

Eleanor Roosevelt's legacy in human rights and world peace emerged from this simple place. Val-Kill, her main home from 1945 until she died in 1962, nourished her personal freedom and political independence. She described Val-Kill as the place "where I used to find myself and grow."

From its mid-1920s creation, Val-Kill was Eleanor Roosevelt's place to gather family, friends, and associates, picnic, walk in the woods, ride horses, and swim. Built on land her husband, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), owned, two miles from the "big house," Val-Kill was both a retreat and center of advocacy and activism. Here, she tested progressive ideas, discussed controversial issues, and inspired students and civil rights and labor leaders to debate and organize. She welcomed world leaders, hosted United Nations (UN) colleagues, and lobbied politicians. She shed new light on democracy; social, economic, and political justice; and peace with her prolific writing and gatherings of diverse people.

Eleanor Roosevelt championed social welfare and civil rights, wielding influence through FDR and on her own. Her Val-Kill Industries experiment, training out-of-work rural folk in traditional crafts, was a prototype for national New Deal projects. She traveled widely as first lady to witness US poverty and labor conditions, and the ravages of World War II abroad. After FDR's death in 1945, she supported humanitarian causes. She led the UN Human Rights Commission in the landmark Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One of the most powerful and admired women of her time, her call for "equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination" for all still resonates and inspires today.

Eleanor Roosevelt

Where . . . do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home . . . Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.

1884 Anna Eleanor Roosevelt (ER) born October 11, New York City, to Elliott and Anna Hall Roosevelt, prominent members of New York society.

1892 Mother dies. ER and brothers Hall and Elliott Jr. sent to live with Grandmother Hall in Tivoli, NY; Elliott Jr., dies 1893; father dies 1894.

1899 Age 15, sent to Allenswood School, England, "happiest time in my life." Headmistress Mlle. Souvestre instills confidence, independence, and social conscience.

1903 Works with Junior League teaching immigrant children exercise and dance at Rivington Street Settlement House, Lower East Side, NYC.

1905 Marries distant cousin Franklin Delano Roosevelt March 17; ER's uncle, President Theodore Roosevelt, gives the bride away. Couple lives in Manhattan rental and Hyde Park, home of FDR's mother, Sara Delano Roosevelt.

1906 First child, Anna, born. In next 10 years, ER gives birth to five sons: James, Franklin Jr. (dies at eight months), Elliott, Franklin Jr., and John.

1910 FDR elected NY state senator.

Public service, whether my husband was in or out of office, was to be a daily part of our life from now on.

On duty at the United Nations.
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1913-19 FDR Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Family moves to Washington, DC. US enters World War I in 1917. ER helps set up US Navy Red Cross Canteen. Travels post-war Europe: "the picture of desolation fostered in me an undying hate of war . . ." Supports League of Nations and World Court.

1920 Campaigns for FDR's unsuccessful vice presidential run on Democratic ticket. 19th Amendment gives women the vote; ER joins League of Women Voters.

1921-23 Joins Women's Trade Union League. After FDR contracts polio, she helps him return to public life. Political veterans Nancy Cook, and Marion Dickerman, Women's NY Democratic Committee, become ER mentors and friends.

1924-26 Val-Kill is built along Fall-Kill stream. FDR helps design cottage for ER, Cook and Dickerman. ER edits *Women's Democratic News*.

At Val-Kill I emerged as an individual.

1927-29 ER, Nancy Cook, and Marion Dickerman discuss FDR's concern for national trend of farmers leaving rural areas for city jobs. Cook suggests Val-Kill furniture cottage industry to employ local farmers in slack season; master cabinetmakers teach skills in shop/factory built behind cottage. Forge built to make pewter items; weaving shop creates jobs for women. ER markets products.

1928-30 FDR elected NY Governor, two terms. ER travels state; alerts FDR to conditions to improve. 1929 stock market crash triggers Great Depression.

1932 FDR elected US President, first of four terms. ER champions social and economic justice and civil rights. Is criticized for mistakes associated with New Deal projects to provide training, jobs, housing, and education.

I'm the agitator; he's the politician.

1934 Joins National Urban League and NAACP; urges FDR to create National Youth Administration; promotes fairness across gender and race lines.

1936 Val-Kill Industries closes. ER remodels Val-Kill factory as 20-room house with apartment for Malvina "Tommy" Thompson, her secretary 1929-53. Family, friends, associates, and journalists picnic and swim at Val-Kill. Syndicates "My Day" column on national issues and daily observations.

The cottage was . . . mine and I felt freer there than in the big house.

1939 Britain's Prime Minister Winston Churchill and King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visit. World War II begins in Europe, September 1939.

ER resigns from Daughters of the American Revolution when it won't let African American opera singer Marion Anderson perform in Constitution Hall, Washington, DC. ER helps get concert and broadcast for Anderson at Lincoln Memorial.

1941 Japanese attack Pearl Harbor, HI, Dec. 7; US enters WW II. ER addresses nation before her radio program—"whatever is asked of us I am sure we can accomplish . . . free and unconquerable people of the United States of America."

With FDR, 1933, in their presidential years.
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1942-44 ER travels to Britain, South Pacific, Caribbean, and South America to visit troops, hospitals. Netherlands Queen Wilhelmina and family escape Hitler and come to North America, often visiting at Val-Kill. ER hosts annual picnics for youth, including Wiltwyck School for disadvantaged boys and Hudson Shore Labor School for girls.

1945 FDR dies in Warm Springs, GA, April 12. ER tells press "the story is over." WWII ends. ER divides time between Val-Kill and NYC.

1946 President Truman names ER delegate to General Assembly to organize the UN envisioned by FDR; serves on Committee Three for Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Affairs.

. . . the only woman in the delegation, I was not very welcome.

1947 Chairs UN Human Rights Commission; commission drafts declaration of human rights.

1948 UN General Assembly adopts Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR); delegates give unprecedented standing ovation. ER's proudest achievement.

1949-51 At Val-Kill, French President Auriol decorates ER as Commander of the Order of the Legion of Honor. ER hosts Prime Minister Nehru of India.



Her great accomplishment, at the UN.
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1952-53 Resigns from UN as Dwight Eisenhower is elected president; remains active in American Association of the UN; hosts members at Val-Kill. Visits Middle East and Asia.

1954-56 Urges rapid school integration after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Hosts Yugoslavia's Marshal Tito and Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie. Works to nominate Adlai Stevenson as Democratic candidate for president.

1957-59 Interviews Premier Nikita Khrushchev in Soviet Union for *New York Post*; they differ on disarmament, other issues. Khrushchev visits ER at Val-Kill. ER TV show "Prospects of Mankind" airs social issues until 1962.

1960-61 Democratic nominee John F. Kennedy seeks ER's support. President Kennedy reappoints ER to UN delegation; she chairs President's Commission on Status of Women, hosts organizational meeting at Val-Kill.

1962 Eleanor Roosevelt, 78, dies Nov. 7 in NYC; buried beside FDR in rose garden at

Hyde Park estate. President Kennedy, Vice President Johnson, and former Presidents Eisenhower and Truman attend funeral.

. . . she embodied the vision and the will to achieve a world in which all men walk in peace and dignity. And it was to this goal, a better life, that she gave her tireless energy, the strange strength of her extraordinary personality . . . and kindled hope where none had ever flamed.

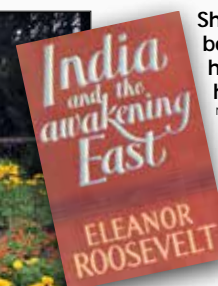
Adlai Stevenson, 1964

1970-75 Roosevelt family sells Val-Kill. In 1975, Hyde Park residents form Val-Kill Cottage Committee to promote preservation of site to honor ER.

1977 Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site made a National Park Service area. Committee forms Eleanor Roosevelt Center at Val-Kill, providing programs that continue her legacy.

1984 Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site dedicated and opened to the public.

She wrote 27 books, many at her Val-Kill home.
NPS



Val-Kill Industries

In 1926, Eleanor and friends Nancy Cook, Marion Dickerman, and Caroline O'Day founded Val-Kill Industries. Conceived as a social experiment, it was designed to provide local farmers and their families with necessary crafting skills to supplement their income. The program taught marketable skills and made a range of furniture and pewter products. Later New Deal programs were based on this model. Eleanor marketed Val-Kill's products.



Craftsmen working at Val-Kill Industries and trademark.
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With British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (left) and students (below).
NPS



Global Diplomacy

When her husband contracted polio and was unable to walk unaided, Eleanor helped FDR get back into public life. She traveled widely, in New York state when he was governor and later across the nation when he was president. She researched and investigated problems needing his executive attention. FDR benefited greatly from her humanitarian and social justice commitments. She faced criticism and threats for her stands on racial justice and other sensitive social issues. She continued this work throughout her life and became one of the most beloved figures of her time.



Serving hot dogs at one of her picnics (left).
NPS



First Lady of the World (right); with Wiltwyck School boys (below left).
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Family Retreat and Home

Val-Kill became a family retreat and later a place to entertain foreign leaders in laid-back American style. In 1936, the Val-Kill factory was redone as Eleanor's home, and that of her secretary Malvina "Tommy" Thompson. It was a place to entertain friends, political associates, and foreign leaders in a relaxed, Roosevelt style. Eleanor wrote many of her 27 books, 2,500 articles, and over 550 columns here. Politicians journeyed here to seek her support and advice.

