

newyork

**Theodore Roosevelt  
Birthplace**

National Historic Site

np

On this site, where he was born and lived until 14 years old, is commemorated the boyhood of the many-sided man who became his country's 26th President. Here, in a 4-story brownstone standing in a now-lost residential setting, Theodore Roosevelt passed some of his most formative years. After bouts with childhood ailments, early passions for nature and books, and the shaping influences of family and travel, he grew into the man whose character, vigorous personality, and momentous deeds made him a dynamic force in American life from his earliest political years to the day of his death.

Theodore Roosevelt was born at 28 East 20th Street, New York City, on October 27, 1858. Four years earlier his father, Theodore, Sr., had brought his Southern bride, Martha Bulloch Roosevelt, to live in the house on 20th Street after their marriage in Georgia. Though the dwelling was neither large nor lavish by the standards of the day, it was adequate for a young couple of moderate means. For the next 18 years it was the family's home, and it was here that the other three Roosevelt children were born: Anna in 1855, Elliott in 1860, and Corinne in 1861.

**A STRUGGLE FOR HEALTH:** Poor health plagued "Teedie"—as the boy was called by the family—almost from the start. One of his earliest recollections was of his father walking up and down the room at night, holding him in his arms. The Roosevelt children spent their summers in the New Jersey highlands or along the Hudson, but the change did little to help the youngster's condition. When he was 12 years old and his health was beginning to improve, his father spurred him along by installing a gymnasium on the porch off the nursery. "You have the mind," his father told him, "but you haven't got the body. To do all you can with your mind, you must make a body to match it." The boy responded by doggedly working out on the apparatus, along with the rest of the neighborhood youngsters. Within a year he improved so much that asthma never again seriously interfered with his activities.

If "Teedie" missed out on the rough-and-tumble of boyhood, he found solace in books and natural history. He learned to read at an early age, and his keen intelligence and surging energy sought a range of outlets. Physically

unable to attend school, he extended his uneven tutoring by wide reading. Heroic tales, science, and biography were his first tastes. By the age of 8, he was a budding naturalist, and by 14 had grasped the main tenets of Darwin. His curiosity left him little time for brooding.

**THE EUROPEAN ADVENTURES:** When Theodore was 10, the Roosevelts went off to Europe for their first Grand Tour. Often homesick, ill, or exhausted, Theodore later remembered the trip with distaste. But for a boy so observant, the experience must have been something more than an ordeal in endurance. Four years later, in 1872-73, the family returned to Europe. For Theodore, equipped now with better health, added years, and new resolve, this trip was more profitable. He found the Continent, Egypt, and Syria as interesting for their birds as for their monuments. His diary revealed a fascination with nature and a talent for description. Altogether, his travels in Europe were a broadening influence that more than offset his lack of systematic schooling before college.

**RECONSTRUCTION OF THE BIRTHPLACE HOUSE:**

When Mrs. Roosevelt and the four children returned to New York in late 1873, they moved into a new home at 6 West 57th Street. The house on 20th Street remained in the Roosevelt family until 1896. As the neighborhood passed from residential to commercial use, the house underwent a series of commercial alterations and was finally demolished in 1910. In 1919, encouraged by Roosevelt's two sisters, the Women's Roosevelt Memorial Association (which merged with the Theodore Roosevelt Association) raised funds to buy the site and reconstruct the house. They also bought the adjoining property, the house of Robert Roosevelt, uncle of Theodore. The father of Theodore Roosevelt, Sr., had originally bought the two houses for his sons.

The house was originally entered by climbing the stoop. On the first floor were a parlor and a library, both opening onto a hall, with a dining room running across the full width of the house at the rear. On the second floor were three bedrooms, and on the third floor, three more. Servants' quarters were located on the fourth floor. A door on the second floor porches connected the two original houses.



"It was furnished," Roosevelt later wrote of the house, "in the canonical taste of the New York which George William Curtis described in the *Potiphar Papers*," a period in which men of substance liked to have their homes reflect the dignity and solidity of their traditions and lives. "The black haircloth furniture in the dining-room scratched the bare legs of the children as they sat on it. The middle room was a library, with tables, chairs, and bookcases of gloomy respectability."

A feature of the house was the arrangement of the yard in back. Both houses had wide porches overlooking their yards and the gardens of the Robert Goelet estate on 19th Street. These provided spacious and airy places for the children to play.

In the reconstructed house five rooms have been restored to their appearance in 1865. The parlor with its high ceiling, magnificent mirrors, crystal chandelier, and blue damask draperies has the characteristic elegance of the period. To the children, this room was "a room of much splendor . . . open for general use only on Sunday evening or on rare occasions when there were parties." The front bedroom, in which Theodore was born in 1858, contains the original furniture and a portrait of his mother. Next to it is the nursery, and beyond that is the open porch which was used as a gymnasium.

**ABOUT YOUR VISIT:** The site can be reached from the 23rd Street exit of the IRT (Lexington Avenue) or BMT Subway. Parking space in the vicinity is scarce. The park is open daily, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., except January 1, Thanksgiving, and December 25.

Visitors will be given a guided tour of the house by a member of the staff. Special arrangements for group visits should be made with the superintendent. For information, call 212-260-1616.

**FOR YOUR SAFETY:** Do not allow your visit to be spoiled by an accident. While every effort has been made to provide for your safety, there are still hazards which require your alertness and vigilance. Exercise common sense and caution.

**ADMINISTRATION:** Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, in cooperation with the Theodore Roosevelt Association. A superintendent, whose address is 26 Wall Street, New York, NY 10005, is in immediate charge of the site.

## THEODORE ROOSEVELT A Chronology

- ☞ 1858 Born October 27 in New York City.
- ☞ 1880 Graduated from Harvard; married Alice Lee, October 27.
- ☞ 1882-84 Member, New York State Assembly.
- ☞ 1884 Death of Alice Lee Roosevelt, February 14.
- ☞ 1884-86 Rancher in Dakota Territory.
- ☞ 1885-89 Published six volumes of travel and history, including *The Winning of the West*
- ☞ 1886 Unsuccessful Republican candidate for mayor of New York; married Edith Kermit Carow, December 2
- ☞ 1889-95 Member, U.S. Civil Service Commission.
- ☞ 1895-97 President, New York Police Board.
- ☞ 1897-98 Assistant Secretary of the Navy.
- ☞ 1898 Organized Rough Riders.
- ☞ 1899-1901 Governor of New York.
- ☞ 1901 Vice President of the United States.
- ☞ 1901-9 President of the United States.
- ☞ 1903 Alaska boundary dispute with Great Britain settled.
- ☞ 1904 Construction of Panama Canal began.
- ☞ 1905 Brought Russia and Japan to the peace table at Portsmouth, N.H.
- ☞ 1907-9 Sent the U.S. Navy around the world in a demonstration of preparedness.
- ☞ 1909-10 Hunted big game in Africa.
- ☞ 1910 Received in Oslo Nobel Peace Prize which had been awarded him in 1906.
- ☞ 1910-14 Contributing editor for *The Outlook*
- ☞ 1912 Unsuccessful Progressive Party candidate for President
- ☞ 1913-14 Explored "River of Doubt" in jungles of Brazil.
- ☞ 1917 Offered to raise and lead a division of troops in France; offer declined.
- ☞ 1919 Died peacefully at Sagamore Hill, January 6.



As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. Administration.

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