to Roosevelt's life, career, and politics. A library was filled with a collection of Roosevelt books and other research material. The auditorium was used for association meetings, patriotic organization meetings, and social events. The Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace was established as a national historic site in 1962 and donated to the National Park Service in 1963. The five recreated period rooms remain open for visitation and interpretation as well as a museum and exhibit space in the basement level of the structures.

