

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Thursday, May 21, 1964

Page 1

If I had to list the ten best days I've spent in the White House, Thursday, May 21st would certainly be among them.

ch
sp

This was my trip to Kentucky. Up early and out to the airport to catch the chartered Convair at 7:00^{am} with Liz, of course, and Bess, because we were going to her home territory, Kentucky; and Congressman Carl Perkins whose district we would be covering; Bill Batt of the ARA; Howard Birch with the Farmers Home Administration; and Peter Jones with the Department of Commerce, who had prepared me, by giving me Night Comes to the Cumberlands by Caudel, to read; and some 34 press. Helen Thomas and Frances Lew^{ine}, whom I think are practically twins; Marie Smith of the Post; Isabelle Shelton of the Star; Eleanor Pollock of the Philadelphia Bulletin; and Nan Robertson, who wrote such good color stories in the New York Times about the ranch country; Gwen Gibson of the New York Herald Tribune; and Mary Packinham of the Chicago Tribune; and Muriel Dobbins of the Baltimore Sun. Karen Kleinfelter, the best thing that happened to the Dallas News in years; and Norma Ekdahl, in her own home territory of the Lexington Herald; Norma Milligan of News Week, who's handling me very fairly, I think; Nancy Dickerson and her camera crew from NBC; and Bill Wise and Stan Weyman, who were doing a very upstanding job on Luci for Life.

We had coffee and sweet rolls aboard, and arrived at Blue Grass Field, Lexington about 8 o'clock to be met by Governor and Mrs. ^{Breathitt} ~~Breathitt~~ and their pretty children; Mayor and Mrs. Fred Pukasy; and Dr. and Mrs. John Oswald, President of the University of Kentucky; and about 150 people lined up along

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Thursday, May 21, 1964

Page 2

the fence to whom, after I said hello to all the dignitaries, I went over and began shaking hands.

Then began an eight hour tour by motorcade, on foot, and by helicopter, with my incongruous army of newspaper people and cameramen, trailing behind me, through the beautiful but economically depressed Cumberland Plateau. I love the picturesque names - Troublesome Creek, Lick Branch School, the community of Quick Sand, Stray Branch. It was a country of hills and hollows, emerald green with spring, swift rocky streams crossed by foot bridges and occasionally a hillside blighted by strip mining, the process of simply scraping off the top of the earth, by machinery, to get to coal, and leaving it looking wounded and ugly, with no reforestation. It's a beautiful country with a sad history of a declining economy that's gone on for the last three or four decades.

Governor and Mrs. ^{Breathitt} ~~Breft~~ were in the car with me, and as we rode along the highway, we passed a school where all the students were lined up by the side of the road. It was the last day of school and many of them were clutching report cards in their hands. Lots of them had an all day sucker. I couldn't resist, I halted the whole motorcade, got out, shook hands with as many as I could reach and then on we went to our first real stop which was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Robertson, and their seven children, at Warshaw Branch.

Marie Turner, Superintendent of Schools of ^{Breathitt} ~~Breft~~ County, was at my side all day, and how lucky that community and area is to have her because

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Thursday, May 21, 1964

Page 3

she loves her job and she does the best she can with it. A lot of the good that has happened to many of the youngsters that have come out of there, must be traced back to this one woman. As we stopped, she said rather diffidently that it was almost a mile up the creek to the house where the Robertsons lived, and she thought they could make it in a school bus, she wasn't sure. I said "No, I'd much rather walk." So I put on my black boots, which have walked many a mile around the ranch, and led my small army ^{up} the winding path along Warshaw Branch ^{to} the three room house of the Arthur Robertsons. They were lined up on the front porch, Mr. and Mrs. Robertson and six sons and one little girl, Judy Ann, who [^]scrubbed and dressed up for the occasion, [^]offered me a bunch of wild flowers, red and yellow, [^]Snake tongue and rooster comb; I was delighted.

Thin, wiry, gaunt faced Arthur Robertson was easy to talk to and full of ginger, although he looked like he hadn't had a square meal enough of the days of his 36 years. We had come here because he had taken advantage of a \$700 government grant, which paid for materials only, to winterize their house, put asbestos siding and insulation in it, to dig a well, build a privy; all of the labor he did himself.

And also because, through help and instruction from the Agriculture Department, he had cleared and put into tobacco, [^]about 3/5ths of an acre, [^]of this unbelievably hilly farm. I walked around with him for about 30 minutes and really enjoyed it. He showed me the log cabin they had lived in before he had built the house with his own hands where they now live.

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Thursday, May 21, 1964

Page 4

Three of their children were born in the log cabin. He now has a part time job on the Unemployed Parents Program, setting out pine trees on Stray Branch, where he works for about 160 hours a month. Tobacco is his only cash crop, but he has a Poland China hog, and kills about two pigs a year for his family's table; a few chickens; and he had the most marvelous looking garden - potatoes were coming along fine, which he said, one of his sons ^{made} had planned and did all the work on.

To approach his house, I walked across a foot bridge, really just a log across Warshaw Branch. And that is the picture that all of the newspapers found the most typical of the day.

The bet we are making, the government, and it is a large bet, because the Federal government is pouring about two hundred million a year in Kentucky, since 1961 to improve health, housing, for job retraining, for school lunch, public works, and similar public service programs, is that you can do this without destroying the character, the self reliance of American citizens.

When you look into the faces of the children, you see good raw material and you know that is the hope of the future in this area - education, job training, and eventually some kind of opportunities for employment from industry, some way of making a living beside the mortally ill coal industry, in this beautiful part of ~~the country and~~ the world.

Inside the house, there was a framed marriage license, a picture of Jesus, some very family type pictures, I believe a wedding picture. The children were all very clean and polite, but there certainly wasn't a fat

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Thursday, May 21, 1964

Page 5

one in the lot. At least they have, as poor as they are, the beautiful forest and the streams to live with instead of asphalt and concrete buildings.

One of the little ^{boys} ~~buildings~~, Lonney, I believe he was, gave me his school picture. I still have it,

This is being recorded several days later and I can't help but quote a line from a letter from Mrs. Robertson. She talked about the visit, and then in talking about their future, there was a line - "It don't hurt to dream."

We trudged out of the hollow, over the foot bridge, the dusty, sweating cameraman carrying packs that must have weighed, oh, 50 or more pounds, up to the highway and then up to Lick Branch School.

The one room school house, very much like Fern school where I went, from the time I was five until I was eleven, except there are 25 children here, ⁽ⁱⁿ⁾ ~~grade school~~ one to eight. ^{is} ~~It's~~ in a beautiful, leafy, wooded hollow, and once more you reach it by crossing a little bridge. School house architecture hasn't changed any. Not only was the house the same, but there was a great big pot-bellied stove inside, only this one burns coal I'm sure, and I told the youngsters that in my childhood, the biggest boy always had the job of putting in, first the kindling, and then the big wood, and lighting the stove first thing when we got there on cold winter mornings.

All the children were dressed up, the little girls (and lots of them were so pretty) in stiff, starched pink dresses. Everybody clean, really fine looking young folks. Very Anglo-Saxon names, Busch, Bolling, Watts, Turner. Unlike Fern, one wall was covered with a map, and one of the

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Thursday, May 21, 1964

Page 6

children explained to me, that every time anybody went on a vacation, as they sometimes did in the summer months, when they got back they would draw a line to the town where they had gone, and they would tell their school mates all about it. And there were lots of bright colored pictures around, including pictures of the President.

We had a hot lunch, which cost 10 cents to all those who could afford to pay for it. If you can't, you get it free. It's part of the government's [ash] program, to help hard hit parts of Kentucky. It consisted of canned pork, green beans, hot corn bread cooked by a neighbor across the street, ginger bread for dessert and milk. They bring in about two weeks supply at a time. It's furnished by the government. Leave it at the neighbor's house - street's not the word - across the creek and she heats it up for them, and makes the corn bread herself several days a week, just as a neighborly gesture. The only trouble about the meal is that you can't eat and talk at the same time and I didn't get to eat much because ^I there was so much more interested in talking and listening.

The children put on a puppet show for me, all about the little small red hen, you know the one that asks the duck and the pig, and several other farm animals to help plant the corn, and weed the corn, and hoe the corn, and pick the corn, and finally to make the cornbread - and not a soul would help until she said "Now who will help me eat the cornbread?" at which time of course, everybody was ready to help. They had quite a collection of

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Thursday, May 21, 1964

Page 7

puppets and I thought it delightful that two of them were Daniel Boone and Black Beauty. So speaks Kentucky.

Before lunch, everybody had washed their hands, including me, at a very sensible device, a perforated zinc bucket full of water, hanging from a nail, the water dripped through into a large garbage can below and you washed your hands as it came out. We hadn't thought of that at Fern.

The school desks were just the same, even the names cut by pocket knives by little boys, but I didn't see any little girl with plaits, that the boys would have pulled the hair of, or put them in the inkwell as they used to at Fern.

After the puppet show, we went out on the front porch and I presented the Lick Branch school with a flag, one that had flown over the Capitol of the United States. They had already provided a flag pole and we ran up the flag while they all gave the Pledge of Allegiance - it was a moment to remember.

I also brought them a set of encyclopedias, but the biggest event of the day, was that electric lights had been installed just prior to my getting there - all the fixtures had actually been presented as a gift by the Sylvania Electric Company - and I was the first person to throw the switch. They say on dark days in that hollow, you can scarcely see in school, sometimes it turns out at 2 o'clock on winter afternoons, so this is a big advance.

Two of the mamas had made a quilt for me, the Dutch girl pattern. It will be very much at home at the ranch.

And then I saw something that Fern School never had - a book mobile

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Thursday, May 21, 1964

Page 8

it comes around to all the little schools, at least all the ones that have roads that you can get to, and some of them don't have roads that you can get to. Very wonderful addition to rural life, but so much depends on the quality of book they carry around. I walked in and looked around, and great as the idea is, I wish they had reached a little higher in the mental food they had to offer these fine faced youngsters.

Finally I said goodbye and rode away with Marie Turner, thinking about two things particularly, that she had told me - that when some of the youngsters first came to school in September, they were listless, dull, not very interested, and then after they had had a good meal for about three or four months, they would just pick up, show a lot of improvement in their school work, get livelier, even get a little mischievous. She also said, they gave them breakfast, a lot of them that they knew hadn't had much breakfast before they left home. Oatmeal and milk was about the staple breakfast.

And the other thing that she said when I asked her if they had much turn over in the school, she said yes, a teacher hardly ever stays longer than one year, in these little one room school houses. She has 26 such school houses in her domain, which is ^{Breathitt} ~~Breathitt~~ County.

It's hard to attract young people to such ^{places} ~~young~~ vital teachers who must board with the neighbors where the facilities are often outdoor toilets, and muddy roads that no prospective date can come over, and ^[not] much chance of

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Thursday, May 21, 1964

Page 9

getting out, even on weekends.

Which made me hark back to Ken Galbraith's idea of an elite teacher's corp.

And our next stop, still accompanied by Marie Turner ^{and} Trevor Howell, who is her daughter, ^{Breathitt} was at the ~~Breathitt~~ High School in Jackson. Their new gymnasium was to be dedicated.

What interesting rhythm of the bell of history ^{that} this should be on the same site, where an old gymnasium was dedicated by Mrs. Roosevelt 26 years ago!

It was a clean, bright building, lots of glass, every seat full. I was introduced by an attractive, poised young girl, Trevor Louise Howell, Marie Turner's granddaughter, a senior in ^{Breathitt} ~~Breathitt~~ County's High School, carrying on the tradition for the third generation.

And then I made my first real little talk of the day, to the 5,000 guests, including the Lt. Governor, Congressman Carl Perkins, Bill Batt, of course, Peter Jones, and my entourage of newspaper folks.

Delightfully enough, there were three of the graduates there, Trevor Howell among them, who had been present when Mrs. Roosevelt had dedicated the gymnasium 26 years before.

This gymnasium was built as one of the 188 accelerated public works programs in the Cumberland Area, a partnership deal between local initiative and Federal support.

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Thursday, May 21, 1964

Page 10

After the speech, Mrs. ~~Breathitt~~ ^{Breathitt} presented me with a beautiful hooked rug - an art still practiced by the old people in the area, a Federal eagle in the middle. And a quilt that is a very aristocrat among quilts, the tiniest little stitches. I wish these crafts could be brought to their fullest fruition, a combination of the most marketable quality, and the most indigenous native art, and help the economy of a region.

Next, we went to the Wood Utilization Center at Quick Sand, which is sponsored by the University of Kentucky, and here Dr. Oswald, President of the University. A combination of the area redevelopment Administration which has actually built the center, and the assistance of the Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation and the U. S. Forest Service, a very joint effort, to give young men skilled in using this regions most valuable, potential, natural resource, its timber. The mountains are covered by oak, pine, beech, poplar - but when they go to build a new school or anything, they buy the finished product from another state.

This center teaches them the things beginning with logging and saw mill facilities, timber stand improvement, harvest cutting, surveying, mapping, timber estimating, fire prevention and suppression - and things I don't even know the names of. How to get the timber out of the forest - it's called logging; by skidding, bucking, hauling, log grading. And then the use of all sort of machinery, including laminating machinery and dry ^{kiln} ~~kiln~~ machinery, lathes, saws, wood preservation. Actually the young men it turns out are

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Thursday, May 21, 1964

Page 11

good machine operators, who can look forward ^{to} being supervisory personnel in the woodworking industry. Maybe, hopefully, some day to come back and bring their own little plants to this very region, because that is what the region needs, - more little plants to bring jobs to the young people who otherwise go away, seeking employment.

I made a brief little talk here and then left by helicopter from that delightful name Quick Sand, for a 30 minute ride over the beautiful green hills to Lexington.

Then for a rest period and on to dinner, the Kentucky Federation of Womens Clubs, which had brought to this beautiful town in the blue grass, women from all over Kentucky.

who
Mrs. Adrian Duran could have sat for a portrait of the southern belle, She presided and introduced me, who was one of those warm people, friendly, that you feel like you've known a long time, right after you've met her.

The Federation itself, has many programs geared to the needs of the State; one for doctor's clinics; one called Operation Alphabet, to attack that statistic, 407,000 adult illiterates in Kentucky, but I had the feeling that the membership, as a whole, mostly belong to the blue grass section, for Kentucky is divided between some of the most lush and beautiful and wealthy country, and some of the most hilly and poor, and backward country, to be found in this Union. And I think they were not too much in sympathy with my talk about the Administration's war on poverty and about the really

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Thursday, May 21, 1964

Page 12

very thrilling day I had spent in their home state. [—] The need and the progress I had seen.

Naturally, I took the occasion to talk about some of the beloved Kentuckians I had known. The Veep, the Fred Vinsons; Senator and Mrs. Earl Clements; and my own Bess Clements Abell. And also this was a good springboard to recognize all the publicity about the two Congressman who had gone to see my tenants in Alabama, with tape recorders in their briefcases, though I simply said, "Some people are suddenly very worried about the tenant families who live in my farm on Alabama. I'm glad they are concerned. I've been worried about these families a long time and if there had been a poverty bill ^{thirty} ~~a few~~ years ago those former cotton farmers would have been retrained to a new skill rather than remaining on in an economy that time has passed by.

The lasting answer to wiping out poverty in this country, ^{is} is not just charity, but a full scale program to provide job opportunity for all under priviledged familes, and education opportunity for their children."

This was a beautiful, dressed up evening, with a lot of nice ladies, and I was charmed by Mrs. Durran, but the pictures that will linger in my mind, ^{are} are those of Lick Branch School, and the hollow where the Robertsons lived.

#####