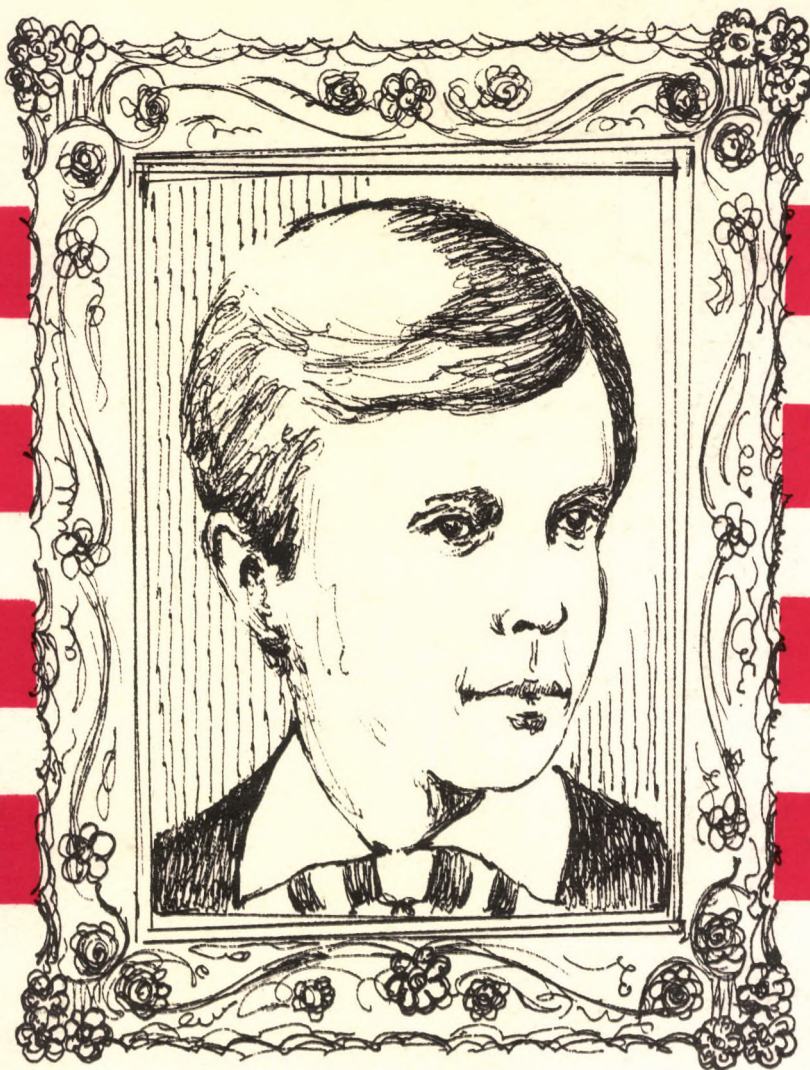


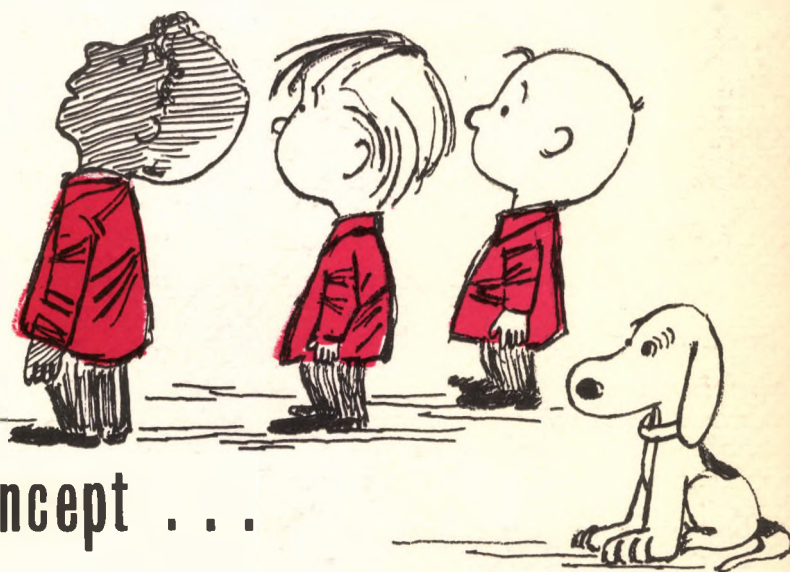
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THEODORE

ROOSEVELT

BIRTHPLACE



an interpretive concept . . .

Theodore
Roosevelt
Birthplace
an
interpretive
concept



written byAnt Allen

cover and illustration by..Joseph Rockwell

national
park
service

IT'S MISLEADING TO SUPPOSE

*there's any basic difference between
education and entertainment*

THIS DISTINCTION MERELY RELIEVES PEOPLE

*of the responsibility of
looking into the matter.*

....Marshall McLuhan

FORWARD

Theodore Roosevelt's timeless character and unwavering integrity established a life style with which many modern Americans can identify. His speeches, writings, and actions retain this timeless quality and are overwhelmingly relevant to today's world:



To student activists?

"Keep your eyes on the stars, but remember to keep your feet on the ground."

To the isolationists?

"Much has been given us, and much will rightfully be expected from us...we have become a great nation, forced by the fact of its greatness into relations with the other nations of the earth, and we must behave as befits a people with such responsibilities."

To opponents of wage reform?

"No man can be a good citizen unless he has a wage more than sufficient to cover the bare cost of living, and hours of labor short enough...to bear his share in the management of the community."

To opponents of social reform?

"This country will not be a permanently good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a reasonably good place for all of us to live in."

"(This country must have)...an economic system under which each man shall be guaranteed the opportunity to show the best that there is in him."



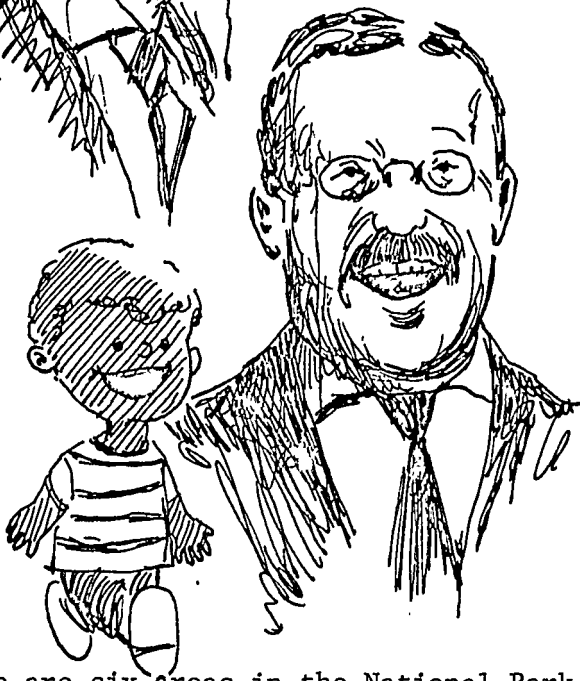
To proponents of bigotry?

"Americanism is a question of spirit, conviction, and purpose, not of creed or birthplace."

To those lacking commitment?

"In life, as in a football game, the principle to follow is: hit the line hard; don't foul and don't shirk, but hit the line hard."

"Only those are fit to live that do not fear to die."



For those without hope for the future?

"We think the greatest victories are yet to be won, the greatest deeds yet to be done, and that there are yet in store for our peoples, and for the causes that we uphold, grander triumphs than have ever yet been secured."

There are six areas in the National Park System set aside to preserve the memory of our dynamic 26th President: Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historical Site, Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park, Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, Theodore Roosevelt Island in Washington, D.C., Mount Rushmore National Memorial and Ansley Wilcox House National Historic Site. Each of these monuments to a memory has a singular role to play in presenting the Roosevelt story to the inheritors of his dreams -- the American people.

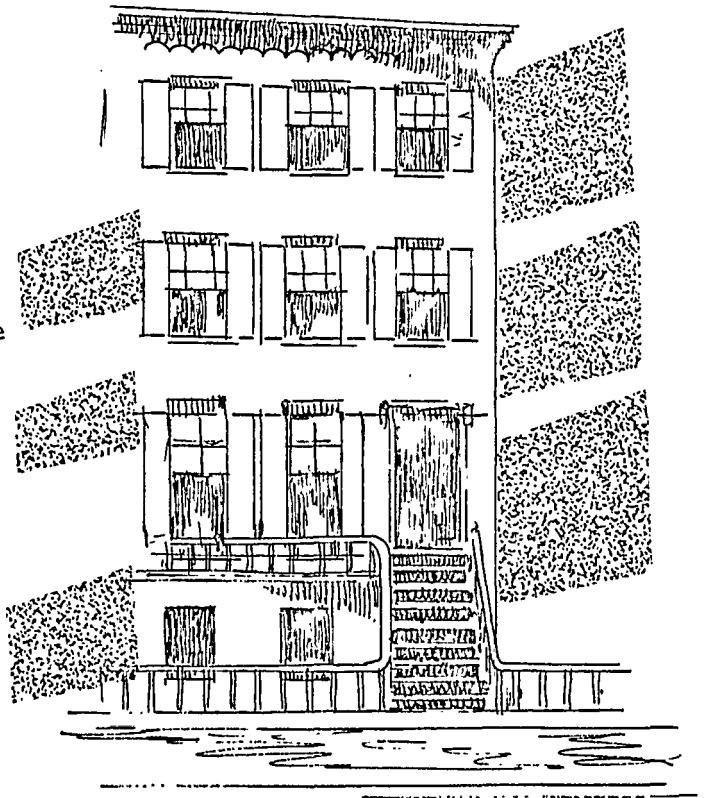
In the pages that follow an attempt will be made to identify the role that the Birthplace should play in presenting the Roosevelt story.



INTERPRETIVE THEME

The first 15 years of Theodore Roosevelt's life (1858 through 1873) were spent in association with the brownstone house at 28 East 20th Street, New York City. Here the youthful president-to-be overcame obstacles that would have broken a lesser man. Here were planted the ideas and ideals that later blossomed into innovations in government action and social reform legislation unmatched by earlier presidents. Here he enjoyed a family life that endowed him with qualities that later enabled him to be both a concerned and dedicated family man as well as political leader of the nation. Here in a large city environment, he somehow developed an interest in the world of nature that he retained throughout his life.

Interpretation at Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace should focus on the first 15 years of his life, and relate this period of the boy's development to the man's later accomplishments. But interpretation here must do more than tell merely what happened. We must explore the "why" behind the happenings. In this way only can we "turn on" the interest of the visitor. If we are successful in postulating answers to questions such as those that



follow, then these answers will result in a lasting impact on the visitor.

(1) How did young Theodore overcome the disabling effects of his asthmatic attacks? Would not the answer to this question have impact on thousands of young visitors who may have infirmities of their own?

(2) What activities did young Theodore engage in that developed his leadership and tenacity of later life? Would not many young people be interested in knowing the "secret of success" and, where possible, emulating an ideal hero-figure?

(3) How did young Theodore develop his intense interest in nature and the out-of-doors? What opportunities did the city-born Roosevelt have that are not available to the city youth of today? Don't you think a youthful visitor would be interested in knowing how he can receive similar experiences to those enjoyed by Roosevelt?



(4) What inspired Roosevelt's intense love of learning? How did this love of learning stand him in good stead in later years? Isn't it possible that there is real value in explaining to the youthful visitor the not-so-obvious benefits of his educational opportunities, in terms of another person's successful life?

(5) What was it about young Roosevelt's home life that made him in turn such a dedicated father? Can't we suppose that explanation of close family ties and warm relationships would have a positive effect on this world of broken, fatherless homes?

(6) What experiences did Theodore have that brought forth his great social consciousness of later life? Isn't there relevance to issues of today in revealing how the well-to-do Roosevelt family had a son that later proved to be a champion of the "common man"?

The theme should therefore focus on Roosevelt's early years, but must do this in terms of his accomplishments of later life, and in terms of application to today's world. Thus, Roosevelt's work is not over; his spirited, dynamic life can and should be used as a pattern for our own. If we can kindle a small flame in the heart of the visitor similar to the blaze that roared in Roosevelt's chest, our duty will have been done.

In 1956, the then Vice-President Nixon presented a report to the Congress from the Theodore Roosevelt Centennial Commission which stated:

"As a nation, we need his honesty and forthrightness, his courage and the decency of his personal and family life. We need his regard for his fellow man and his determination to work to achieve that social justice which is equal opportunity. We need that determined and dedicated service to the public good which he demonstrated and which is basic to national security. Above all, we need that passion for America which burns in

Theodore Roosevelt's spoken and written words and, most compellingly, in the records of his action in public office or as private citizen. To make those qualities of character, that inner fire, real to the American people...and to help American men and women, American boys and girls, to want those qualities and that fire for themselves...seems an undertaking as worthwhile as any in the secular field that has been presented in our generation, or is likely to be presented."

The theme, then, should be presented in such a way that would inspire the visitor to want to emulate some of the character that was Theodore Roosevelt. Since the majority of visitors are inner-city children under 16 years of age, our efforts should be directed toward the youthful mind. The youth of today are the responsible citizens of tomorrow. The Theodore Roosevelt story can inspire the young citizen to channel his energies into the democratic processes and perhaps discourage the trend of destructive practices or apathy one can see developing in the youth of this country.



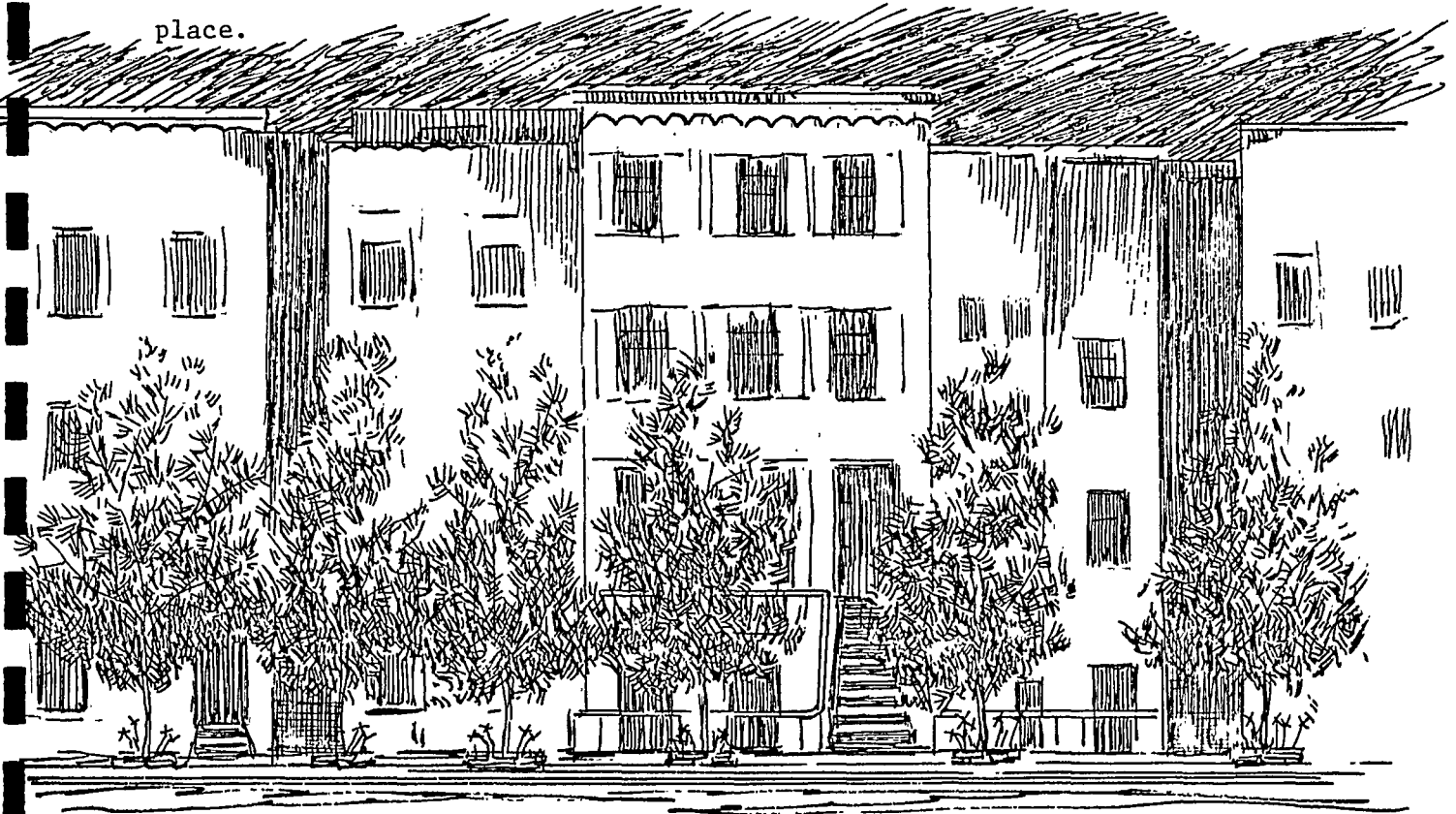
The Existing Situation at Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace

The Roosevelt Birthplace, a five story brown stone building, at 28 East 20th Street stands amid a rapidly deteriorating commercial section of town. On both sides of the building, garment industries, wholesale jobbers and small restaurants intrude what was once a rather fashionable part of the East Side of New York. Although the Roosevelt family moved from this home in 1873, it did remain in Roosevelt ownership until the late 1800's, at which time it was sold. In 1919, the Women's Roosevelt Memorial Association (which later merged with the Theodore Roosevelt Association) raised funds to buy the site and reconstructed the house. The house had at that time been converted into a commercial establishment. Enough structural damage had occurred to the building to require complete reconstruction. The Birthplace was later donated to the National Park Service in 1963, by the Theodore Roosevelt Association.

On the street in front of the Birthplace, there is virtually no parking available for the visitor. What little curbside parking exists is usually taken up with commercial trucks and trailer vans loading or unloading merchandise for the adjacent stores and warehouses. Access to the Birthplace is generally by the New York subway system or by taxicab. The nearest subway point is approximately two blocks from the Birthplace.

Worth noting, but probably not particularly pertinent to this report, is the fact that there is considerable restoration of some of the older buildings occurring just west of the Birthplace on 20th Street. Apparently, a number of people have deemed the structures suitable for residential purposes and are spending considerable money to restore them to a semblance of their former

appearance, but with modern conveniences. Should this renovation continue, it is possible that much needed improvement of the neighborhood could take place.



A Master Plan study needs to be conducted for the Birthplace. In 1963, when the Birthplace was donated to the Park Service, a Master Plan was prepared, but this Master Plan did not concern itself greatly with anything exterior of the building. There is substantial local interest on the possibility of extending our area of influence to the entire block of 20th Street on both sides of the street. This can be considered almost necessary if we wish to preserve any of the atmosphere that might have existed during Roosevelt's residence in the area. The situation of commercial facilities on both sides of the building greatly detracts from the appearance and the atmosphere that the visitor must experience. Since these buildings are in poor shape and since

a few of them are already condemned, it is quite possible that cooperative agreements with the City officials and/or acquisition of additional lands or a combination of both could someday create a very fine atmosphere which would be pleasing to the visitor.

If such additional lands were acquired, there is local interest to explore the possibility of building a neighborhood gymnasium as a memorial to Theodore Roosevelt. This is an area of town where such facilities are non-existent or at least extremely scarce. This may inspire the children residing in the neighborhood to enter in on a physical fitness program. Certainly no other activity could more adequately memorialize Theodore Roosevelt's interest in children than a neighborhood athletic center or gymnasium. Certainly all of this is outside the area of interest of an interpretive prospectus, but should be considered in long range objectives for the site.

The existing reconstructed structure is more than the residence of the Roosevelt family. Also reconstructed was the adjoining residence of Theodore Roosevelt's uncle, Robert Roosevelt. From the outside the two-family nature of the structure is not apparent; but in the interior, the residence that was actually owned by Theodore Roosevelt's parents has been restored and re-furnished as a home. The residence of Robert Roosevelt is that portion of the structure which has been utilized for the exhibit rooms and library.

The Park Tour

The visitor enters the Birthplace through the basement entrance. An information desk is located just inside the doorway and on the left-hand side of the

lobby. The visitor is welcomed by Service personnel on duty at the desk and a \$.50 admission fee is collected. The visitor is then invited to begin his tour by looking over the exhibits in the basement museum. When personnel are available, the visitor may receive a guided tour of the exhibit room. The museum consists of approximately 57 built-in, glass-covered exhibit cases. Although the majority of visitors to the Birthplace are children, these exhibit cases were built for adults. One must be nearly five feet tall to conveniently see into the cases, and most children are not. The cases simply make it impossible or at least highly inconvenient for children to use.

On exhibit are specimens, documents, and memorabilia representing every facet of Mr. Roosevelt's diverse activities. Subject material includes: Ancestry, Boyhood, College Days, Marriage, New York Legislator, Civil Service Commissioner, New York Police Commissioner, Candidate for Mayor of New York, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, North Dakota Rancher, Rough Riders and Military Life, Family Life, Vice-President, President, Peace Negotiator, Nobel Prize Winner, Hunter and Explorer, Conservationist, Bull-Moose Candidate, Assassination Attempt, Loss of Son in WWI; and this is by no means an exhaustive listing. There is a wealth of information in these exhibits...and to the Roosevelt scholar there is endless interest. But for the casual visitor, there is far too much for one to absorb in the short period of time normally set aside for this visit. Most visitors are simply overwhelmed by the amount of material on exhibit.

After looking through the museum, the visitor returns to the lobby and is met by a park guide who takes him by elevator to the second floor to begin the tour

of the refurnished rooms of the Roosevelt home. The visitor is told about the nursery and bedroom (where TR was born) on the second floor and then is led down the stairway to the parlor, library and dining room on the first floor. The refurnished rooms are very well done, although all the furniture is not original to the site. Artificial sunlight has been installed in the window casings to thwart the problem of insufficient natural daylight and soot-covered windows. Once the visitor has seen the refurnished rooms, he has the opportunity to go through the first floor exhibit room. This museum has thirteen built-in, glass-covered exhibit cases similar to those installed in the basement museum. On display in this room are a number of animal skins, a mounted African lion, several statues, and the massive desk used by TR when he was Assistant Secretary of the Navy. A very fine collection of charcoal drawings by Philip Goodwin which were used to illustrate TR's African books is also on display. Once the visitor has had a look at this museum, he is then led down the last flight of stairs to the lobby to end his tour.

In the case of school groups, there is one deviation from this visitor pattern. The children are taken by elevator directly to the fourth floor auditorium and are shown a film pertaining to Theodore Roosevelt. After viewing the film they are led down the stairway to the second floor to resume the normal tour.

The Visitor

The Birthplace now receives 10,000 visits annually. 5,000 of these visits can be accounted for through school groups which visit the Birthplace and a large portion of the remaining 5,000 visitors is made up of children accompanying their parents. So, it can be safely assumed that approximately 60-65% of the

visitors to the Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace are children. It is also of vital importance to realize that of this great number of children, the majority are from the Black community and so there is a real challenge for us to be able to make the story of Teddy Roosevelt, especially that of his boyhood, relevant and interesting to this group of visitors. Another important consideration is that virtually all of the 10,000 visitors coming to the Birthplace each year are from New York City.

The Library

On the second floor of the Robert Roosevelt Home, (directly above the two museums) the Park houses an extensive library. This library is available to scholars doing research or visitors having an intense interest in Theodore Roosevelt. Members of the Theodore Roosevelt Association also use the library and hold meetings in this room.

The Information Desk

Just inside the main entrance, the Information Desk serves as an admission fee collecting point and as a sales desk for the Theodore Roosevelt Association items. At the present time, there is a telephone switchboard here at which all incoming calls for the New York City Group Headquarters upstairs are answered. Soon the New York City Group Headquarters Staff will move to Federal Hall, thus greatly reducing the large number of phone calls now handled at the front desk. This will allow the Park Technician who is assigned to the Information Desk more freedom, no longer being tied to the switchboard. The Theodore Roosevelt Association has a wide variety of publications and a few objects for sale, all closely associated with Theodore Roosevelt.

The Third Floor

The entire third floor is at present taken up with offices and administrative offices for the New York City Group Headquarters. These offices will be vacated in the near future when personnel are moved to the recently remodeled Federal Hall. These rooms will then be available for visitor use, more exhibit space, or whatever use is deemed necessary by the management of the Birthplace.

The Museum Collection

The Birthplace has a large number of specimens and objects of tremendous historical importance. Many of these are on display in the various exhibits. Others are presently in storage in the vault in the sub-basement. Apparently ownership of these specimens is of a varied nature. Some of the objects are still owned by the Roosevelt family, some of the objects are on loan from friends of the Roosevelt family, some of the objects are still under the ownership of the Theodore Roosevelt Association, and others are owned by the National Park Service. Thorough documentation is necessary to clear up these ownership problems. All of those items which are not in pure ownership of the National Park Service, should be clearly identified so that there will be no confusion at a later date. Once the New York City Group Headquarters has vacated the premises, the museum collection that is now in the safe in the sub-basement should be returned to the museum collection room, also in the basement.

Opportunities for Interpretation at Theodore Roosevelt

Birthplace

Dealing first with the exterior of the building, several things could be done to enhance the outside appearance of this marvelous structure. Fortunately, the building has been recessed a few feet back from the front line of the adjoining buildings. This contributes greatly to making the Birthplace different from its deteriorating surroundings. Additional steps could be taken to further emphasize this difference. One thing that could be done would be to work closely with city officials in establishing a no parking zone (strictly enforced) directly in front of the building. At the present time, trucks pull up directly in front of the Birthplace, stay there for prolonged periods loading and unloading crates and cartons. Secondly, it is possible that the concrete sidewalk could be torn up and replaced with a more interesting sidewalk directly in front of the Birthplace. Thirdly, attractive curbside planting of trees could be extended throughout the block on both sides of the street. Of course, this would require a great deal of cooperation on the part of the neighbors in the block. Such neighborhood improvements would emphasize to the potential visitor something different is going on here and that there might be something gained by entering this building and stepping into the past for a short visit.

Once inside, there are several opportunities to improve the rather well managed interpretive program that exists. Briefly, these improvements boil down to a more simplified interpretive theme; directing this theme in the main toward children; and relating the theme to the youth and issues of

today. Also of extreme importance is to carry on the fine job that the Theodore Roosevelt Association has begun in preparing information to be sent out to school groups for off site interpretation. Because the visitation at the Birthplace is relatively low and because the message that the Birthplace can generate is extremely important, greatest benefits could be expected by preparing professional off site interpretive programs, to be mailed out in package units to participating schools throughout the area.

In regards to the simplification of the interpretive program, one of the first things that comes to mind is the rather complicated exhibit room in the basement of the Birthplace. This exhibit room now contains 54 individual exhibit cases, each of which consists of two glass enclosed boxes (see basement floor plan for museum layout). The exhibit cases now contain hundreds of objects associated with the life of Theodore Roosevelt, many of which are extremely pertinent to the story proposed to be told in this museum. Others are of only marginal significance to the story and yet are extremely important specimens in themselves.

If agreement can be reached as to the story line we wish to get across to the visitor, then it seems probable that we can do more to get this message across with much less in the way of specimens in the exhibit room. It must be emphasized that while many specimens may no longer be exhibited in this particular room, they must receive adequate protection and do not have to be put into storage. Later in this proposal, a solution will be offered on how to handle those specimens which are off the main line of the story to be told.

The main exhibit room in the basement is of paramount importance to the story line of the Birthplace. This is the exhibit room that the visitor enters first. He should be able to derive from this experience a direct hard-hitting, simplified story line dealing with the youth of Theodore Roosevelt. Colorful and imaginative exhibitry combined with the exhibit of pertinent specimens to the simplified story line can get the message across quicker and more thoroughly than the numerous specimens and labels that now exist in the museum.

The second improvement most necessary for rehabilitation of the museum deals with its orientation toward children. The present museum cases are inconvenient, if not impossible, for some children to see into. Since the majority of the visitors into the Birthplace are children, either in school groups or with their parents, it seems extremely important to modify not only the physical structure of the cases to make them accessible to children, but the content and story line so that it becomes understandable by children. We are fortunate in this instance to be dealing with a figure of American history that is certain to have universal appeal to the youth of the country and at the same time be dealing with an area in which the majority of the visitors are children. This combination should open up new opportunities for interpretive treatment of the museum.

Thirdly, in any kind of rehabilitation or modification of the existing museums, care must be taken in dealing with the existing museum cases. The cases are built directly into the walls of the museum halls. Removing the side cases poses a structural problem and certainly a costly treatment. There is something to be said for leaving them. They appear to be part of the building.

The wood paneling used in the cases is the same as that used on the wall and they reflect the typical museum approach of the time the building was restored. However, if the decision is made to leave these exhibit cases, there will need to be some structural changes made in them. It would be possible to utilize the lower front of the case which is not now in use so that the children as they walk by, have a clear view into the exhibits. It would be possible to combine several of the cases, removing the separation between individual ones into a larger exhibit and yet retain the overall exterior appearance of the case. Perhaps a few of the cases could be removed and wall panels or other exhibit devices inserted where these have been removed. At any rate, enough structural modification must be done to make them accessible and visually appealing to the children. The central "island type" row of exhibit cases could be removed entirely without detracting from the interior appearance of the museum. A series of free standing exhibits could be substituted in lieu of the island cases or it could be left open to open up the central area of the exhibit hall. In the rear of the museum under the skylight, is a section of the museum that could well be rehabilitated completely. All of the exhibit cases could be taken out from this area and a sound and light program instituted in this separate room of the exhibit hall.

It must be pointed out that there is no general consensus on what disposition is to be made of the exhibit cases in this museum. The 1963 Master Plan said "The remaining exhibit cases shall be rehabilitated to meet National Park Service operational standards, but their basic forms should be retained in consideration of the architectural integrity of the various room interiors."

This document is not binding on current planning, but is quoted to recognize the esteem placed on the cases. Certainly the interior of the cases is open for modification and it may be decided that complete renovation of at least one of the exhibit rooms is the most practical method of achieving the objectives of this prospectus.

Since there is another museum room directly above the main exhibit room in the basement, it is possible that the story lines (one for children and one for adults) could be entirely separated between the two museums. Since the downstairs museum is the first one the visitor encounters upon entering the building, and since the majority of the visitors are children, it seems logical that this museum room should be devoted to the youthful visitor. The upstairs exhibit room on the first floor then would be directed toward the adult visitor. Another possible approach would be to modify the existing exhibit room in the basement entrance level to a bi-level museum with separation of the adult and children's versions based on a visual elevation level, or perhaps a clear distinction in side by side exhibits, or by even making the total exhibitry comprehensible to children but still interesting to adults. If this route was followed, then the upstairs exhibit room would take on the story of more detailed accounts of Roosevelt's life for those particularly interested in the details and display of less pertinent objects dealing with Roosevelt's life.

Audiovisual Opportunities

Every school group that attends the Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace program is invited to participate in an audiovisual presentation in the auditorium on the fourth floor. The existing auditorium situation has an acute acoustical problem. The audio portion of the films being shown in the auditorium is almost incomprehensible. Whether or not this difficulty is because of the peculiar acoustical problems in the auditorium or whether it is just a malfunction on the film sound track was not determined. At any rate, it is very difficult to hear the audio portion of the films. The Park has several films on hand from which to choose a suitable one for showing to any group. The films on hand are apparently in very bad shape and new copies need to be acquired. None of the films on hand were made specifically for the situation at Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace. The films were produced by either the United States Information Agency or outside groups with an interest in Theodore Roosevelt. Probably sufficient footage exists to combine with a new audio portion into a film which would be specifically appropriate for the purpose of showing at Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace. The best solution would be to start from scratch with a film to be produced for this particular situation by our Audiovisual Lab. Another satisfactory solution would be the immediate production of the film that is currently being recommended for Sagamore Hill and copies made to be shown also at the Birthplace. The film proposed for Sagamore Hill is of such a nature, that it would be perfectly applicable to groups visiting the Birthplace. The most immediate solution would be: To update the sound system in the auditorium providing built-in speakers with good acoustics and to acquire new copies of the prints now being shown.

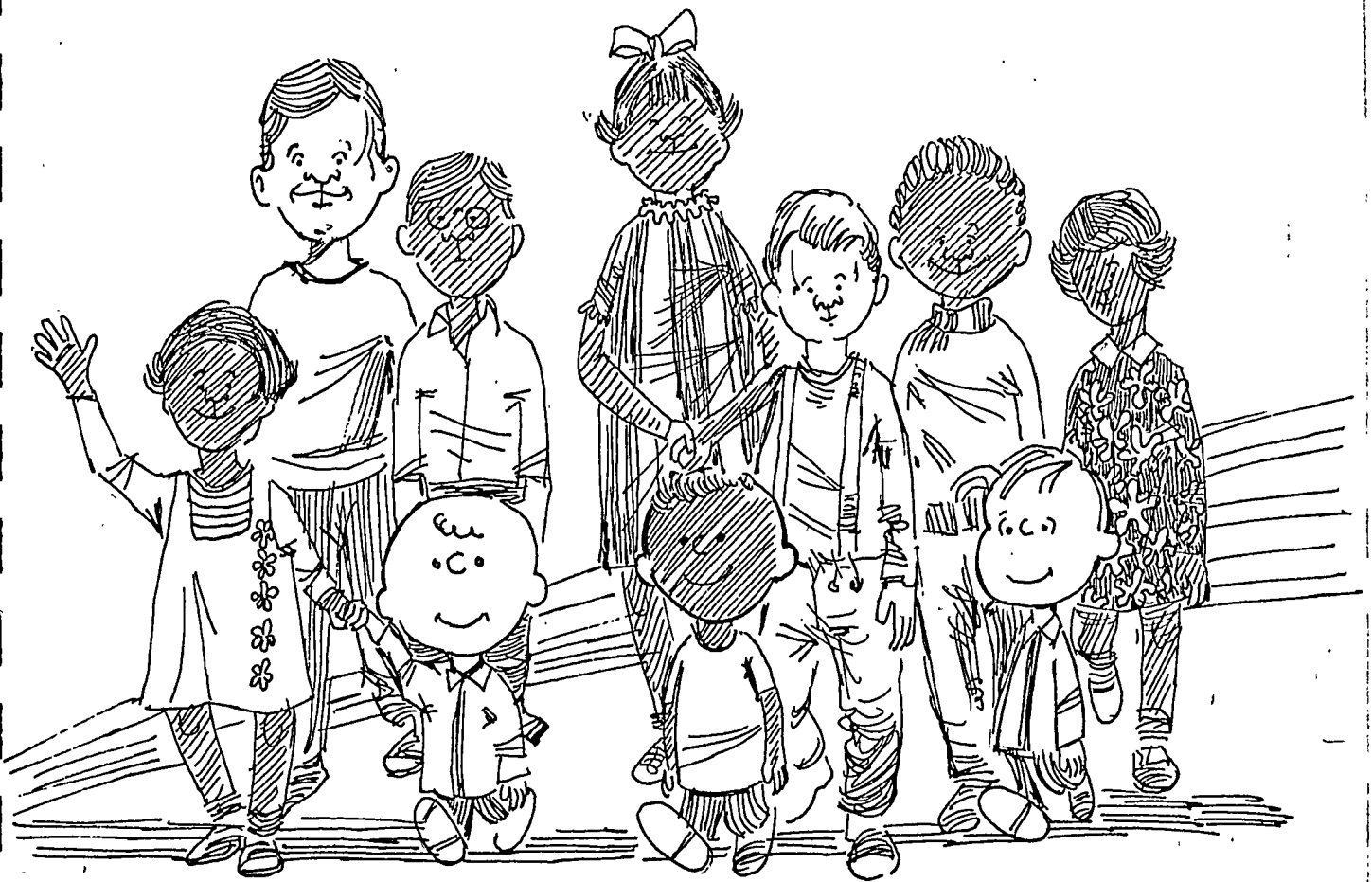
A PROPOSED SOLUTION

This section is offered as a possible course of action to rehabilitate the interpretive facilities at the Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace. The overall objective is to make the tremendous personality of Theodore Roosevelt "come alive" and be comprehensible to the special kind of audience that visits the Birthplace.

I. The Basement Museum

The visitor experience begins in the Basement Museum. Here the visitor becomes acquainted with concepts and ideas not capable of being illustrated in the refurnished rooms. Appreciation and understanding of events that took place in the Roosevelt home follow the information provided in the museum. The exhibits will establish Roosevelt as a real person...a gifted and determined young man; acquaint people with the values cherished by Roosevelt; and display specimens which substantiate these concepts.

Since visitors receive their first impressions here, it is important that we concentrate our resources and efforts to provide the best possible museum effort in this exhibit room.



Since children constitute most of the Birthplace visitors, it is of utmost importance that we recognize their special needs in museum techniques. Hopefully, we can be skillful enough to insure that adults will be able to derive enjoyment and edification from these efforts also, but to direct our efforts to the adults at the expense of the children's understanding would be folly.

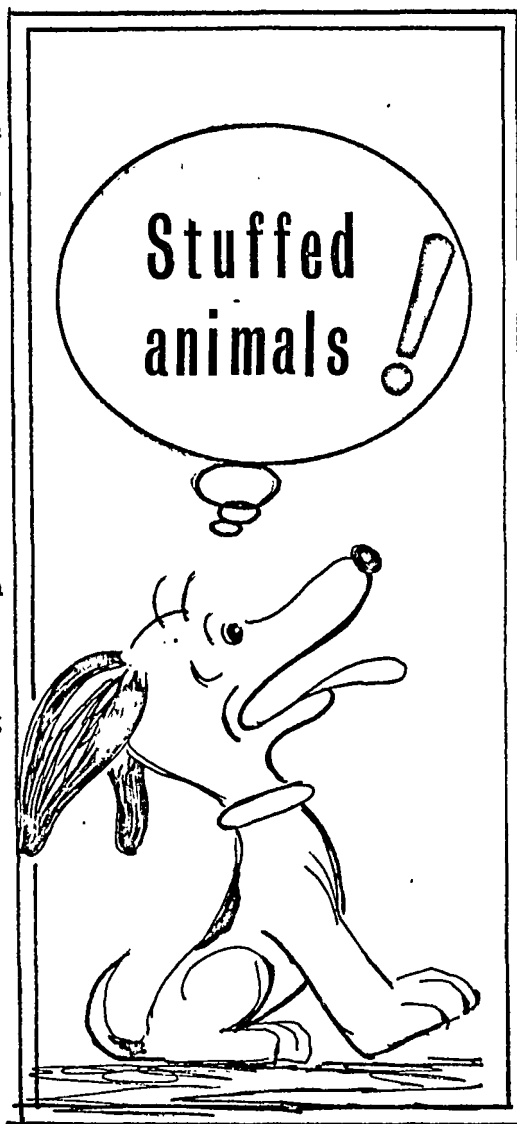
This proposal strongly recommends that the basement museum be completely renovated to meet the needs of our youthful audience.

Such physical renovation would include:

1. Removing all exhibits from the alcove and converting this space into an audiovisual program.
2. Removing the 16 "island-type" exhibit cases from the center of the room, to open up the exhibit room and avoid a crowded atmosphere.
3. Complete overhaul of the existing wall exhibit cases to make them visually accessible and appealing to children.
4. Free use of bright and exciting colors to liven up the atmosphere of this one room. This will afford a desirable contrast to the atmosphere of "hallowed ground" in the refurnished portions of the Birthplace.

The thematic approach used in this museum is of utmost importance. The exhibit planners must at all times be aware that they are dealing with a special audience -- inner city children less than 16 years of age. Experience in children's museums throughout the country indicates that exhibits geared to the youthful mind can be quite successful in reaching adults, too. Considerations considered important to theme and message content are as follows:

1. All label copy must be comprehensible to age level 10-16. Short messages are desirable, as most visitors come in groups and there is a tendency to "hurry through" lengthy narratives. Perhaps typical labels might be abandoned in favor of balloon-type messages delivered by a cartoon character. Most children visiting the Birthplace are more familiar with cartoons and cartoon characters than any other form of reading. For some of these children, their total exposure to the world of reading has been between the covers of a comic book. If we are to be successful in getting any message across in this museum, then we must use a form of media on which these children trust and believe. For those visitors who are more sophisticated, they will also find pleasure and a message in this low-keyed approach.



This proposal strongly suggests serious consideration be given to utilizing a cartoon character to lead the visitor through the exhibits. The cartoon

character could talk directly (on a first person basis) to the visitor through balloon-type labels and explain in simple, elementary language the concepts and ideas relating to the youthful Roosevelt and explain the significance of exhibit specimens. The cartoon character would be found on most of the exhibits to lend continuity throughout the exhibit room.

2. The number of specimens exhibited in the children's museum should be held at a minimum. We should exhibit only those specimens that help to illustrate the exhibit subjects enumerated below, and try to select from the vast array of objects on hand, specimens which are by their very nature appealing to the child's frame of reference.

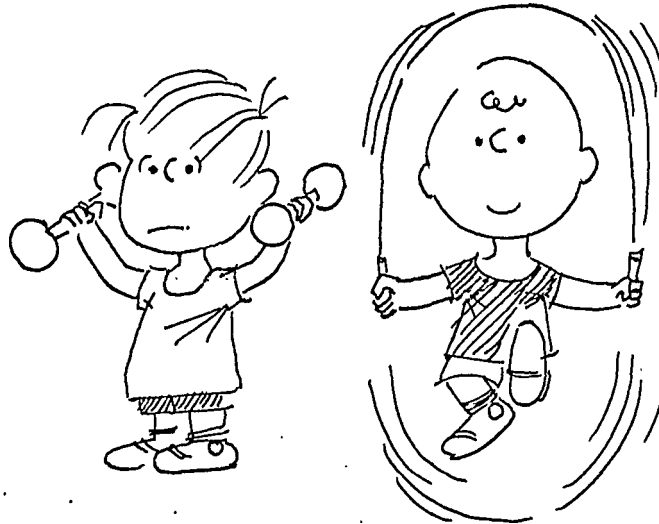
3. At every opportunity the exhibits should connect events that took place in the Birthplace when Roosevelt was a young man to actions and pronouncements made by the adult Roosevelt. We should play heavily on the "cause and effect" concept. We should emphasize that this house stands for something important, because it was right here in this house that all that was to become Theodore Roosevelt was generated. This will create a better sense of appreciation for the tour of the house.

4. Exhibit themes or subjects may be drawn from the following subjects or concepts: (Admittedly not an exhaustive list)

- (a) Theodore Roosevelt and his parents: Emphasize his mixed ancestry; strong and gentle father..."my father was the best man I ever knew"; show anecdotes from Roosevelt's youth which will tend to make him a real figure, humanize him and let the youthful visitors identify

with young Roosevelt as an ordinary young man, who happened to have an extraordinary life potential. Leave the visitor thinking that maybe such potential is in all of us, and if we "try harder", we can bring it to the surface!!

- (b) Theodore Roosevelt and his first challenge: Recap his childhood illnesses, how his father inspired him not to let the sickness get him down, how he applied his energies to overcome the handicap through exercise and an active life. Pose the question: If Roosevelt had not won the battle against a physical handicap, would his intense drive to excel have sustained him, and would his life have been much the same? The answer is purely speculative, but there can be little doubt that he would have accomplished much in his life, no matter what the physical limitations might have been. (We can tell what kind of physical exercises he used.)



- (c) Theodore Roosevelt and the outdoors: Roosevelt was a city boy who developed an intense love for the adventure of the out-of-doors

that continued throughout his life. How did this love affair come about? It happened before he was 10 years old. What opportunities for involvement with nature are now available to the city youngsters of 100 years later? At about age 10, along with some friends, he started his own private "museum" -- collecting things may precipitate latent interests and talents in young minds. Several stuffed specimens (collected and mounted by him) are available for exhibit purposes. Taxidermy may even be suggested as a good thing to learn (although it may seem contrary, almost heretical, to our usual pitch). After all, hobbies of any kind are what's lacking in most of the inner city kids who come to the Birthplace. This message should inspire the visitor to become interested in something...just anything that's worthwhile and pursue this interest, chase it down, exploit it. Because Roosevelt pursued his aptitude along natural history lines, he achieved a large degree of success as a naturalist.



Because of this early interest, Theodore Roosevelt was able to accomplish many worthwhile things when he found himself in a position of power. As President, he established 150 million acres of national forests, 50 game reserves, and doubled the number of national parks, (including Grand Canyon). We should dwell on this conservation-oriented per-

sonality at length -- nothing could be more relevant to the issues.

of today. Today's youth are more aware than ever and many of them are taking up the cause of environmental quality. Here is the story of a man who had the foresight to act before the crisis was upon him and today's youth will be interested in figuring out why!!

- (d) Theodore Roosevelt and the observant eye: All through his life he was able to notice things unnoticed by others. This keen power of observation is a necessary quality of a budding naturalist. What experiences as a boy developed this power in the man? Was it his love of reading? Was it his penchant for collecting specimens? Or did it lie in the fact that he was born with poor vision and when this handicap was noted and corrected, he grew to appreciate his new-found vision more than the average person? To substantiate the claim he had a keen, observing eye we can exhibit excerpts from his excellent field notes on natural history observations. Could it be that Roosevelt's accurate observation and knowledge of animal behavior gave him insight into human behavior that he used in dealing with citizens, soldiers, kings and children?

- (e) Theodore Roosevelt the scholar:

Even at a very young age Roosevelt read lots of books. This love for literature continued throughout his life. He not only consumed, he also produced.

He published his first work (notes on field observations) at the age of 19. His later works include biographies, historical accounts,

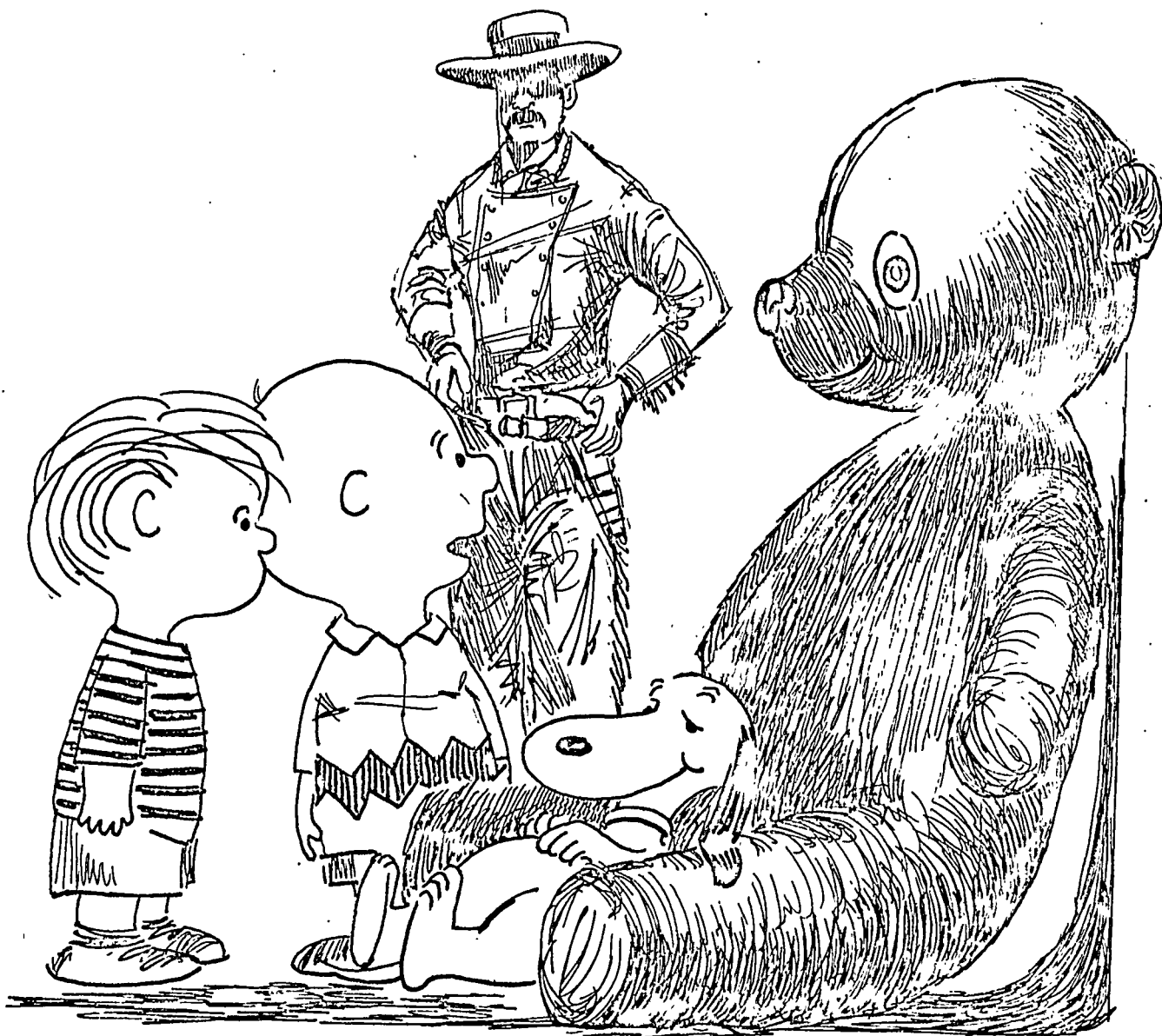


philosophical comments, and life histories of game animals, for a total of 28 books, countless essays and articles, and over 150,000 letters. He read up to three books a day, and carried books with him wherever he went. Because of his sickness, Theodore did not have a formal school education. His wide range of reading interests and his tutors must have succeeded, however, for he did very well at Harvard. There are a number of remarkable photographs showing Roosevelt reading in the most unlikely circumstances.

The purpose of this exhibit should be to stimulate the visitor's interest in reading; to demonstrate that reading lots of books does not create a sissy; to show that reading can be fun -- and worthwhile; to show what values one might receive through a wide background of reading.

- (f) Theodore Roosevelt and the Teddy Bear: This would certainly carry no profound message, but would undoubtedly be of great appeal to the young visitors. Explanations of his involvement in the creation of the lovable Teddy Bear along with an exhibit of a number of representative bears can be material for an exciting exhibit. Perhaps the exhibit can pursue the many caricatures that were made of Roosevelt. Most of the caricatures are not offensive and most were done as a measure of respect and admiration for him; but nevertheless, these grotesque graphics can be used to highlight many of the different characteristics of the man to spark the children's interest. A large number of editorial cartoons and caricatures

are available to draw upon for material for the exhibit. The whole tone of the exhibit effort should be bright, humorous, and lively.



(g) Theodore Roosevelt and social reform: What experiences in this house influenced this man of wealth and position to later take up the cause of the common man? In his public life he attacked the sacred cows of the monopolistic trusts and political appointments of civil servants, which he felt were to the detriment of the public. Theodore's father was extremely active in charity work and in helping those unable to help themselves. Maybe this example inspired Theodore to aspire to a political system..."under which each man shall be guaranteed the opportunity to show the best that there is in him". He also grew up to believe that "Americanism is a question of spirit, conviction, and purpose, not of creed or birthplace".

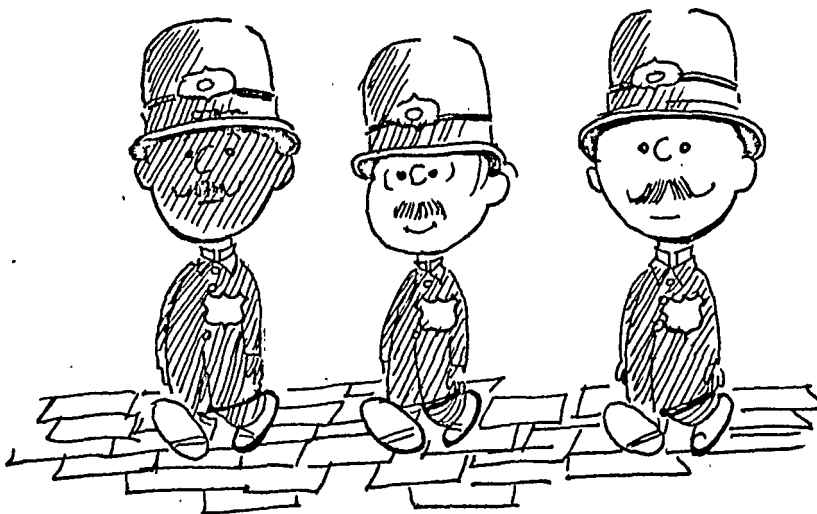
At any rate, it is most probable that the ideals espoused by Roosevelt throughout his political career were from seeds planted in his fertile mind as a child, and germinated in the loving and active atmosphere of his childhood environment. His actions on behalf of the downtrodden were appreciated by the public. He received many honors from citizen groups for his good works. There are two presentation gifts available for display which were given to Theodore Roosevelt from black citizen's groups as a token of appreciation for his political actions.

His timeless statement may sum up the theme of this exhibit effort:

"This country will not be a permanently good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a reasonably good place for all of us to live in."

(h) Theodore Roosevelt and his other challenges: This fearless man never once shirked from his sense of responsibility and duty. In fact, he often aggressively attacked any challenge he faced, no matter the odds. Every human has obstacles in life which he must face and overcome. By using Roosevelt as an example, we may be able to inspire our youthful visitors to meet and defeat their own set of problems. Facing up to a challenge, assessing it, and vigorously attacking the root cause was Theodore Roosevelt's life style, and one which is well worth emulating.

Events in Roosevelt's life can be used to demonstrate his approach: his defeat of a debilitating physical handicap; his successful victory, with the odds against him, over police corruption in New York City; climbing the Matterhorn as a youth; and continuing with a scheduled speech when seriously wounded by an assassin.



5. The Audiovisual Program: A short continuous stand-up program of approximately five minutes is proposed. However, the program could be activated by the visitor as he enters the room (during periods of low visitor use). A large rear-projection screen could make up the back wall of the room. A number of projectors would throw images keyed to the narrative at random locations on the screen. Sometimes several images would be on the screen, at other times maybe only one. The narrative could tell how childhood influences in this house resulted in the making of a man who had impact on the world. The visuals would illustrate the man in action. Fortunately there is considerable photographic documentation (both motion and still pictures) from which to pick and choose.

If a cartoon-type character is chosen as a guide through the exhibits, this same character could be used in the visuals to connect the narrative concepts to the visual presentation.

II. Renovate the First Floor Museum

1. Physical Modifications

No major physical changes in this room are proposed. If the Philip Goodwin drawings now occupying several of the exhibit cases were displayed in a different manner or were incorporated into the children's museum in the Basement, then there would be several cases available to hold objects removed from the Basement museum. It would be even possible to bring the "island type" exhibit cases up from the Basement museum and install them in here.

2. Thematic Changes

- (a) Aim the story here to the adult visitor.
- (b) Concentrate the storyline on Theodore Roosevelt's public life, especially that period of his life while he was State Legislator, New York City Police Commissioner, New York City Mayor candidate, and Governor of the State of New York. Most of the visitors are New Yorkers and therefore will be interested in these facets of his life.
- (c) The editorial cartoons by Nast, McCutcheon, Fleming, Davenport and others are a story unto themselves. We could create a gallery of these editorials and utilize the semi-circular alcove at the South end of the room to display them. A representative gallery of these cartoons would

cover almost every facet of Theodore Roosevelt's life, and would be a source of fascination to the visitor. These editorials are more appropriately located in the adult museum because of the satire and subtle messages conveyed.

III. A Possible Third Floor Exhibit Room

Once the downstairs museums are renovated there may be a number of exhibit specimens left over from the old exhibits. One of the rooms on the third floor (now used as offices by the New York City Group staff) could become an additional exhibit room. The wall exhibit cases taken out of the south end of the Basement Museum could be installed in a third floor room.

Such an exhibit room would be used exclusively by the Roosevelt buff or especially interested visitors. This would be comparable to a park's study collection, but would be far more convenient than taking such people to the sub-basement museum collection room and showing them specimens out of storage.

IV. The Film Program in the Auditorium

The films now being shown by the Birthplace staff should be immediately reconditioned. The film is severely scratched and the sound track practically inaudible. The films play an extremely important role in interpreting to school groups as they may be sent out in advance to prepare children for a visit to the Birthplace, and are usually shown to every group which visits the Site.

An audiovisual specialist should install a built-in sound system at the earliest possible time. The present sound system uses the small speaker that comes with a portable motion picture projector. The sound emanating from this installation is unacceptable by any standard.

Once these technical difficulties are solved, the existing films will suffice for the present. The recently submitted prospectus for Sagamore Hill proposes production of a movie for use at that site. The scenario proposed for the Oyster Bay facility seems perfectly applicable for showing at the Birthplace. Therefore this proposal recommends at minimum that sufficient copies of the new Sagamore Hill film be made to be used at both sites. Ideally, two different versions of essentially the same film could be produced at the same time; the Birthplace version stressing and emphasizing the earlier phases of his life and the Sagamore Hill version emphasizing those aspects occurring after he established residence at Oyster Bay. This would be the most economical and efficient method of securing satisfactory films for both sites.

V. Making the Tour Self Guiding

This is a long range proposal with low priority. However, facing up to the continuing limitations on personnel ceilings and anticipating an increase in visitation somewhat greater than the stable 9,000 to 10,000 annual count at present because of museum improvements, a self-guiding capability might be necessary. This could

be accomplished by installing an audio station at each doorway of the refurnished rooms and prohibiting entry into the room through the use of electric eye detectors.

The audio station message could recreate a typical conversation that might have occurred in each room. The visitor would become a silent observer onto happenings that probably occurred in the very room he is looking into. The conversation by the Roosevelt family could give insight into the love and concern for one another that existed in the Roosevelt home.

VI. The Information and Sales Desk

The Theodore Roosevelt Association has a large number of publications for sale dealing with the life of Theodore Roosevelt. Undoubtedly, the mere reading of inspirational accounts of Theodore Roosevelt's life has changed people materially. Thus, providing the visitor with the opportunity to purchase books and pamphlets about Theodore Roosevelt is considered to be an important part of the interpretive program at the Birthplace. The Association should be encouraged to continue to furnish these publications at reasonable costs. They are also to be commended for the remarkably fine job they have done thus far.

The Sales Desk should be modified in some way to better display the available publications. Perhaps an attractive browsing rack could be installed adjacent to the existing counter to invite people to pick up, leaf through, and perchance to purchase.

VII. Off-site Services

Perhaps the very best growth potential for interpretation of the Theodore Roosevelt story lies in what we can do away from the Birthplace. The Theodore Roosevelt Association has taken a giant step by their publication of a teacher's manual of suggested class activities, Theodore Roosevelt and Responsible Citizenship. This effort should be encouraged and enlarged with preparation of additional classroom materials, such as film strips, leaflets, and off-site presentations by the staff.

APPROVAL BLOCK

INTERPRETIVE PROSPECTUS

THEODORE ROOSEVELT BIRTHPLACE

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Recommended:

Chief, Office of Environmental Planning & Design

Superintendent, New York City Group

Approved:

Regional Director, Northeast Region

