



First Ladies For Their Hospitality



by Ruth Sawin

THE president's New York home in 1789 with Martha Washington as official hostess, the White House today with Eleanor Roosevelt presiding—

One hundred and forty nine years separate the reigns of these two women as "first ladies" and "first homemakers" of the United States, but their views on the art of entertaining and making guests feel at home are indeed similar. They offer examples in hospitality which any homemaker would like to follow.

"Making everything as agreeable as possible for everybody" was Lady Washington's first thought. "Make the guests feel that their mere presence gives you pleasure," is Mrs. Roosevelt's motto.

While the Washingtons were at Mount Vernon, both before and after the war, a day seldom passed without the company of friends or strangers at the house.

One writer says, "The pursuits of the Washingtons were those of a retired farmer's family, but they were not excluded from social contact with persons of intelligence and refinement. Eminent men of the government (always from the higher ranks of English society) who lived in a style of magnificence which has long since passed away, were frequent visitors. The Washingtons visited at Annapolis, and at Mount Vernon they returned the civilities received, and practiced on a large and generous scale, the hospitality for which the southern planters have ever been distinguished."

Usually guests arriving for a short visit stayed for dinner and many times all night. Mrs. Washington's hospitality was often taxed to the limit to provide accommodations for them all. Even the attic was furnished to house the overflow of guests.

After the revolution, the number of guests at Mount Vernon increased to such an extent that Washington said of his home, "It is little better than a well-resorted inn."

While at Mount Vernon, guests always assembled in the drawing room every morning at eleven, where Mrs. Washington greeted them with formality. They remained until the clock struck twelve, when she would arise and ascend to her chamber, returning

precisely at one, followed by a servant carrying an immense bowl of punch, which she had prepared herself, from which all guests would partake before dinner.

Washington expressed the sentiment of himself and his wife about their frequent guests and many entertainments when he wrote: "My manner of living is plain, and I do not mean to be put out by it. A glass of wine and a bit of mutton are always ready, and such as will be content to partake of them are always welcome. Those who expect more will be disappointed."

While the family was living in New York, during Washington's presidency, it was found necessary for Mrs. Washington to establish rules for receiving visitors and entertaining company. Every Friday between 7 and 9 two rooms of the home were opened to receive anyone who chose to call. At these affairs Mrs. Washington presided with dignified ease and graciousness toward all the callers making them feel at home.

When the present "first lady," Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, entertains, she expresses true hospitality by making the guest feel that what he wants to do is the thing that everyone else wishes to do. No guest is really comfortable, she believes, if he feels that any great effort is being made to entertain and therefore no matter what is done, it must be done in a casual manner.

"If people feel that you are making a tremendous effort and doing anything out of the ordinary for them, they will of necessity feel a little embarrassed; but if they feel that their mere presence gives one pleasure, and that nothing matters as much as the pleasure of seeing them, then whatever may be lacking in the physical surroundings will make very little difference."

Mrs. Roosevelt believes like Mrs. Washington that dignity and informality can be well-blended.

Certain dignified forms of entertainment are good if not too formal.

The form alone, however, is not important. It is what it stands for in work and in service which is, after all, the important thing, and the thing to remember is that the basis of all society is kindness and consideration for others.



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