

The President's Wife and the Librarian



*The
President's Wife
and the
Librarian*

LETTERS AT AN EXHIBITION

APRIL 2, 2009–DECEMBER 31, 2009

THE ASSUNTA, IGNAZIO, ADA & ROMANO
PELUSO EXHIBITION GALLERY

MARK BARTLETT
SYLVIA JUKES MORRIS
HARRIET SHAPIRO
WALLACE FINLEY DAILEY

THE NEW YORK SOCIETY LIBRARY

Introduction

MARK BARTLETT, HEAD LIBRARIAN

In 1980 Alice Gore King donated 588 letters to the Houghton Library at Harvard University. They were written between 1920 and 1947 by Edith Kermit Roosevelt, the wife of Theodore Roosevelt, to Miss King's mother, Marion King, for almost fifty years a staff member of the New York Society Library. The correspondence documents the little-known friendship between the President's wife and the Librarian. Mrs. King saved Mrs. Roosevelt's letters but Mrs. Roosevelt destroyed most of those from Mrs. King before her death in 1948. Only four survive. The Roosevelt-King letters in the Theodore Roosevelt Collection at Harvard, as well as charging cards from this Library's archives, offer a unique view of Mrs. Roosevelt's literary tastes and opinions. *The President's Wife and the Librarian* (April-December 2009) marks the first time the Roosevelt-King friendship and the accompanying letters have been the subject of an exhibition.

Mrs. King's friendship with Mrs. Roosevelt was a quintessential example of the relationship that exists today between staff and members. *The President's Wife and the Librarian* is a story about the Society Library, but it is also a story of New York City in a time now thought of with nostalgia. It is a piece of the reading history of America, seen through the bookish life of the President's wife.

This exhibition catalog includes three essays, "Edith Kermit Roosevelt: A Biographical Essay" by Sylvia Jukes Morris, "*The President's Wife and the Librarian: Letters at an Exhibition*" by Harriet Shapiro, and "A Note on Edith Roosevelt's Papers at Harvard University" by Wallace Finley Dailey. British-born Sylvia Jukes Morris is the author of *Edith Kermit Roosevelt: Portrait of a First Lady* and *Rage for Fame: The Ascent of Clare Boothe Luce*. Harriet Shapiro is the curator of *The President's Wife and the Librarian*. Wallace Finley Dailey is the curator of the Theodore Roosevelt Collection at the Harvard College Library.

OPPOSITE
*Edith Roosevelt's
New York
Society Library
charging card,
December 30, 1942-
February 10, 1943.*

We wish to express our gratitude to Theodore and Constance Rogers Roosevelt, Helen D. Roosevelt, Mary Kongsgaard and Richard Williams for their generous support in helping to make this exhibition possible. Additionally, our thanks go to Jeannette Watson Sanger, Chair of the Lecture and Exhibition Committee; John and Rita DePasquale;

Name		70
Roosevelt, Edith K.		
Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt Sr.		
Address		Sagamore Hill, Oyster Bay, L. I.
LENT		RET'D
30 Dec '42	Fourth Mystery Book	5 Jan '43
	Helm - Angel Mo and her Son	5 Jan '43
5 Jan '43	Keight - Call for the Seal	13 Jan '43
	U. P. Ball - Where Cost I Do	13 Jan '43
	Wade - French Parkman	13 Jan '43
	Denton - The One Window Th	13 Jan '43
	Davis - Stella	13 Jan '43
13 Jan '43	Triffle - Don Robert	20 Jan '43
	Cather - Shadows on the Rock	20 Jan '43
	Diderot - Jeanne	25 Feb '43
	Wolfe - The Room	20 Jan '43
20 Jan '43	Carberry - Puppy World	11 Feb '43
	Hull - Automobiles Come	11 Feb '43
	Spencer - Nabobs	11 Feb '43
	Connors - Joan's Fall	11 Feb '43
	Cole - Berkshire Mts.	11 Feb '43
27 Jan '43	Market - Another Day	FEB 2 - 1943
	Thirkell - Marling	FEB 2 - 1943
	Walling - Corpse Whore	FEB 2 - 1943
	Almer - Country Mood	FEB 2 - 1943
FEB 3 - 1943	Walling - Corpse Grump	FEB 2 - 1943
	Seileth - 7, who's wanted	17 Feb '43
	Spencer - Shakespeare	17 Feb '43
	Gray - Madue Civil War	17 Feb '43
10 Feb '43	Ches - Peril at Sky	17 Feb '43
	Crane - Yellow Under	17 Feb '43

Mark J. Koziol and Charles Markis, Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, National Parks Service; Marie Kutch, Theodore Roosevelt Association; Katherine Hansen, Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site. Finally, we are proud to present this exhibition in the Assunta, Ignazio, Ada and Romano Peluso Exhibition Gallery.

Enjoy your visit to the world of *The President's Wife and the Librarian*.



Edith Kermit Roosevelt

A Biographical Essay

SYLVIA JUKES MORRIS

One day in the mid-1860s, a New York neighbor of Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt saw two young children sitting side by side on the steps of the family's brownstone at 28 East 20th Street, just off Broadway. One was the oldest son of the household, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., aged about eight, and known to his familiars as "Teedie." Though slight and frail-looking, he was concentrating intently on his companion, a girl of about five with chestnut hair and blue eyes. She was wearing a white dress and looked serious beyond her years, as she read aloud from a book. Her name was Edith Kermit Carow, but she was sometimes teasingly called "Spotless Edie," on account of her neat appearance and meticulous habits.

Edith lived a few blocks away on Livingston Place, near 14th Street, and had met Teedie while playing in Union Square. Martha Roosevelt noticed the growing closeness between them, so she invited the girl to join Teedie and his two younger siblings, Corinne and Elliot, for kindergarten lessons in the second-floor nursery.

Their teacher was Mrs. Roosevelt's sister Anna Bulloch, a diehard Southerner with an inexhaustible fund of Br'er Rabbit stories. For her pupils' more formal tuition, she used the respected McGuffey Readers, designed "to impart valuable information and to exert a decided and healthful moral influence" on young American minds. She also included in the curriculum the popular magazine *Our Young Folks*, which introduced her charges to such classics as Louisa M. Alcott's *Little Women*, along with other tales stressing morality and the virtue of good conduct.

A love of reading inculcated in the Roosevelt schoolroom stayed with Edith. Well into old age, she could recite reams of verses by Longfellow, Tennyson, Browning and Shakespeare. The last was her favorite, and she said that if *As You Like It* was ever lost, she would be able to "write it out" word for word. She seldom traveled without a copy of Shakespeare and once, while waiting for a carriage, she was seen sitting on a pile of luggage reading *King John*.

British-born biographer Sylvia Jukes Morris is the author of *Edith Kermit Roosevelt: Portrait of a First Lady* and *Rage for Fame: The Ascent of Clare Boothe Luce*.

OPPOSITE
Edith Roosevelt reading to Archie and Quentin at the White House, 1904.

Although Edith bonded quickly as a child with the sickly, shortsighted and studious Teedie, she was, with most people, shy and somewhat remote. A classmate would say that “she always seemed deeply detached from the external accidents of life... her warmth and passion lay far beneath the surface.” Yet she also displayed “a great strength of character and ineluctable willpower.”

Edith’s coolness was self-protective, partly caused by the strained circumstances of the Carow household. Her father, Charles, had inherited a thriving shipping business from his father, Isaac Carow (an early shareholder of the New York Society Library) but profits had declined during the Civil War, and Charles had taken to drink. By 1867, when Edith was six, 50,000 New Yorkers were out of work, her father among them. Gertrude Tyler, her neurasthenic mother, was forced to turn to her own family for support.

There was, however, enough money for ten-year-old Edith to go to Miss Comstock’s School, a prestigious private academy on West 40th Street. In addition to the basics, the girls studied zoology, botany, physiology, etymology, philosophy, music, Latin, German and French. Perhaps due to her Huguenot ancestry, Edith became fluent enough in the last language to pepper her letters and conversation with Gallic phrases. But her best subject was English literature, and she soon became an accomplished amateur poet. Her adolescent themes, more complex than average, included despair, regret and loss, reflecting early experiences, and pessimistically anticipating later ones:

*Soon these helpless tiny fingers
By life’s thorns will wounded be
Holding close the cruel roses
Plucked from life’s deceptive tree.*

In the fall of 1876, when Edith was fifteen, Theodore entered Harvard, and her relationship with him changed dramatically. At the end of his first semester, he returned to New York for Christmas, and took Edith to a party. After supper, Corinne found them in a dimly-lit room having a “cozy chat.” They were beginning to look like a romantic couple. Then, in January, Theodore wrote home to say that he had met a girl in Boston who “looked quite like Edith—only not quite as pretty as her Ladyship: who when she dresses well and do’n’t [sic] frizzle her hair is a very pretty girl.” Enamored of him, and aware that he was encountering many eligible young women in Massachusetts, Edith wrote a metaphorical poem:

*I have many noble castles
In the air
Buttress, battlements and turrets
Showing fair
Clear defined each age-dark story
'Gainst a rosy sunset glory
Pure and rare.*

*To my castles none may enter
But the few
Holding to my inmost feelings
Love's own clue
They may wander there at will
Ever welcome finding still,
Warm and true.*

*Only one, one tiny room
Locked they find,
One thin curtain that they ne'er
Gaze behind
There my lost ambitions sleep,
To their tear-wet slumber deep
Long consigned.*

*This my lonely sanctum is;
There I go
When my heart all worn by grief
Sinketh low
Where my baseless hopes do lie
There to find my peace, go I,
Sad and slow.*

The sentiments expressed here by Edith are astonishingly similar to those of her distant cousin, the novelist Edith Wharton, writing seventeen years later, in a short story entitled "*The Fullness of Life*."

A woman's nature is like a great house full of rooms: there is the hall through which everyone passes ... the drawing room where one receives formal visits; the sitting room, where the members of the family come and go... but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned ... and in the innermost room, the holy of holies, the soul sits alone and waits for a footstep that never comes.

Mrs. Wharton achieved romantic and sexual fulfillment only in middle age. Edith Carow knew from childhood that her lifetime love would be Theodore Roosevelt, the one person admitted to her “lonely sanctum.” But his venture across her threshold would not be without missteps.

After hosting a party for Edith in Cambridge in the spring of 1877, Theodore wrote home to say that she had behaved “as sweetly as she looked,” and that his male friends had admired her “intensely.” A year later, when he entertained her again at the Roosevelt summer home in Oyster Bay, his mood had grown somber. His much loved and revered father had died some months earlier, and Theodore, at nineteen, was missing him badly. He sought Edith’s companionship more than ever, taking her sailing, rowing and driving. But then, for reasons they never fully explained, the tranquil days were made stormy by a quarrel. It led, TR said later, to a break in their “intimate relations.” Both of them “had tempers that were far from being of the best.”

According to Edith in later life, Theodore proposed marriage to her more than once during his first two years at Harvard, but her maternal grandfather thought her too young. Corinne said that Theodore Senior had also discouraged the match, because he feared the long-term consequences of Charles Carow’s alcoholism. Edith simply said that her erstwhile suitor had “not been nice.”

That fall, Theodore turned twenty, and the name of Alice Hathaway Lee, a beautiful, blonde Bostonian, appeared with increasing frequency in his diary. Yet he still sent his love to Edith via Corinne—“if she’s in a good humor: otherwise my respectful regards...I hope when I see her at Christmas it will not be on what you might call one of her off days.” During a subsequent weekend of tennis and strolling with Alice, he suddenly decided to woo her. When he wrote a note to congratulate Edith on winning *The World* literary competition, it was from the Lee house on Chestnut Hill in Brookline.

Sensing that Theodore had drifted away, yet sure that she would regain him in time, Edith earned the reputation in New York social circles of having “an utter lack of susceptibility.” As had become her custom when thwarted or depressed, she took solace in books. Her reading list that winter included lives of Blake, Coleridge and Southey, besides fiction by Dickens, Thackeray and Henry James.

On August 6, 1879, Edith received a copy of *Lucile*, a long poem by Owen Meredith, inscribed “To Edith K. Carow on her eighteenth birthday, from her sincere friend Theodore Roosevelt.” In New York briefly that fall, he called on her and, as always, they talked of literature. Afterwards, he declared her “the most cultivated, best read girl I know.” He seemed to be vacillating between “sweet, pretty” Alice and his erudite, companionable old friend.

But not for long. On January 25, 1880, TR proposed marriage to Alice Lee. She accepted, and Edith Carow added a new title to her reading list: *Splendid Misery*. Yet at Theodore’s wedding reception on October 27—his 22nd birthday—she defiantly “danced the soles off her shoes.” As she later told a granddaughter: “I knew that someday, somehow I would marry Theodore Roosevelt.”

And wed him she did, on December 2, 1886. Alice had died tragically young, of Bright’s disease, almost three years before, having just given birth to a daughter and namesake. After a honeymoon in Europe, Theodore, Edith and her little stepdaughter Alice moved into Sagamore Hill, a three-storied gabled structure with twenty-two rooms that Theodore had built in Oyster Bay, Long Island. There, in September 1887, they had their first child, “Ted,” who was followed at intervals over the next ten years by Kermit, Ethel, Archibald and Quentin.

During that period TR held numerous positions: Civil Service Commissioner, New York City Police Commissioner, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Lieutenant-Colonel of the Rough Riders regiment in the Spanish-American War, Governor of New York State, and then Vice-President of the United States. Finally, in September 1901, the assassination of William McKinley catapulted him into the presidency.

Notwithstanding her innate reticence, Edith would play her role as First Lady superbly. But first the Executive Mansion, as it was then called, had to be made habitable and equipped for elaborate social functions. A fire in an earlier administration had caused the executive offices to encroach on the upstairs living quarters, cutting the number of bedrooms. To accommodate a family of eight and occasional overnight guests meant a drastic change.



Congress obliged with an appropriation of over half a million dollars, to restore the renamed White House to its original classical simplicity. Edith asked the architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White to make renovation plans, and busied herself in every detail. The new West Wing offices were connected to the house proper by Thomas Jefferson's original colonnade, which in the Victorian era had been swallowed up by a huge greenhouse. Above the East Room, two extra suites with adjoining baths replaced the President's old study and secretarial offices. A grand stairway was installed, the size of the State Dining Room was increased, and a First Ladies' Portrait Gallery was carved out of the basement that hitherto had housed pipes and ducts.

Most of the construction took place during the summer and early fall of 1902, while the Roosevelts were at Sagamore Hill. But Edith kept in constant touch with the architects. When McKim submitted an unsuitable design for her desk, she insisted it be made to match rosewood furniture already in place. Always thrifty, she ordered that drapes taken from the formal rooms be used to re-cover furniture in the family quarters. Since no complete set of executive china existed, Edith ordered 1,320 pieces (120 place settings) of creamy English Wedgwood decorated with a two-inch wide Colonial motif. She then collected surviving crockery from some twenty-five other administrations and displayed the best in cabinets on the ground floor.

Determined that future occupants should not be cavalier about national heirlooms, Edith made an inventory of the entire contents of the White House. From then on presidents were not allowed to dispose of its historic objects by the wagon load, as Chester Arthur had done.

When the family returned in October, they found the building's Victorian accretions mostly gone. The main corridor was no longer cut off from the entry vestibule by a Tiffany screen. The East Room had been shorn of its floral carpet, stuffed circular sofa, and bulbous chandeliers. Reinstalled were American Federal and French Empire-style pieces used by the earliest occupants.

The enlarged State Dining Room now seated a hundred, and the East Room became the scene of elegant entertainments, all paid for out of Theodore's salary. As passionate about music as literature, Edith Roosevelt initiated a series of evening musicales to be performed there during the winter season. Among the performers were the opera diva Nellie Melba, the pianists Ignace Jan Paderewski, Josef Hofmann and Ferruccio Busoni, the Vienna Male Voice Choir, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and a young Spanish cellist, Pablo Casals, who would return almost fifty-eight years later to play for the John F. Kennedys.

The Roosevelts quit Washington in March, 1909, leaving behind many bereft friends, among them Henry Adams, the historian and descendant of presidents. Edith had

OPPOSITE

The "goddess" photo taken in 1900 was TR's favorite portrait of his wife.

visited him regularly in his large, red brick Henry Richardson house on Lafayette Square. He could not bring himself to say farewell. "Is it not enough that I should have to look out of my window every moment," he wrote her, "and that, whenever my eye falls on the White House the thought that you are not there should depress me without having also to assume an air of cheerfulness and go to bid you goodbye as though we both like it?"

Quiet, enigmatic and self-effacing though Edith had been, the staff also felt a void after her departure. She was "a sort of luminiferous ether, pervading everybody and everything," said TR's chief aide. In seven and a half years as First Lady, "she never made a mistake."

Husband and wife were apart for long periods—in one case, over a year—during the decade 1909–1919. TR led a marathon scientific safari through East Africa, and spent seven months lecturing and exploring in South America. In between, he ran unsuccessfully as a Progressive in the 1912 presidential campaign, and was almost killed by a would-be assassin. Tropical fevers and the wear and tear of his strenuous life aged him rapidly. His heart had never been strong after struggling against chronic asthma in childhood and youth. A Harvard physician had warned him to be more sedentary. But Theodore would have none of it. "Doctor," he said, "if I've got to live the sort of life you have described, I don't care how short it is." Later, he added that he intended to "spend and be spent" until he reached sixty, no matter the consequences. This he did, dying in his sleep at Sagamore Hill on January 6, 1919.

"She is not only cultured but scholarly," TR once said proudly of Edith Kermit Roosevelt. Acknowledging her astuteness, he said that he ignored her advice at his peril. "The person who had the long head in politics was mother," their daughter Ethel remarked. A White House valet observed that the First Lady was a shrewder judge of people than her husband. Mark Sullivan, the editor of *Collier's Weekly*, wrote that in the opinion of many, Mrs. Roosevelt was "greater among women than her husband among men."

Memories of such compliments did little to mitigate Edith's loneliness in widowhood. After her youngest son died in World War I and her other children married, she looked increasingly to books for intellectual sustenance. A New Yorker bred, if not born, and an omnivorous reader, she found her New York Society Library membership helped to fill a diminished life.

Edith always felt that not having a university education had deprived her of a deeper understanding of the world and its cultures. She therefore tried to compensate with prodigious and wide reading. During the day and on most evenings, she sat with a pile of books and literary magazines, either in the great North Room at Sagamore Hill, or in her own cozier sitting-room.

The latter was furnished with button-back sofas, two armchairs, a polar bear rug and shelves housing works of some of her favorite authors, many of them French. It had been her good fortune to be able to employ servants all her life. Having a full-time housekeeper, cook, personal and parlor maids, gardeners and a chauffeur freed her from most domestic chores. She used the bonus hours to satisfy her unquenchable thirst for knowledge and wisdom, and to write letters to friends and congenial relatives.

In 1920, she began a bookish correspondence with the New York Society Library's Marion King, which would continue for over twenty-five years. Some 600 letters from the former First Lady to Mrs. King in the Theodore Roosevelt Collection at Harvard University reveal Edith to have been a strongly opinionated reader, just as her weekly package of books—sometimes as many as nine—show her catholicity of taste. At various times she asked to be sent Byron's letters, Racine's essays, Willa Cather's novels ("a great rock in a weary waste of twaddle") and some "sexless" Agatha Christie mysteries that she called "nightcaps." On other occasions, she ordered a tome on French cathedrals, biographies of Lincoln, Voltaire, and the autobiography of the opera basso Chaliapin, along with the poetry of John Clare, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Edna St. Vincent Millay. She also re-read Joseph Conrad's *Almayer's Folly*, and reported that it was "even more wonderful than I remembered." Accounts of Freya Stark's exploratory journeys and Gertrude Bell's Iraq travels enabled her to hold her own in discussions of Middle Eastern culture and politics with her grandson Archie, an Arabist who spoke sixteen languages.

Literary gossip occasionally made its way into the letters. "The Elinor Wylie thing was shocking! If you had known her [the American poet and novelist] from the beginning of her career as I did!" After finishing a life of Coleridge, Edith expressed disappointment with the characters in it, as if she had actually known them. "What dreadful people those Lake poets were. So selfish!" She had met A. A. Milne, the author of *Winnie the Pooh*, and found him a "quiet mousey little person—not a man—who whispers in your ear about Christopher Robin... Not a ray of social talent & an unattractive wife."

Edith diverted herself with foreign excursions in the winter months of her late years. "I have salt water around my heart," she wrote, quoting an old Breton saying. On lengthy

sea voyages she re-read all of Shakespeare's comedies, Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*, biographies of Calvin and Cervantes, and a volume on the art of Goya. As an octogenarian she turned more frequently to her own collection and finished, for the umpteenth time, the six novels of Jane Austen.

Although Edith always signed letters with her full name, or the initials EKR, she began addressing Mrs. King as "Marion" as time went by, asking about her daughter, and even advising her on how to deal with exhaustion. "Spend some Sundays in bed with your door closed ... nothing in particular to eat. No books or letters or papers. All my life this has been the best medicine... *'Peace, happiness & repose / Shut the door on the doctor's nose.'*"

Gas rationing in World War II cramped Edith's movements. She had to cut back on motor trips to Connecticut, where she was born, and especially to "Mortlake," a white clapboard house in the state that she had bought. It once belonged to her Tyler ancestors. The deaths of Ted of a heart attack after the D-Day landings in Normandy, and of Kermit, an alcoholic suicide, while on military service in the Aleutian Islands, curbed her favorite pastime. "I cannot read much now—so much to think over." Besides, "My eyes are not what they were at twenty."

OPPOSITE
Edith Roosevelt's
parlor at
Sagamore Hill.

Before Kermit's demise, Edith had collaborated with him on writing two books. One, about her ancestors, was called *American Backlogs*. The other, recording family travels, was entitled *Cleared For Strange Ports*. She took the title from a phrase in her passport, and in the first chapter, "The Odyssey of a Grandmother," she wrote:

Women who marry pass their best and happiest years in giving life and fostering it, meeting and facing the problems of the next generation and helping the universe to move, and those born with the wanderfoot are sometimes a bit irked by the weight of the always beloved shackles. Then the birds fly, the nest is empty, and at the feet of the knitters in the sun lies the wide world.

It was predictable of her to scatter phrases from Shakespeare, such as "knitters in the sun" from *Twelfth Night*. They were seared in her brain. Her most precious possession was a leather-bound set of the Bard's works, a gift from Theodore. When the three volumes fell apart from heavy use, she had them rebound.

Edith Kermit Roosevelt died on September 30, 1948, at the age of 87. Born in 1861, during Lincoln's first term, she saw Harry Truman campaign for his second. Thorough



in death, as in life, she left instructions for her funeral. "Simplest coffin possible. If the church has no pall, cover with one of my crepe shawls. Nothing on coffin but bunch of pink and blue flowers from my children. Processional Hymn No 85 'The Son of God.' *Not* slow tempo. Recessional Hymn No 226 'Love Divine.' The anthem from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Do not take off my wedding ring and please no embalming."

One of Edith's favorite poems was the Canto "Death" by Walter Savage Landor. Four lines from it could well serve as her own epitaph.

*I strove with none, for none was worth my strife;
Nature I loved, and, next to Nature, Art;
I warmed both hands before the fire of Life;
It sinks, and I am ready to depart.*



Hallett & Co. Boston
1911

The President's Wife and the Librarian

Letters at an Exhibition

HARRIET SHAPIRO

On March 4, 1909 after eight years in the White House, the Theodore Roosevelts returned to Sagamore Hill, their house in Oyster Bay. Edith Kermit Roosevelt now had time to resume her visits to the New York Society Library where she had long been a member. Watching her arrival at 109 University Place was the young staff member Marion Morrison King. She recalled that Mrs. Roosevelt climbed the stairs to the main hall with baskets of flowers in her arms for the staff and left a few minutes later with the same baskets now filled with books. Writing of that moment nearly fifty years later in her memoir, *Books and People*, Marion Morrison King could still hear the sound of “her high heels clicking down the long stairs.”

In time the president's wife and the librarian would begin a correspondence that lasted from 1920 to 1947. Five hundred and eighty-eight letters preserved in the Houghton Library at Harvard University document their literary friendship. Mrs. King saved Mrs. Roosevelt's letters. Mrs. Roosevelt destroyed much of her private correspondence, including nearly all of Mrs. King's letters. A passion for books, a code of behavior imposed by shared values of upbringing and class and a strong sense of social discretion created a unique bond between the two, broken only by Mrs. Roosevelt's death in 1948. “Hers was an accomplished mind,” Mrs. King wrote of her friend, “and her discriminating judgment made her pronouncements on books of great value to us through all the years of her long life.”

Marion King describes the years before the First World War as idyllic. Women had yet to bob their hair and the telephone was a recent invention. Horses and wagons, carriages and bicycles still filled the streets. Library members could be seen driving past 109 University Place in their carriages, aged Mrs. John Jay wrapped in an India shawl in her old-fashioned landau, Miss Grace Wilkes with her fat coachman, and Miss Adele Colgate in a runabout driving her own dancing bays. This was the world preserved in amber from her childhood that Edith Roosevelt, wife of the twenty-sixth president of

Harriet Shapiro, an editor and translator, is Head of Exhibitions at the New York Society Library.

OPPOSITE
*Edith and
Theodore
Roosevelt
in 1916.*

the United States returned to. As one observer wrote, “it is hard to believe the calm and dignity of the time.”

In Marion King’s words, Mrs. Roosevelt used the New York Society Library “with unfailing constancy.” The Roosevelt children were also readers and Mrs. Roosevelt gave them and other family members Library subscriptions. The going rate in 1909 was \$10 a year. In a note Mrs. Roosevelt wrote to Mrs. King in 1927 she threatened not to subscribe any more for her family. “If they have not sense enough to appreciate how many ten dollars the Library means, just let them learn. I wonder why the book shops of N.Y. don’t unite and suppress you.”

*The Library in the
good old days: Pink
silk stockings*

Mrs. Roosevelt had visited the Library since childhood. “Edie” Carow, who spent her early years near Union Square in downtown Manhattan, was a serious reader. It was her father, Charles Carow, a shareholder, who introduced his little daughter to the building—the long entrance hall paved with colored mosaic tiles, the ladies’ reading room, a conversation room, the main reading room and upstairs the library. Two galleries high, it had an oblong dome-shaped roof and a not-very-clean skylight which filtered light down onto the large wooden tables piled with books and papers. On dark days a row of dim electric bulbs lit the gloomy space but no more effectively than brackets of gas jet fixtures from the earlier days still attached to the dark brown walls. To get warm in the drafty space, Morrison, her floor-length skirt billowing out, would stand over one of the four registers on the floor.

Marion Morrison had been at the New York Society Library for two years when she first met Edith Roosevelt. She was twenty one years old at the time and had attended The Normal College (now Hunter College) and taken a short course at Teachers College Library. Her annual salary was \$540; her title was desk assistant. She was already showing signs of the gifted researcher she was to become but was yet to emerge as the woman described some years later as “*the Library*.” In her memoirs, Morrison writes of calling home on the Library’s primitive office telephone to ask that clothes for an unexpected evening party be delivered to University Place. For the rest of the afternoon, Wentworth Sanborn Butler, the Librarian Emeritus, was heard in the venerable Library halls muttering “pink silk stockings.”

Among the members Morrison served was Frederick Gore King, a retired banker and widower with grown children. King, who was thirty-seven years older than Morrison, was a member of an old American family. He was the great-grandson of Rufus King, appointed by George Washington as Minister to England. Marion had distinguished ancestors too, including the suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Eli

Yale, an early benefactor of the university named after him. During their courtship, Morrison and King took walks together in Van Cortland Park and she decoded messages he sent her in backwards mirror writing. She called him “Otis” because she thought he looked like the American actor Otis Skinner (the father of writer and Library member Cornelia Otis Skinner). They married in 1913.

Even though they were distantly related through their husbands, the relationship between Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. King developed slowly. The friendship gathered strength in the years after TR’s death in 1919. These were the long years of Edith Roosevelt’s widowhood where books, always a solace, became even more essential. There was another consolation in the form of Mrs. King’s daughter, Alice, who often accompanied her mother to Sagamore Hill for a summer weekend. “Would the little daughter who likes flowers care to come?” Mrs. Roosevelt wrote Mrs. King in a note dated August 25, 1921. The journey to Arcadia was made by train on the sooty Long Island Rail Road. Once there, weather permitting, all three would go swimming in the bay. In the evenings, the women talked about books and read out loud on the porch while Alice played nearby with the Roosevelt grandchildren. Tucked in a white envelope in one of the black archival boxes at the Houghton Library is a small silver fish on a thin pink ribbon. It was probably given to Alice by Mrs. Roosevelt.

*Sagamore:
The journey to
Arcadia*

Several times a month Mrs. Roosevelt received a package of three to four books, sometimes more, sent by express mail to Sagamore Hill. A driver for the express company that delivered to Long Island would rein in his enormous horses outside the Library entrance to pick up the package. During the summer months books were sent to Mortlake, Mrs. Roosevelt’s family home in Brooklyn, Connecticut. Mrs. Roosevelt also ordered books for her numerous overseas travels. She scanned magazines and newspapers, including the *New York Herald Tribune*, *The Times* [of London] and the *Times Literary Supplement*, and read catalogues from the Boston bookseller Lauriat’s and the New York bookshop Dauber & Pine for promising titles. Most often she relied on Mrs. King. She was not always happy with the selections made by the staff librarian Helen Ruskell. In 1935 after a package with books not chosen by Mrs. King arrived at Sagamore, she made her displeasure known. “They go to you with curses tomorrow. For the future you shall choose my books.”

*Selection of books:
Returned
with curses*

Mrs. Roosevelt’s interests were wide-ranging. “She wanted, and recognized, the best in biography, history and travel, science, music and poetry,” writes Mrs. King. Her taste was basically conservative and did not vary over the years. Nothing racy or

“adulterous” pleased. She was always in a hurry to get to the books, read them and report back immediately to her friend. When she had enough books piled up on her table, she would request Mrs. King not to send any more until “...you hear Kaliopé like screams from the hill.”

Mysteries: Mysteries were Mrs. Roosevelt’s preferred bedtime reading as long as “they had as little sex interest as possible.” She called them nightcaps, because they “composed the mind for sleep.” Often the call from Sagamore Hill was “Send more nightcaps.” Among her favorites in the genre were Agatha Christie, Ellery Queen, Patricia Wentworth and E. Phillips Oppenheim. Of Christie she wrote, “...her thesis that all of life can be seen in a tiny village is certainly true....” Among the mysteries received at Sagamore in one six-month period were *A Body Rolled Downstairs*, *The Cairo Garter Murders*, *The Corpse with the Blue Cravat*, *Murder for Christmas* and *Death Sends a Cable*.

Biographies: Biographies were another staple, especially the lives of statesmen and politicians from Jackson, Lincoln and Cleveland to Marlborough, Talleyrand and Bismarck. Of Winston Churchill’s *Marlborough, His Life and Times*, she wrote early in December 1933, “Not heavy to read, but very heavy to hold in my hand.” Her taste for variety led her to *The Father of Little Women*, Honoré Morrow’s biography of Bronson Alcott, which she thought good enough to pass on to her sister, John Ruskin’s three-volume autobiography *Praeterita* and John Buchan’s *Sir Walter Scott*. The Scott, she wrote, “went far beyond my anticipation & was in delightful English.” She appreciated *The Stricken Deer*, a biography by David Cecil about the eighteenth-century English poet William Cowper but disliked the “repulsive, most indecent” *Flaubert and Madame Bovary* of Francis Steegmuller, one of the critical successes of 1939. She returned it unread to the Library.

About Edith Wharton’s *A Backward Glance* she declared that “Mrs. Wharton made a good bedside book. I read it all, but somehow I did not want to meet her friends.” She rejected Madame du Deffand’s correspondence and questioned Frances Wolcott’s *Heritage of Years*. “How can a clever woman be so dull?” she wondered. But she appreciated Sir Arthur Bryant’s *The American Ideal*, a collection of biographical essays. “Lincoln, & bits about my husband were unusually understanding...”

Mrs. Roosevelt did not care for modern fiction. “You know I can’t read those long modern novels,” she confided. These included John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*, Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* and Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*. She wondered if the stories of Katherine Anne Porter “[are] too sad or too modern for me.”

John Collier's *His Monkey Wife* was immediately returned to University Place. "I cannot read [it]. I don't know why." Mark Twain was a "vulgarian." Thomas Mann was "a great sham." She was pleased but perplexed by Victoria Sackville-West's novel *All Passion Spent* which she decided was "...beautifully written but can you imagine casting off all family duties for the companionship of an old servant, the real estate agent, & a carpenter."

Nineteenth-century fiction was more palatable. She often asked for the novels of Anne Thackeray Ritchie and found "the local ladies at the Country Ball" in Mrs. Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* "inimitable." One of the few twentieth-century writers who met with her approval was Willa Cather, a Library member. E.H. Young's novels also pleased. "I have just read every page of [*Miss Mole*] with pleasure & satisfaction. She is such a real person to me, with her brave heart & sordid little romances...." However, she disliked *The Provincial Lady* by E.M. Delafield, restraining "an urge to murder its author."

In 1932 Mrs. Roosevelt wrote Mrs. King that she had completed Aeschylus's *Oresteia Trilogy* "with great joy & satisfaction, [but] when I consider O'Neill want to say 'Fudge!'" About *I Married Adventure* by Osa Johnson, she declared "After gathering all my strength I made a second attempt [to read it] and was repaid by the description of the Lake. That alone. She must be a very ordinary person." She was disappointed by the correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, published in 1930: "A large pudding with a few plums." She admired many poets but thought John Masefield "should keep to the seas." Walt Whitman she judged "a second rate poseur, tho' we forgive him much for *My Captain* or *Lilacs*."

*Pronouncements:
A large pudding
with a few plums*

Mrs. Roosevelt's comments may have been conversational but they cut to the bone. "Not serious reading," she decided of the autobiography of Ernest Rhys, the British writer and founder of Everyman's Library. "A thin personality. I had hoped for much more." The writings of Queen Victoria's private secretary Sir Henry Ponsonby interested her, she explained in a note postmarked December 6, 1943, "...because my sister met him in Cairo & was appalled & dismayed to see that he had called in the aid of rouge!... when I saw him years later he was just a fussy little odd & end."

The English astrophysicist, Sir Arthur Eddington, challenged her intellectually and she tussled with his ideas for many years. In late May 1929, she wrote to Mrs. King, "I found Eddington most interesting, but my mind is not sufficiently trained scientifically to fathom all his reasoning. He has a delightful and deluding style." A week later she

*Sir Arthur
Eddington:
A puppy
with a bone*



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Edith and Ethel in 1900;
Ted (Theodore Jr.) reading in the
family library, Washington, D.C.,
circa 1892; The Roosevelt family
returning from a hike at Sagamore,
June 25, 1914.

OPPOSITE

Edith Kermit Carow, about age 6.

FOLLOWING SPREAD

The Roosevelt family in 1895.
From left, TR, Archie, Ted, Alice,
Kermit, Edith and Ethel.
(Quentin was born in 1897.)









continued, "I find Eddington still in the back of my head, floating around like a difficult bit of music. The great hope is a sea voyage, a long one. Then 'if I put my mind to it, Perhaps I can do it.'" She also admired the English writer R.B. Haldane, reporting to Mrs. King that she would "send everything but the Haldane back very soon. As you know, I treat his books, & Eddingtons, as a puppy does a bone." Eddington reminded her of the brevity of her own education, which she regretted. "If I had been given more I should have a better mind."

Care of books: Mrs. Roosevelt took meticulous care of her Library books, informing Mrs. King if she passed a new favorite on to her daughter Ethel Roosevelt Derby or one of her daughters-in-law or on the rare occasion lost a book. In 1939 she dashed off a note about the condition of a book she had received—the corners of many of its pages turned down by the previous reader. "Such a dishonest vandal should be dropped from your lists" she insisted. She also informed Mrs. King that while reading Clara Steeholm's *James I of England: The Wisest Fool in Christendom*, its spine had collapsed. "Unless he is given treatment as soon as he returns from the country his fate is sealed!"

A Favor: TR was rarely mentioned in Mrs. Roosevelt's letters. However, on December 28, 1928, she wrote Mrs. King, "My husband gave me the Everyman Shakespeare & I have traveled so much with it that it must be repaired. I can't bear to hand it myself to a binder, & you will know why when you see it. Will you get the Library's binder to do it, & send bill to Miss Mary Sweeney [Mrs. Roosevelt's maid] Sagamore Hill Oyster Bay." Mrs. Roosevelt asked that the binder make a strong light leather box for the three volumes and have the box close with a snap.

Family and friends: Mrs. Roosevelt regularly wrote to Mrs. King about the birth of grandchildren, their schooling and marriages, as well as the health of aging friends. Of Mrs. Cadwalader Jones, a Library member, Mrs. Roosevelt writes, "... alas tho' the spirit is there, its clothing is very frail." In a note postmarked October 27, 1941, she tells Mrs. King, "You will have heard of dear old Mrs. Nichols broken hip. A kind & gentle one....Not a fierce violent one like me!" Of her friend Miss Weekes she writes [She is] "a dear, but a limited dear because she was born a Weekes. I keep a vision of her at a ball, which should be forgotten." She was stricken when Belle Hagner James, her secretary during the White House years, died in 1943. James's fortitude was similar, perhaps, to her own. "She has had what used to be called 'Land sledding' since her husband's death," Mrs. Roosevelt

wrote, “& bore it with her head up & never a word of complaint.” After the death of Mrs. Augustus Jay, she wrote Mrs. King, “I don’t believe there were many Mrs. Jays. They have to be born not made, & you can’t buy them by the dozen at Macy’s, as Lucy Frelinghausen [Frelinghuysen] wickedly said of Mrs. Cleveland.”

Mrs. Roosevelt sometimes gave Mrs. King advice on domestic matters, as she might have her own daughter. When initialing towels, Mrs. Roosevelt asked in a note post-marked October 24, 1940, “red or dark blue washes out, but dark purple quite good. Name or initials?” She also mailed her some chemises she had not worn. “...should I live to the age of Methusela would get no chance to do so. Please excuse this rude gesture but you told me you wore them summer & winter!” When she did not hear from her she missed her. “Send me a line when you are not ‘Fair laden doon’ with desk work.” Another request came for Mrs. King’s homemade candied orange peel. She enjoyed reading her poetry, which had been published in the *New York Herald Tribune* and when asked for a critique supplied it. She was pleased to hear that Mrs. King planned to write about the Library. The news “is very enlivening—especially to an old lady who loved the stuffy old library.”

World War II cast a pall over life. “The war cloud hangs over us all,” she confessed. Mrs. Roosevelt stayed awake one night in June 1940 repeating to herself “Bundles for Britain Baskets for Belgium Hampers for Holland Doughnuts for Denmark...” Library charging cards for the war years show that Mrs. Roosevelt read William Shirer’s *Berlin Diary* and Winston Churchill’s *While England Slept*. At Sagamore Hill driving was curtailed because of gas rationing. After the death of the writer and Library trustee Stephen Vincent Benét on March 13, 1943, she writes, “The country can ill spare him.” She thanked Mrs. King for a note of condolence she had written after the death of Kermit Roosevelt in the Aleutian Islands in June 1943. “I can scarcely understand what has come to us.”

*World War II:
Bundles for Britain*

Throughout the nearly three decades of the correspondence, Alice’s name turns up in Mrs. Roosevelt’s letters. For Christmas 1922 Mrs. Roosevelt offered Alice a suitcase. “The infant mind,” she writes Mrs. King, “seems to find satisfaction in that useful treasure in this family, but she may be supplied.” She doesn’t like to think of Alice growing up she writes Mrs. King in 1927. “Why can’t we keep them little girls,—though then we should lose all the delightful companionship which comes with years.” In a note from overseas postmarked March 17, 1934, she tells Mrs. King she will be returning some Library books. She misses Alice. “You will let me claim a bit of her please, just one pretty dark hair, or the tip of the littlest finger.”

*Alice:
One pretty
dark hair*

Letters from Mrs. King: The four letters from Mrs. King to Mrs. Roosevelt that have survived are chatty in tone. Mrs. King follows up on bits of Library business, and discusses a summer holiday on Cape Cod. In a letter postmarked September 6, 1934, she writes “I am proud to think how many nice friends I share with you...but your own friendship is all one could ever need this side of heaven, all delight and all refreshment in itself.” In perhaps the final letter from Mrs. King to Mrs. Roosevelt, postmarked April 3, 1947, she describes an old scrapbook full of clippings of “New York happenings.” Among the guests at a large ball in New York in the early 1880s was “Miss Edith Carow in rose color.”

Illness: In these last years, illness had become an unwelcome companion. Mrs. Roosevelt recovered slowly from a fall that fractured her hip in November 1935. “If I am to be a cripple I shall alleviate my life in every way, but first I shall fight like a tigress for something better. I feel with Alice in Wonderland “The animals do hurry me so.” She had tired of mysteries. “...too many in life,” she notes. Having read in French all her life, she now considers turning to Molière for a change of pace “... as I have neglected him lately.” It was perhaps a gesture to her French Huguenot ancestors. Then in a note to Mrs. King in January 1941 she writes, “... though everyone says I look well, that only means that the shop windows are well lit! It does not seem wise to inquire what they hide!”

She requests a book by Henry Walter Bates, a naturalist who wrote about the Amazon. “I met his book on a steamer & very much hope to meet it again in the library—Then may I have the new Wentworth & I think there is a new Christie, Agatha too.” The Amazon which her husband explored in 1914 has been “one of my obsessions, & nothing but saving money for my heirs kept me from attempting a coast to coast journey.”

The last letters: As Mrs. Roosevelt’s eyes weaken, she asks for fewer books from the Library. “Not much left of this old lady, but ‘the flag is still there.’” Then on a darker day in 1944 she admits, “It has been a sad homecoming this year. There never will be a merry one again until I have gone & no reminder of the past remains.” About her Library parcels, she tells her friend, “There are plenty of books that I can still read on my own shelves so do not bother about me dear Marion.” A note postmarked August 22, 1946 is signed, “Your faint but pursuing friend.”

There are several requests for the Justice Holmes letters which remind her of the White House days. “Mrs. Holmes was a dear friend of mine. The Justice, the vainest man I ever knew, but apart from that ‘an amusing little cus.’” Then again about her health, she writes that “Mary [her maid] says in French fashion I am moving about like



the heel of an old stocking!" She writes to Mrs. King one last time, in a note postmarked February 10, 1947. "Don't forget to send me the Thackeray letters when they come home to roost. My love to Alice. E.K.R."

Agatha Christie's *The Labors of Hercules* was checked out to Mrs. Roosevelt on July 2, 1947. It is the last entry on the charging card.

*TR and Edith
with Kermit
and Ethel in
England, 1910.*

On September 30, 1948 Ethel Roosevelt Derby wrote to Mrs. King. "I know no-one who will miss Mother more than you—and send you my love & understanding. There was no-one like her. She died quite quietly in her sleep. The afternoon before when I saw her she had been rather better. Her nurses & Mary & Bridget were really wonderful & utterly devoted. 'The ways of death are soothing & serene' I thought, as I looked at her. She was as if asleep but with that tremendous majesty of death. One hears the trumpets from the hid battlements of eternity."



An excerpt from Books and People

MARION MORRISON KING

I had come to know Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt in our little exchanges over books, and the discovery of distant in-laws in common had been another step in our acquaintance. That September [of 1920] she asked me to come down to Sagamore Hill for lunch, bringing my little daughter. From that pleasant beginning grew one of the long, rewarding friendships of my life, a delight that lasted through twenty-seven years, until the period of her final illness.

Books are a great bond, and Mrs. Roosevelt, to whom they were the very staff of life, enjoyed the talk that circles around their centers of supply. I soon began going down for week-ends several times a year, intervals of infinite refreshment and stimulation. To arrive at Sagamore on a hot, late Friday afternoon, tired, and sprinkled with the black soot featured by that Oyster Bay train, to find her framed in the doorway, or in the earlier years waiting in the car at the station; to be drawn into the dim coolness of the spacious old house and steep in its quiet welcome until Monday morning, time and again was very heaven.

She led a comparatively retired life after her husband's death. Her family, her friends, her house, her correspondence, her charities, her reading were its interests, and reading was more to her than to anyone I ever knew. Beginning early, when as a young girl she came to the old Library to take armfuls of books on her father's share, she had cultivated her mind with the instinctive taste that was characteristic of her. I knew the writing she liked, but for every new treasure I mined for her, she introduced me to two old ones that I knew only from the outside. Just talking to her was education, and she was as generous of herself as she was to share the interesting life of the house.

It was apt to stir in the daytime with guests for lunch, or family running in to see her, or grandchildren staying in their parents' absence, but the evenings, unless people came to dinner, were quiet, with talk beside the fire in the big north room, while she knitted and I sewed. Always we read aloud for a while, often poetry, a taste we shared.

Distastes shared are a strong bond too. Mrs. Roosevelt was essentially a private person, veering away from publicity and intrusion. In the case of conversation, this was

Marion Morrison King joined the New York Society Library as a desk assistant in 1907. She retired in 1954.

OPPOSITE
Marion Morrison two years before her marriage in 1911 to Frederick Gore King.

managed expertly with her silvery, unwounding laugh and a faraway expression, the facility of years in the White House. In the case of reading, there was silent rejection of the metaphorical laying-on of hands. Sometimes a book or an article about her husband or her family would be handed to me with “Please tell me if I have to read this,” a judgment for which my own thin skin seemed to be my qualification. In writing, it was not the intimate but the handling of the intimate by which the author stood or fell, the intangibles he either knew or he didn’t. His taste and the quality of his mind were her standards.

But her dislike of the too personal was not all subjective. She resented it for others. Gossip was not welcome in the house. There might be an occasional barbed shaft at someone thoroughly disliked, but her opinion was oftener conveyed by a long, meaningful look from her dancing blue eyes.

If she trusted you, she shared a great deal with you, stories of Washington friendships—Henry Adams, Justice Holmes, the Lodges, the Jusserands, anecdotes of the White House, in which she thought they had been the last family to be completely happy. Mrs. Taft was ill; the Wilsons knew death and breakdown; the Hardings were “the Administration over which we draw a veil”; the Coolidges lost a son. The Hoovers had not arrived when she made the statement. “I was so happy,” she said that day, putting down her knitting to gaze across the wide lawn. “My goodness, I was so happy, I felt I ought to throw a ring into the sea!”

We talked children and husbands, clothes and domestic problems, the Library she remembered in the days before I was born, and always books, books. She was a warm, generous, loving friend, with a gift for friendship that kept you feeling always in touch with her. At least I did. I heard from her almost weekly, personal letters at home, about her reading, my reading, family news, a clipping or two, this and that. Politics were no consuming passion with either of us, although she had an intelligent awareness of course, and once came out of her seclusion to speak for the re-election of Mr. Hoover. “Can you imagine why anyone would want to be President?” she asked me.

Her knowledge of the world, her seasoned, informed opinions were invaluable to me and my work. She was a large part of my life and my education, and she would be the first to understand why, glad as I am now to think of Sagamore preserved as a memorial, for others to see the background of a great American and his family, I do not want to go there again.

Letters to my Mother

ALICE GORE KING

The letters show humor, compassion, concern for her friends, affection for her family. She felt personal loss deeply but always rose to it. The letters are a social history. They discuss changes in the Administration, the two World Wars, diplomatic life, neighborhood news, and then her declining years, her dislike of the aging process—but always, her reading.

They are the story of a friendship between two intellectual, sensitive people. Formal for years, beginning: “Dear Mrs. King” (it was ten years before Mrs. Roosevelt addressed my mother by her first name), ending with her name in full or just initials. Affection was expressed simply through a message from Shady, her dog, sending “love to Alice.”

The letters are in beautiful condition—even though they go back to 1920. All are in franked envelopes except when they were mailed outside the country. The cancellation dates are crisply clear. Inside, they carry the date, though not always in full, sometimes added in my mother’s handwriting. They were written on personal stationery, on calling cards, on pads (when she wanted to pen a note on her lap after breakfast in bed), and on picture postcards from abroad. Words were misspelled, and many were undecipherable—either due to illegible handwriting, or to the fact that Mrs. Roosevelt abbreviated names of books or used only initials for them.

When I inherited them, I wondered what to do with them. I wanted to publish them, but [in my mother’s words] “Mrs. Roosevelt was essentially a private person, veering away from publicity and intrusion.” I had never seen them except as neatly tied packages in the large wooden box they were kept in, though I must have read them from time to time when they arrived. So, first I went through them. Then I typed them. Then I took four years to make up my mind what to do.

I finally decided that the letters should go a suitable collection....Scholars of literature and history should analyze and summarize them. That is not my forte. But I wanted to...point out the rich lode that is there.

From an article by Alice Gore King, the daughter of New York Society Librarian Marion Morrison King, published in the summer 1981, Vol. VII, no. 3, 1981 *Theodore Roosevelt Association Journal*.

will know that you are
enjoying.

I am about to ask you
to do some things for
me which will be a
great help. They

besides you see the
Goryman shape piece

I have travelled
much with it that is
must be repaired.

I can't bear to hand it
myself to a binder, -
you will know why
when you see it. Will

A Note On Edith Roosevelt's Papers at Harvard University

WALLACE FINLEY DAILEY

As was made clear by Theodore Roosevelt's initial communication with the Library of Congress in December 1916, the gift of his papers to the American people was a decision that he reached jointly with his wife. Although the bulk of the collection was transferred before his death in 1919, Edith Roosevelt made sure that additional files were added as they were unearthed in the family hayloft at Sagamore Hill. She allowed the inclusion of several volumes of her own letterbooks, copies of dictated correspondence of a routine and/or official nature.

Papers not so transferred, notably Theodore's juvenilia, diaries, and nature notebooks, were being loaned by Edith to the Congressionally chartered Roosevelt Memorial (since 1953 Theodore Roosevelt) Association, which also acquired family correspondence and additional manuscripts from Theodore's sister Corinne Roosevelt Robinson and others. The Association then opened the doors to the Roosevelt Memorial Library at Roosevelt House, the newly restored Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace on the lower East Side of Manhattan, in 1923.

These accretions of manuscripts found their way to Harvard's Houghton Library in 1943–1944, either as deposits by the Theodore Roosevelt estate (for Edith's loans, since 1953 the property of the Association itself) or as Association deposits or gifts. These all came with the rest of the Roosevelt Memorial Library, a major gift of books placed in Widener Library, pictures, scrapbooks, and ephemera. Both Houghton and Widener components have since been known collectively, including subsequent manuscript acquisitions discussed below, as the Harvard College Library's Theodore Roosevelt Collection.

But Edith herself was virtually absent from these accessions. As Sylvia Jukes Morris has memorably addressed the issue in the introduction to *Edith Kermit Roosevelt: Portrait of a First Lady* (1980, p. 3), Theodore Roosevelt's wife protected her privacy—she was after all not the President—and she was anxious to protect the privacy of her

Wallace Finley Dailey is the Curator of the Theodore Roosevelt Collection, Harvard College Library.

OPPOSITE

An excerpt from Edith Roosevelt's letter to Marion King dated December 28, 1928
"I am about to ask you to do something for me—which will be a great help. My husband gave me the Everyman Shakespeare & I have travelled so much with it that it must be repaired. I can't bear to hand it myself to a binder, and you will know why when you see it."

correspondents as well. So recipients destroyed her letters with a few notable exceptions, including the set celebrated here, and she destroyed theirs. Morris cites (p. 457) a 1924 letter to her sister, Emily Tyler Carow, in which Edith confesses to eliminating all but a few of Theodore's letters to her. Morris also notes Edith's statement to Eleanor Belmont (*The Fabric of Memory*, 1957, p. 108) that she did away with most letters, even, as a reaction to reading the published exchanges between the Brownings, those from her husband. Edith and Theodore's daughter, Ethel Roosevelt Derby, also referred to this destruction in a 1952 letter to Marion Morrison King accompanying the correspondence featured in the exhibition cataloged here. The burning of family correspondence after a final reading was perhaps not that uncommon a ritual while the age of letter writing still flourished. Literary exemplars may be found in such diverse works as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1853) and Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Emily Climbs* (1925).

The first evidence at Harvard of Edith's influence in this sphere came with the advent of the Robinson collection (*65M-65, etc., 1965), the papers of Corinne as preserved and given by her daughter, Corinne Robinson Alsop Cole. They included only ninety-five of Edith's letters to her sister-in-law over a period of some fifty years. In 1968, along with a substantial gift from the Association of Theodore's papers previously retained by it (*68M-67), came a deposit of those of his elder sister, Anna Roosevelt Cowles (*68M-66), containing, less unsatisfactorily, 570 of Edith's letters to her over thirty-five years, and 688 to sister Emily over forty years as well as sixty-three to her mother, Gertrude Tyler Carow. Yet there are only 111 from Emily and thirty-five from Gertrude. (How the Carow correspondence came to be in the Cowles papers is unclear, since Bamie, as Anna was known to her family, predeceased her sister-in-law by seventeen years.) Unfortunately the benefit of such quantities was somewhat mitigated by the fact that Bamie or someone initially processing her papers did not believe in saving envelopes, and since Edith often did not date her letters beyond a day of the week, the result presented a challenge to the cataloger that could not be entirely surmounted.

Nine years after the death of their mother in 1977, Ethel Derby's daughters Edith Derby Williams and Sarah Alden Derby Gannett presented Harvard with her papers (*87M-100, 1986), which included those of her own mother. In Edith's part of the collection, non-family correspondence received is strictly limited per correspondent, or, one might more accurately say, sampled, for instance, the single letter (of farewell, 1909) from Henry Adams, printed by Morris (p. 342). More striking gaps emerge: there are only six letters from Bamie, two from Corinne, three from Emily (and eighteen to her); and except for Ethel, Edith's children barely appear in letters received. The papers do contain fourteen letters from Edith to Quentin. Nine others are found in the papers

of Quentin's fiancée, Flora Payne Whitney Miller (*91-M50), given by her children in 1992. Letters from Edith to her other children—to give them their familiar names—appear respectively in the papers of Ted, Kermit, and stepdaughter Alice Roosevelt Longworth at the Library of Congress, and seventeen to Alice in the papers given to Harvard by Alice's granddaughter, Joanna Sturm, in 1985–1986 (*85M-24). A group of letters from World War Two from Archie to his mother is in his papers (*78M-23) as given by the Archibald B. Roosevelts, Jr., 1979–1991, as are but five letters from Edith to Archie (*80M-6, *80M-41). The combined correspondence between Edith and Ethel in the Derby papers, meantime, is reasonably full, if not quite even: Ethel kept 518 of Edith's letters, 1897–1948; Edith kept 286 of Ethel's, 1900–1935.

The surprising revelation is a batch of seventy-five letters from Edith to Theodore himself, all but one falling between 1890 to 1903, chiefly while Theodore was away hunting or fighting the War of 1898. The single letter from their courtship, 1886, is printed in full by Morris (p. 84–88). Aside from these, only six of Edith's to Theodore are currently known to survive, three of them at Harvard. One letter written by Edith during the war contains a final paragraph telling her husband that she sleeps with his letters. (These letters exist only in the typed transcripts that Edith circulated to her family, as they appear in some early Robinson papers deposited at Harvard (subsequently given) by the Association in 1944 (*56M-226).) Although this paragraph has been blotted out, Morris has managed to decipher and print it (p. 180). A similar example occurs in a small group of papers of Theodore's cousin Jean Schermerhorn Roosevelt (*91M-49, 1991), given by her son P. James Roosevelt and the estates of his deceased siblings, Philippa Roosevelt Jeffries and John Ellis Roosevelt, in which a single letter from Theodore to Edith has had its salutation and closing endearment suppressed. It was these two instances that led me, when preparing a facsimile edition of Theodore's war diary in 1998, to ascribe to Edith the several deletions (of a political nature in this case) found therein, likely inspired by her impending gift of the diary to the Association in 1921–1922.

The Derby papers contain a mere two original letters from Theodore to Edith, along with nine copies; all told, at least twenty-seven survive. A few of them, although the full count is undetermined, are among Ted's and Kermit's papers at the Library of Congress. With a single exception, all the rest may be found at Harvard in copy or original, including four given in 1970 by Ethel (*70M-14). Of these latter, Morris prints in full one numbered 57 (p. 351–352), the only survivor from those Theodore sent from his African safari of 1909–1910. A deposit by Ethel's daughters (*86M-16, 1986) added letters between Edith and Theodore from their childhood; also one in 1902 from

Theodore to Edith at Groton, where she was nursing pneumonia-stricken Ted, while a letter from her to Theodore from Groton a week earlier turns up in the Joanna Sturm gift noted above. A final gift from the Derby sisters came in 1994 (*95M-32), with seventy letters of condolence to Edith at Theodore's death.

Before leaving the Derby papers, which of course include the voluminous papers of Ethel herself, we should acknowledge the crucial presence of Edith's diaries, 1892-1946, with only 1898 and 1936 unrepresented. These are not censored, but are generally cryptic, written invariably in pocket annual or five-year format. Excerpts were published in the *Theodore Roosevelt Association Journal* (xii, no. 2, 1986). There are also juvenilia, reading lists, and account books. Close on the heels of the Derby papers came a group of Edith's own ancestral papers retained at Sagamore Hill until 1986. This gift by the Theodore Roosevelt Association (*87M-101) includes a helpful supplement of eighty-two letters from Edith to Emily (and thirteen to mother Gertrude), and family correspondence that Edith used in preparing her *American Backlogs* (1928).

Another relatively recent acquisition of note involving Edith was the gift in 1993 (*92M-60) by Elizabeth Emlen Roosevelt of papers of her great-grandmother, Elizabeth Norris Emlen Roosevelt ("Aunt Lizzie"), wife of Theodore's uncle James Alfred Roosevelt, in which Edith's letters to her give a welcome glimpse of family life in the White House. These items, as well as the Derby papers, those of Archie, the papers from Sagamore Hill, and papers from the Alsop family supplementing the Robinson papers (*77M-69, 1979; *87M-102, 1986) were used and cited by Sylvia Morris before their appearance at Harvard. Her efforts and those of Edmund Morris were in no small part responsible for their eventual inclusion there.

This then is the context for Edith Kermit Roosevelt's 588 letters to Marion Morrison King, 1920-1947, as preserved by Alice Gore King, presented to Harvard in 1980 (*80M-24), and discussed by her in the *Theodore Roosevelt Association Journal* (vii, no. 3, 1981). Save for those to sister Emily, they constitute the most extended surviving sequence of letters by this prolific but wary correspondent, matched as they are by only four survivors (in the Derby papers) from her fellow communicant, Marion Morrison King.

OPPOSITE
Edith Roosevelt,
circa 1935.

NOTE
A finding
aid for the
Roosevelt-King
letters may be
accessed online at
oasis.harvard.edu
QUICK SEARCH
trc00029



AUGUST 6, 1861 Edith Kermit Carow born in Norwich, Connecticut. Spends her early years in lower Manhattan, New York City. As a young girl, she often visits the New York Society Library with her father Charles Carow.

APRIL 25, 1865 Edith Carow and Theodore Roosevelt (born October 27, 1858) watch Abraham Lincoln's funeral procession from the house of TR's grandfather at Union Square. They remain close friends through adolescence.

OCTOBER 27, 1880 TR marries Alice Hathaway Lee, whom he meets while studying at Harvard.

FEBRUARY 12, 1884 Their only child Alice Lee Roosevelt born.

FEBRUARY 14, 1884 Martha Bulloch Roosevelt, TR's mother, dies of typhoid fever. Alice Hathaway Lee Roosevelt dies later the same day from Bright's disease.

DECEMBER 2, 1886 Edith Kermit Carow marries Theodore Roosevelt in London. After a 3-month European honeymoon, they return to Sagamore Hill, TR's Oyster Bay estate in Long Island.

SEPTEMBER 13, 1887 Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. born at Sagamore Hill.

MAY 1889-APRIL 1895 TR serves as U.S. Civil Service Commissioner in Washington, D.C.

OCTOBER 10, 1889 Kermit Roosevelt born at Sagamore Hill.

AUGUST 13, 1891 Ethel Carow Roosevelt born at Sagamore Hill.

APRIL 9, 1894 Archibald Bulloch Roosevelt born in Washington, D.C.

MAY 1895-APRIL 1897 TR serves as president of the Board of Police Commissioners in New York City.

APRIL 19, 1897 TR appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy in Washington, D.C.

NOVEMBER 19, 1897 Quentin Roosevelt born in Washington, D.C.

JUNE-SEPTEMBER 1898 TR serves as Lieutenant-Colonel of the "Rough Riders" volunteer regiment in Cuba during the Spanish-American War.

AUGUST 15, 1898 TR returns from Cuba.

SEPTEMBER 17, 1898 TR nominated as Republican candidate for Governor of New York State.

NOVEMBER 8, 1898 TR elected Governor. He and EKR take up residence in Albany, N.Y.

NOVEMBER 6, 1900 TR elected Vice President on the Republican ticket.

SEPTEMBER 6, 1901 President William McKinley is shot by an anarchist in Buffalo, N.Y. and dies a week later.

SEPTEMBER 14, 1901 TR sworn in as the 26th President of the United States; EKR becomes First Lady.

1902 EKR plays a major role in the renovation and reorganization of the White House; creates First Ladies' portrait gallery.

NOVEMBER 8, 1904 TR elected President in his own right.

FEBRUARY 17, 1906 Alice Lee Roosevelt marries Ohio Congressman Nicholas Longworth in the White House.

NOVEMBER 1906 TR, the first president to travel abroad while in office, inspects the Panama Canal Zone with EKR.

MARCH 4, 1909 William Howard Taft becomes President. The Roosevelts return to Sagamore Hill.

MARCH 23, 1909 TR leaves for British East Africa on a specimen-collecting expedition for the Smithsonian Institution.

SPRING-EARLY SUMMER 1909
After eight years in Washington, D.C., EKR resumes her visits to the New York Society Library.

JULY-NOVEMBER, 1909 EKR tours Europe with three of her children.

MARCH 14, 1910 EKR meets TR in Khartoum, Egypt and begins a 3-month tour of Europe.

JUNE 18, 1910 The Roosevelts arrive New York Harbor to a tumultuous reception.

DECEMBER 2, 1911 The Roosevelts celebrate their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary.

OCTOBER 14, 1912 TR is shot in Milwaukee by a deranged bartender while campaigning as Progressive Party presidential candidate.

NOVEMBER 5, 1912 TR and Taft are defeated by the Democrat Woodrow Wilson in the national election.

OCTOBER 4, 1913 TR and EKR sail for South America. EKR returns two months later to New York City.

FEBRUARY-APRIL 1914 TR explores the River of Doubt in Brazil and almost dies of dysentery and fever. The river is subsequently renamed after him.

MAY 19, 1914 TR arrives in New York City in permanently weakened state.

AUGUST 4, 1914 World War I begins in Europe.

APRIL 6, 1917 U.S. enters the war. Four days later President Wilson turns down TR's request to lead a division to fight in Europe.

JULY 14, 1918 Quentin Roosevelt, age 20, killed in air combat over France.

JANUARY 6, 1919 TR dies at Sagamore Hill of a coronary embolism.

1920 EKR writes first letters to Marion King.

1921-1927 EKR travels extensively around the world.

1923 EKR approves the reconstructed Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace in New York City.

1927 EKR buys Mortlake, her maternal ancestral home in Brooklyn, Connecticut, as a summer retreat. She publishes *Cleared for Strange Ports*, a book about her family's travels.

1928 EKR publishes *American Backlogs*, a history of her Tyler and Carow ancestors.

OCTOBER 1929 New York stock market crash.

1932 The Democrats nominate Franklin Delano Roosevelt for president; EKR supports the Republican nominee, Herbert Hoover.

NOVEMBER 12, 1935 EKR breaks hip in fall at Sagamore; remains in hospital for five months.

DECEMBER 1941 U.S. enters World War II.

JUNE 4, 1943 Major Kermit Roosevelt commits suicide in the Aleutian Islands after a long struggle with alcoholism.

JULY 11, 1944 Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. dies of heart failure after the D-Day landings in northern France.

AUGUST 6, 1945 EKR's eighty-fourth birthday. U.S. drops atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

FEBRUARY 10, 1947 EKR writes her last letter to Marion King.

SEPTEMBER 30, 1948 EKR dies at Sagamore Hill.

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INSIDE BACK COVER: Edith Roosevelt and child near the family pet cemetery and arbor, Sagamore Hill, circa 1901. SAGAMORE HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
BACK COVER: The road to Sagamore Hill, circa 1895. The figure in white is Edith Roosevelt. THEODORE ROOSEVELT COLLECTION, HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY

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