

MEMORANDUM

WHD
THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, May 18, 1968

Page 1

I had breakfast in bed in Mary and Laurence's charming little guest house. This is the most leisurely, civilized trip I've taken. No 7:00 departures, but the weather was gray and chilled, and my yellow cotton ottoman dress and coat was much too summery.

I spent little nicks of time reading "The Hudson River" by Carl Karma. And ^a little before 11:00 Laurence and Mary and Liz and I left for Van Cortland Manor -- one of the Hudson River Valley Sleepy Hollow restorations. I do not know the whole picture but I feel sure that Rockefeller dedication, know-how and money figures largely in all the restorations. Van Cortland Manor and Sleepy Hollow were finished and attracting many tourists, and another in the making.

The Manor house was an impressive, two-story building made of native field stone and timber -- much at home on its ground, and built, I was told, in successive stages beginning in about 1680, and for more than 2 centuries a sort of baronial estate of quite a few thousand acres that were gradually sold off. And by 1941, whatever descendant of the Van Cortland's was living then looked at his remaining 200 acres and sold it to the only viable owner -- a Conservation Society.

Here were a part of the real roots of our country, as old as we get on this continent unless we go back to the Indians. The interior, faithfully and effectively restored, I thought. The hostess guides were in costumes

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, May 18, 1968

Page 2

of the revolutionary era I think. Though the sympathies of the Van Cortland ancestors who had lived in those days may have been on the side of the Torres -- at least some of the wealthy land owners of that time were.

There was some handsome silver, some beautiful furniture -- mostly Chippendale -- cruel work, fine old fabrics, and forbidding kitchens that make me so glad that I live in the 20th Century.

And then we went outside. The grounds were beautifully restored. A vegetable garden, a flower garden, a path that led down to the river. This family neglected nothing. They had run a ferry because they were on the post road from Albany to New York I believe it was -- anyhow a well-traveled road. And they had put up a small Inn by the banks of the river, and there accommodated up to 30 people. As we went through the small rooms -- low ceilinged -- you wondered how -- we were told that often three slept in a bed. One room accommodated several beds for women, another several beds for men. You simply took your chances on whoever your sleeping partners might be.

In the women's room there was a small crude cradle. In the tavern room a big comfortable fireplace and an assortment of clay pipes, long stemmed, and a rack in the middle of the table. I was told that each person had his own pipe marked distinctively in some way. Around the fireplace there were the blue deft tiles that spoke of the Dutch.

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, May 18, 1968

Page 3

Outside a huge bell mounted on a pole. One pulled it if one were a customer for the ferry, and it was parked on the other side.

A big assortment of press accompanied us with cameras and note pads. We drove from Van Cortland Manor to Sunnyside -- the home of Washington Irving. Here we were to have lunch on the grounds. Thank heavens they had a big tent set up or else we should have frozen in May. We all gathered for lunch first -- a crowd of I suppose more than 100 guests -- local conservation and preservation societies, friends and neighbors of the Rockefellers, Mayors, officials, newspaper people. We had a drink first on the lawn, and then round tables under the tent. And a delicious lunch, which by now as always on these trips, I was ravenous. And then at the end a rather lengthy and totally charming entertainment -- a description of the house itself and the restoration by the Curator-Director of Sunnyside. And then a sort of reminiscence of the Hudson River Valley by Carl Karma -- humorous, full of anecdotes, vignettes of history, a sort of Joe Frantz of the Hudson River Valley. And then a total surprise for me -- a slim and tense young man who looked rather like a starving poet came forward, they moved out the podium, moved in a table and a big old book -- Washington Irving's writings. And he picked it up and began apparently to read from the

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, May 18, 1968

Page 4

story of Rip Van Winkle. And in about two sentences it was apparent that he wasn't really reading from the book -- it was just a prop -- and he laid it down and continued to quote for a long, entrancing 10 or 15 minutes -- word for word -- the story of Rip Van Winkle. He was an excellent actor. It came to life for me as it never had before -- the clothes, the characters, the humor of Washington Irving. All of us have known a Rip Van Winkle some time or other. He was the hit of the day, so we were all really prepared to see the house, and in tune with the spirit of the delightful man who had written these legends of Sleepy Hollow. I have seen few houses on which the character of the owner was so clearly imprinted as Sunnyside. Monticello, certainly. This was a very small, modest house, a sort of a humorous copy of a great baronial estate. Washington Irving had described it as being as full of angles and corners as an old cocked hat. And so it was -- all peaks and gables, small rooms and low ceilings. But inviting, quaint, charming. It sits right on the bank of the Hudson, or so you think, until you look right down below you and there on a ridge runs the railroad. And sure enough about every 30 minutes during our lunch, the conversation and the entertainment had been punctuated by the whistle and the passage of a train. So even in his day, and I think the railroad went in there in 1846, the lovers of a sylvan retreat had to deal with the inroads of progress -- especially transportation.

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, May 18, 1968

Page 5

They showed us a stump of an old tree to which boats used to tie up when visitors came on the Hudson to see him. And there were many visitors to Sunnyside -- diplomats, writers, intellectuals, neighbors. He ran a sort of salon it sounded like and he had a numerous family -- nieces and nephews -- a good many of whom lived with him from time to time.

Above the entrance there was a huge asteria vine that wound around, in fact all over the roof of the porch, with great galluns of lavender blossoms.

And inside the first little room was his study with a fireplace. He burned coal apparently. It was small, cozy, full of books. And a sofa which doubled as a bed for him by night -- so crowded was he with relatives. And on it spread his cloak and hat.

There was a great deal of the furniture that had belonged to him or his family. And there was of course the inevitable engraving of how he as a small child had been taken to see General Washington after whom he was named. This house like many other memorable houses had been built and added to, and lived its life along with the families that occupied it. He from sometime in the 1830's I believe it was for a quarter of a century or so. And then a succession of relatives. Well, it has fallen into good hands.

Every now and then as I go through these restored houses, a picture of the brick house flashes through my mind. And though there is no reason

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, May 18, 1968

Page 6

it should ever have this importance, the best I could wish for it is that some day it should have a fate such as this.

Indeed the life ^{recreated} ~~were created~~ at Van Cortland Manor and here at Sunnyside give a vivid, interesting picture of how our ancestors lived. The thousands of tourists, the bus loads of school children -- they tell a part of the American story. And I am so glad they are springⁱⁿ up all over our country. Why, I wonder. Are we becoming mature enough to look back to our roots and value them, even when we simultaneously in this decade seem to be tearing into chaos everything?

Just before we had left Van Cortland Manor we had seen a most delightful vignette of the life of pre-revolutionary times -- of the manner such of that of course that it was a sort of self-contained society. They raised and processed nearly everything they ate, and there was no doubt a carpenter or cobbler or cabinet maker or black smith somewhere on the place. The particular vignette of life we saw was called "From Sheep to Shawl", and sure enough out in the back yard behind the big Manor house they had a big fat sheep lying on his side quite placidly while a man with a very Dutch accent in a revolutionary period costume was shearing him. And then there was a group of little boys sitting around on the grass cross-legged. Everybody was in costume. The first little boy was pulling burrs out of the wool. Each little boy had some sort of a job as the process went along. And then others were carding it with a big flat board full of

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, May 18, 1968

Page 7

sharp points. There were little girls working too. And then seven ladies with spinning wheels. Interestingly enough all of them old but with diverse origins. One from France, one I believe from the Netherlands, one made in this region in Revolutionary times. They looked up from their work and explained their part in it to me. And they told me they had formed a guild some years ago to revive these old arts and crafts.

At a table one of the ladies was explaining how they dyed the thread using such native products as berries or bark or roots. The colors were rather quiet -- a bit muddy -- reds, yellows, browns. But it was absolutely fascinating what went into the making of any one garment.

Finally at the last one lady had presented me with a present -- a white shawl which I can really wear at the Ranch on crisp Fall evenings -- even summers it gets cool -- and it will be such fun to remember where I got it.

And so it had been a day of seeing the early colonial life of our country before it was the United States, and it must have remained much this way for decades thereafter. And it was nearly 4:00 when we finally left Sunnyside and headed back to the Rockefeller residence in Tarrytown.

On the drive back there was certainly the most memorable moment of the whole trip to me. Laurence said they would like for me to become a member of the Jackson Hole Corporation -- that is I believe the advisory

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, May 18, 1968

Page 8

group that concerns itself with all the Rockefeller restoration-recreation enterprises. I was flattered beyond words. And I didn't say anything definite except "thank you". I bring no expertise to it -- not as architect or park expert or conservationist of any particular experience. But I would like so much to do it. I hope it comes to pass. He laughingly said, "We'll have to have the meetings some place that you will really enjoy." And I remembered that at least one meeting had taken place at Jackson Hole, and others I think do in the Virgin Islands.

Back in the guest house I had time for about a 30-minute rest. It never ceases to surprise me how tired and how hungry you get on these trips, although you cannot describe what I do as real work.

And then a little before 5:00 we drove up to the Rockefeller's residence for tea. We had thought we would walk over -- that beautiful, rolling countryside so green, the woods dappled with dogwood, is beautiful and inviting for a walk. But it was drizzling.

The great stone house where Nelson lives that had belonged to their parents commands a hilltop, forbidding, imposing, but softened with beautiful American elms. You wind up a driveway past statuary, some of it wildly modern. There are two great torches. At night the tiffany amber glass must look like twin flames when you drive under the porte cochere. And as you mount the steps you see down the length of the hall a graceful elegant statue -- I think it is ancient eastern art -- and there is the

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, May 18, 1968

Page 9

Governor, smiling, genial, taking us in out of the rain and mist. And Happy, warm and friendly. And their little son -- another, a little visitor I think. And later, her daughters -- older, attractive young girls.

The house to me was unbeliev~~l~~able. I stood in orbit. The vast expanses of halls, high ceilings, elaborately ornate moldings. And here and there a bright, wild, smash of modern art. In one room I saw what I thought was an exact copy of our Benjamin Franklin in the Green Room at the White House by Martin, the Scotch painter. But no, this said simply "West". I wondered it it meant Benjamin ^{West}~~Franklin~~ and which indeed was correct. Who copied who? The whole thing was a vast dissonance to me. I do not see how anyone could be at home in the house.

The Governor and Happy could not have been kinder hosts. Nelson took us all over the house, pointing out the art that he had bought -- many of it years ago. He buys it constantly, changes it. It is one of his real enthusiasms. But I just stand appalled and look speechless.

Downstairs there was a room cleared to hold his purchases -- a sort of art gallery -- full of the way-out modern things. One a sort of a shadow box full of lights and clanging metal that went absolutely mad when you turned the switch. And others that looked like the insides of old cars. There was one in bronze that I could approach understanding. There were armies of a little bronze figures which you could imagine were men on horseback, marching men with spears. Nelson kept on

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, May 18, 1968

Page 10

saying that he was going to send one of these to the President. ~~That~~^{That} he the President had told him that he was getting interested in modern art and that the only way he could really come to understand it and see what he liked was to live around some of it. And so he wanted to send him a piece. I could not for the life of me think what to say, that would be both gracious and truthful.

Then we went into the big dining room dominated by a big portrait of their grandfather by John Singer Sargent, and gathered around the big dining room table. And Happy served tea to us and big slices of delicious cake. What a contrast this is to Laurence and Mary's house which is so warm and welcoming, and in human scale compared to this giant-like scale.

Nelson~~x~~ speaks of his feeling for modern art with such enthusiasm, but to me it is as though he was speaking in a foreign tongue. And I felt dissatisfied at myself for being unable to communicate.

Then we went back to Laurence and Mary's, and I changed into my pink evening dress with the beaded jacket once more. Somehow in the drizzle the yellow chiffon seemed to ~~errorly~~^{errorly} mid-summer. And we went to Lyndhurst -- the restored Gould Mansion -- for cocktails. It is now owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and is open to the public. It looks to me like the grandfather of all great mansions. A huge Gothic structure with a superb view of the Hudson. The architects of that

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, May 18, 1968

Page 11

day must have imagined themselves building castles on the Rhine. And there were several like this I was told.

We had a tour through the house, saw a collection of paintings of the Hudson River School -- some belonging on the walls, others lent by neighbors -- among them the Carl Karmas. There were such familiar names as Kinsit and Thomas Cole and Cropsy and Thomas Moran and Eastman Johnson and George Ennis. I met the officials of the National Trust, was given a scroll by them. But remember most poignantly in all that whole vast, forbidding, uncomfortable house the room of the last daughter of the Goulds who apparently felt a sort of a guilt about her wealth because her room was full of pictures of train wrecks.

I at last discovered the thing that I wanted to find, and that was the model of his private railroad car called "Atlanta". The car itself is now in Jefferson, Texas, and is part of their Spring pilgrimage, highly treasured by the ladies of the Garden Club. How they got it I will never know. And I stood in front of the model and had my picture made and I shall certainly send it to the Jefferson Ladies along with a picture of this great mansion.

As we parted, we saw the green house which stretched on and on it looked like for about 4 city blocks -- an incredible evidence of wealth. The whole way of life here -- a page for America's history that will never return -- glittering, impressive, but burdensome.

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, May 18, 1968

Page 12

And then we went on to Brooke's. And here was a totally different picture. All the grace and charm and beauty that wealth could offer, but on a human scale with warmth and compassion to what I had been seeing with simplicity.

Brooke was at the door, utterly enchanting. She bubbles, she glows, she defies years. She let us inside, and we made our way leisurely from room to room meeting her guests. A group mostly of Hudson River folk interested in the arts or restorations -- the August ^{Hecklers} ~~Hectures~~, the Leland Haywards -- she used to be married to Randolph Churchill and is the mother of young Winston. The Broger family -- five of them. The James Biddles -- he's the new head of the National Trust I believe. And the Robert Mases, who together did Nicholas and Alexandra. She is leaving soon for Russia for a summer of research. And the Jim Fosburgs were there. It took me a few minutes to remember that Mrs. Fosburg used to be married to Vincent Astor before Brooke was. And at one time I found myself having a tour of a lovely intimate room in which the walls were covered with family pictures. Vintage of the late 20's, 30's and 40's. And for awhile I was accompanied by both ladies. He was an extraordinarily attractive man, Mr. Astor.

There was a fire in the Library -- a magnet with the mist and rain outside. And one of the nicest parts of the evening was a quiet talk there with John and Peter Loeb, reminiscing about our good weekend in Texas. And there was Philip Johnson, brittle and clever and so sophisticated. I

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, May 18, 1968

Page 13

always like being around him though I consider us a world apart. He tells me he has finished a concept for the art center in Corpus Christi. And there was another architect, Paul Rudolph, who does not look at all like his buildings if I remember them right. I think they are the brutal, raw concrete type.

And the star of the evening as always whenever she is present -- Helen Hayes, a close neighbor. When she walks in, she takes over the room for me.

Mary was there, and Florence Mahoney and Liz and Les and the Hartzogs and the Kimmermons -- he is standing in for the Udalls on this trip. And Warren Rogers wearing a tuxedo borrowed from Laurence Rockefeller. It's about 25 years old Laurence said. There were the Gardner Coles of LOOK magazine, and Dick Adler. And another attractive single man, Count Arro, and Mara Sallis -- he used to be the Brazilian Ambassador to Washington.

Brooke lives here on weekends and a large part of the summer. She told me once that a widow has to have roots. And in that spirit she hung all the family pictures. I think she has very strong roots in life. She works and she loves her work. And she gives.

She took me out onto a covered terrace facing a beautiful sweep of lawn. Dark had fallen and there was mist and rain. It must be an enchanting place in the day time. We had dinner at round tables in a sort

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Saturday, May 18, 1968

Page 14

of a garden room, and I sat next to Louis Okenclaus who wrote the "Rector of Justine". He was very good company and easy to talk to -- polished, very eastern. I couldn't imagine him living or writing about west of the Mississippi River.

Dinner was delicious, and there were toasts to the President, to me, the warmest and best to Brooke. I had the impulse but not the self-assurance to stand on my feet and make one to her myself. And therefore felt unfinished when the evening was over. And the Rockefellers gathered me up solicitously because it had been a long day. And at a fairly early hour -- about 11:30 -- and we drove home.

And this will be a day to remember in the life of Lady Bird Taylor of Karnack, and Mrs. Lyndon Johnson of Johnson City -- a day with the Rockefellers and the Astors and the Goulds -- seeing the Hudson River Valley -- about 300 years of it.