

Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Historic Site
New York



NPS / MARK MUSE

“Nothing . . . can take the place of family life”

—Theodore Roosevelt at Pacific Theological Seminary, 1911

Theodore Roosevelt—champion of the “strenuous life,” larger-than-life hero to millions of Americans, and 26th president of the United States—was born on October 27, 1858, in the original four-story, brownstone townhouse on this site.



NPS

“Teedie,” as he was known to his family, spent the first 14 years of his life in this house. He was a frail and sickly child, who suffered from severe asthma and other ailments. Physically unable to attend school on a regular basis, Theodore (*seen left at age four*) received some tutoring but gained his education primarily on his own by extensive reading. He devoured books on nature, adventure, and history. He learned taxidermy and started

what he called the “Roosevelt Museum of Natural History” in his room.

All four of the Roosevelt children—Theodore, Elliott, Anna, and Corinne—were born in the house the family occupied until the fall of 1872. When he was 10, Theodore accompanied his family to Europe, which proved a major ordeal for him because of illness and homesickness. Two years later, as Theodore’s health began to improve, his father gave him a warning and a challenge. “You have the mind,” he said, “but you haven’t got the body. To do all you can with your mind, you must make your

body match it.” Theodore vowed to improve his health. To help him his father installed gymnasium equipment on the second-floor porch. Here young Theodore, along with many neighborhood youngsters, exercised daily. By the time the family made a second trip to Europe in 1872–73, his health problems no longer interfered with his activities.

After returning from Europe in 1873, the Roosevelts settled into a new home at 6 West 57th Street. The birthplace house remained in the Roosevelt family until 1896. Gradually, however, as the surrounding neighborhood passed from residential to commercial, the house underwent a series of transformations that obliterated its original character. Reconstructed in 1920–23, it was donated to the National Park Service in 1962. The first floor contains the restored parlor, library, and dining room, and a museum gallery. The second floor consists of a re-furnished bedroom approximating the one in which Roosevelt was born, the nursery, porch on which Roosevelt’s father installed the gymnasium equipment, library, and study. The ground floor has a large exhibit tracing Roosevelt’s career.

View of New York in 1855 showing the neighborhood in which TR grew up; his home is off the picture in the center foreground. His grandfather Cornelius lived in the house just above the large tree at the end of the park. J. CLARENCE DAVIES COLLECTION, MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK.



The Man and the House



Roosevelt’s interest in natural science resulted in a collection of insects and stuffed birds he called the “Roosevelt Musum of Natural History.”



The bullet holes in Roosevelt’s glasses case, shirt, and speech are grim reminders of an attempt to assassinate him in Milwaukee in 1912.



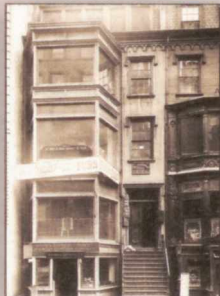
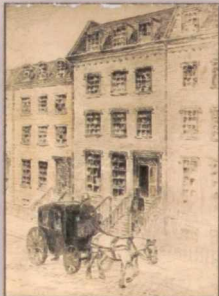
Uniform and equipment worn by Theodore Roosevelt as colonel of the Rough Riders in the Spanish-American War.

Passages in an Active Life

- 1858** Born October 27 at 28 East 20th Street
- 1880** Graduates from Harvard; marries Alice Hathaway Lee
- 1882–1884** Member, New York State Assembly
- 1882** Publishes *Naval War of 1812*, first of many books on history, nature, travel, and public affairs
- 1884** Alice Lee dies February 14
- 1884–1886** Cattle rancher in Dakota Territory
- 1886** Unsuccessful candidate for mayor of New York; marries Edith Carow on December 2
- 1889–1895** Member, U.S. Civil Service Commission
- 1895–1897** President, New York City Board of Police Commissioners
- 1897–1898** Assistant secretary of the Navy



- 1898** Organizes Rough Riders
- 1898–1901** Governor of New York State
- 1900** Elected U.S. vice president; becomes president September 14, 1901, upon death of William McKinley
- 1902** Enforces antitrust laws; begins vigorous conservation program
- 1904** Elected U.S. president
- 1905** Mediates Russo-Japanese peace treaty; awarded Nobel Peace Prize
- 1907** Sends U.S. Navy on voyage around the world
- 1909** Ends presidential term; embarks on safari
- 1912** Runs for president on Progressive Party ticket; survives assassination attempt while campaigning in Milwaukee
- 1913** Leaves for South America
- 1919** Dies January 6 at Sagamore Hill



Far left and middle: Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace as it appeared in the 1860s and 1896. Left: The commercial building that replaced the birthplace house in 1916. Below: A large lion shot by Theodore Roosevelt in Africa dominates the Lion Room.

The Birthplace House

The Roosevelt home at 28 East 20th Street was a typical New York brownstone located on what was a quiet tree-lined street in New York’s most fashionable residential district. The family lived there until 1872 when Theodore Jr. was 14. Eventually the house was taken over for business purposes. In 1916 it was completely demolished to make way for a two-story commercial building.

After TR’s death in 1919 prominent citizens decided to purchase the site, raze the commercial building, and reconstruct Roosevelt’s boyhood home as a memorial. The reconstructed birthplace was opened to the public in 1923. In 1963 the Theo-

dore Roosevelt Association donated the site to the National Park Service.

Rooms of the house have been restored to reflect their appearance between 1865 and 1872. Most of the furnishings are from the original house or were provided by family members. Color schemes, layouts, and other room details were provided by TR’s sisters and his wife.



TR’s parents’ bedroom.

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Planning your visit

Period rooms can only be seen by park ranger-guided tours. Each tour is limited to 15 people and lasts approximately 30 minutes. Latecomers will be asked to join a later tour. Groups of 10 or more need to call (212) 260-1616 to book a group visit. Visitors may also visit the ground floor gallery which contains hundreds of original items from Roosevelt’s colorful life. Service animals are welcome.

More Information

Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace
National Historic Site
28 East 20th Street, New York, NY 10005
212-260-1616
www.nps.gov/thrb

See the park website for laws and policies regarding firearms in national parks.

Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks, visit www.nps.gov.

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Subway Lexington Avenue #6 subway trains stop at the East 23rd Street station on Park Avenue South. Express #4 and #5 subways stop at Union Square. R subway trains stop at the East 23rd Street station on Broadway; frequent service is provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

