



Theodore Roosevelt's Summer White House

Lawrence L. Knutson

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This publication is a chapter excerpted from the forthcoming book *Escaping the Gilded Cage: An Illustrated History of Presidential Vacations and Retreats* by Lawrence L. Knutson

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THEODORE ROOSEVELT'S SUMMER WHITE HOUSE

by Lawrence L. Knutson



THE WHITE HOUSE
HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



Sagamore Hill, President Theodore Roosevelt's Oyster Bay home on the North Shore of Long Island.

OYSTER BAY

ON A JULY AFTERNOON IN 1902, THEODORE ROOSEVELT EXCHANGED THE SIZZLE OF A Washington summer for the ocean breezes of Oyster Bay, New York, and forever transformed the nature of the presidential vacation.

Earlier chief executives had made only a minimal effort to conduct government business away from the White House. Their ranks included William McKinley, whose assassination the previous September had vaulted Roosevelt into the presidency. Times and circumstances had changed, however, and Roosevelt carried the presidency with him wherever he went, whether to Sagamore Hill, his Oyster Bay home on the North Shore of Long Island, bear hunting in the Colorado Rockies, or watching nimble mountain goats at Yellowstone National Park. Although he conducted almost no business while at Pine Knot, his retreat in the western Virginia woods, he worked steadily on the train rides out and back.

A locomotive's piercing whistle announced the arrival of the presidential special at Oyster Bay at 5:14 p.m. on July 5, 1902. Despite an earsplitting thunderstorm, more than 300 thoroughly soaked townsfolk showed up to cheer, wave small flags, and shake the president's hand.¹

For the next seven years, Roosevelt's Sagamore Hill became the summer White House. Through its doors passed a dazzling parade of cabinet members, congressmen, ambassadors, potentates, envoys, generals, admirals, industrialists, and labor leaders. They mingled with the writers, historians, poets, architects, philosophers, artists, former Rough Riders, naturalists, and big game hunters whose company Roosevelt relished. Through it all, Sagamore Hill remained the home of a large and lively family—the center of Theodore Roosevelt's life.

The pattern for the summers to follow was set in 1902 by George Bruce Cortelyou, Roosevelt's efficient executive secretary, soon to be promoted to the president's cabinet. Presiding over a staff of White House stenographers, typists, telegraphers, and messengers, Cortelyou charted

the president's daily agenda, screened his appointments and dealt with a platoon of reporters seeking news. Rising early to deal with cable traffic with Washington, Cortelyou appeared in Roosevelt's Sagamore Hill library each weekday morning, bringing with him the leather mail pouches that held the letters and documents needing immediate attention. Dictating to a stenographer, Roosevelt generated a stack of outgoing mail. During his lifetime he produced about 150,000 letters.²

That first summer, the presidential staff occupied quarters over the Oyster Bay Bank and jostled for space with Dr. W. C. Root, a dentist, who arrived on Wednesdays to treat local toothaches. A newspaper quoted Dr. Root as jesting that the laughing gas he used to dull pain "might muddle minds busy with the important affairs of state" and thereby derange the peace and prosperity of the nation.³

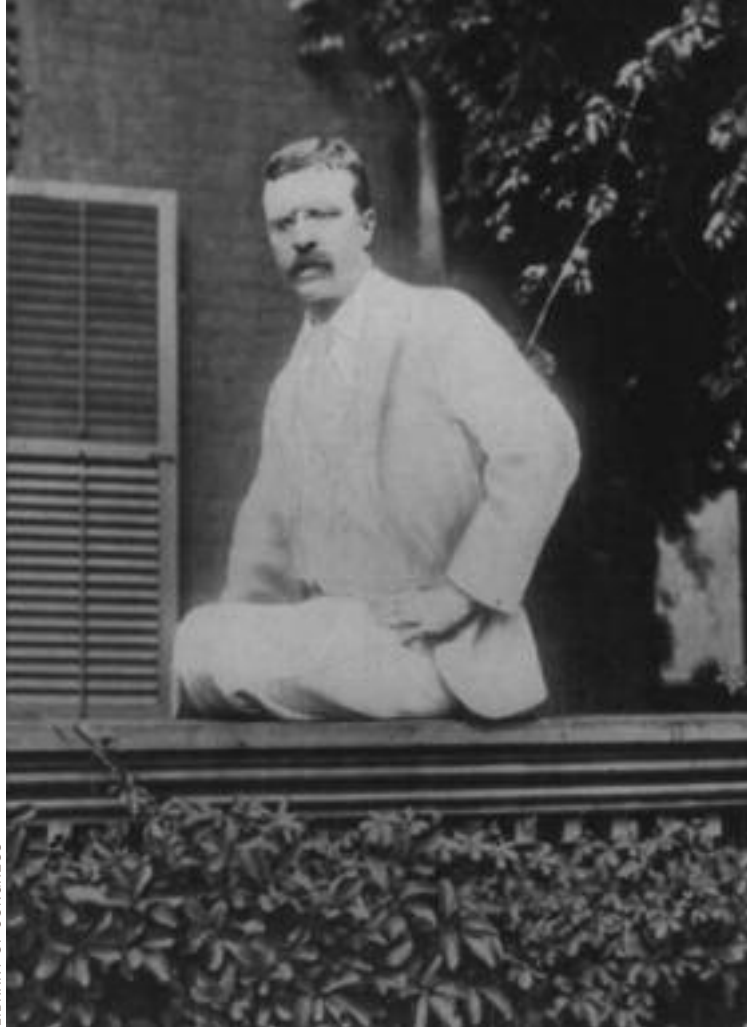
By the next summer a new executive secretary, William Loeb, was in charge of the president's workday. The summer offices were moved to larger quarters over Moore's Grocery Store in a new and turreted three-story, redbrick building on East Main Street. Government clerks heading to work were confronted with a wraparound sign: "PROVISIONS, FRUITS, MOORE'S."⁴

Bare light bulbs lit a half dozen rooms simply furnished with rugs, desks, and typewriters. Although Roosevelt rarely if ever visited, two stenographers were always on call to ride to Sagamore Hill. "In this manner Mr. Roosevelt can keep in as close touch with the world as he wants to or he can hold it . . . at arm's length," a newspaper reported.⁵

Holding the world at arm's length was not as easy as it had been. Telephone and telegraph lines linked the summer capital at Oyster Bay to the White House. Telephones rang at Sagamore Hill itself. Before Roosevelt's presidency, a boy on a bicycle peddled from Snouder's drug store in the village to relay a telephone message. Now there was a wall-mounted phone in Sagamore Hill's pantry and a nickel-plated candlestick telephone on the president's desk.⁶

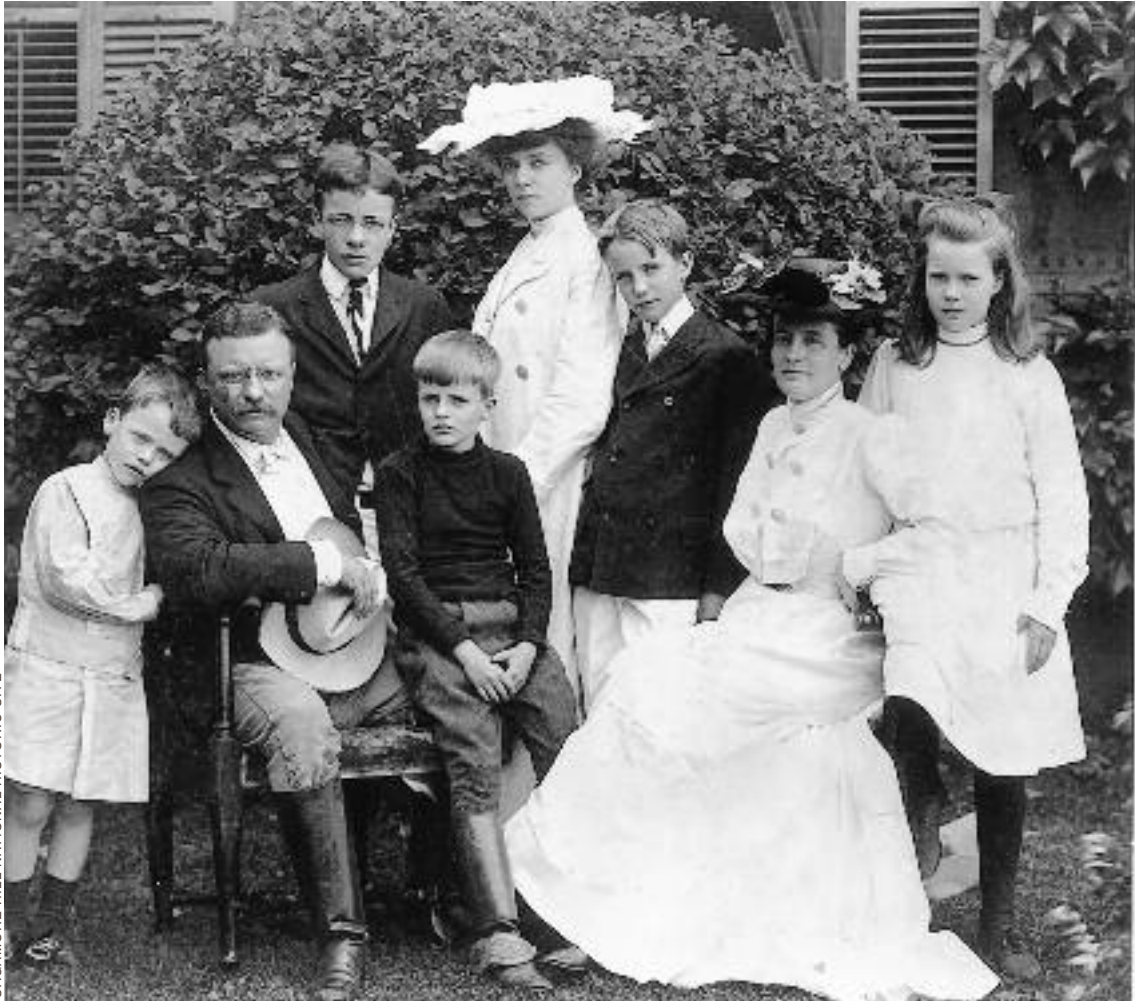
On July 4, 1903, the president's reach from Oyster Bay became truly global. As midnight approached, he inaugurated the new trans-Pacific cable with a telegraphed message that took just twelve minutes to reach Manila, circle the Earth and return to the executive offices above Moore's grocery. From now on the president could issue orders to the fleet in Manila Bay, or contact his ambassador in Tokyo while sitting at his desk watching guests alight from carriages on Sagamore Hill's broad drive.⁷

The Summer White House was well enough established by 1903 for newspapers to chronicle the break with the past. McKinley and other recent presidents had taken only a secretary and a stenographer with them when they fled Washington's notorious summer heat. "The increase in the scope of governmental affairs, now that Uncle Sam has become a world power, renders



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President Theodore Roosevelt pictured at his Sagamore Hill home in 1902.



SAGAMORE HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

President Theodore Roosevelt with his family at Sagamore Hill, 1903.

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impossible a continuance of this simple plan,” said the *Brooklyn Standard Union*. “It has remained for the resourceful Mr. Roosevelt to meet . . . the new conditions by virtually removing the White House offices during the summer months.” The change was complete by the summer of 1904 when the *New York Times* assured readers that the “regular business of the administration will be carried on the same in Oyster Bay as if the president were in Washington.”⁸

A newspaper cartoon illustrated the new era: Roosevelt, waving his famous “big stick,” rides off with the uprooted White House leaving a posted sign: “White House: Gone to Oyster Bay, Back in the Fall.” A bemused Uncle Sam supplies a one-word comment: “Gosh!” While some newspapers objected to Roosevelt’s plan to spend most of the summer at Oyster Bay and then travel in the West, the *New York Times* called the complaints wrongheaded. He will have a good time, it said, “which will be good for him and good for all of us.”⁹

But government business was not neglected. In that first summer alone, the president conferred at Sagamore Hill on a multitude of issues: a possible canal through the Isthmus of Panama, problems in the newly acquired Philippines, cattle ranching in the West, tariff reform, and efforts to curb the trusts Roosevelt accused of creating monopolies. On August 8, 1902, after lunch with a Chinese prince, the president nominated Massachusetts jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. for a seat on the Supreme Court. Two days later he ordered the Army to substitute comfortable soft-collar shirts for the high stiff collars that had chafed the necks of generations of soldiers. An accidental president because of McKinley’s murder, Roosevelt also laid the groundwork for securing the 1904 Republican presidential nomination—and the White House—in his own right.¹⁰

All of this kept Roosevelt’s staff bustling. “It was the rule, rather than the exception, to burn ‘midnight oil,’ in the Summer White House offices over Moore’s grocery store,” Albert Loren Cheney, editor of the *Oyster Bay Pilot*, wrote in a memoir.¹¹

The existence at Oyster Bay was decidedly different after father became president,” Roosevelt’s spirited elder daughter, Alice, remembered years later. “We were hardly ever alone. Drove of people came down to call, or to lunch, or to spend the night. . . . The *Mayflower*, *Dolphin* and *Sylph*, three government boats, were one or another, as a rule, anchored off Sagamore. The newspapermen were camped in the village.”¹²

Charles McKim, the distinguished New York architect, called at Sagamore Hill in July 1902 to settle details of the extensive renovations the Roosevelts planned at the White House. First Lady Edith Roosevelt reluctantly agreed that the sprawling glass greenhouses stacked against the west wall could be removed. Space would be gained to move the executive offices from the crowded mansion to a new West Wing. On the train back to New York, McKim accepted congratulations for negotiating “the Treaty of Oyster Bay.”¹³

It was during a conversation at Sagamore Hill that Roosevelt coined one of the most enduring descriptions of the powers of the presidency. A friend, George Haven Putnam, told the president he had a tendency to preach. "Yes, most of us enjoy preaching," Roosevelt agreed. "And I've got such a bully pulpit."¹⁴

Sagamore Hill stood near the center of Cove Neck, a thumb of land separating Oyster Bay Harbor from Cold Spring Harbor. Green tunnels through the trees led to a sandy beach and a pier where the family row boats tied up. Rowing was a favorite outdoor tonic. "I always, especially, welcome anything in the boats, because it gives me a chance to row with Edith, so I get some exercise without wearing her out," Roosevelt told a friend. From the water they could look back at the raking roof of the house which Roosevelt had named for "the old Sagamore Mohannis who, as chief of his little tribe, signed away his rights to the land two centuries and a half ago." By the time he became president, Theodore and Edith, the former Edith Kermit Carow, presided over a tribe of spirited children. The eldest, Alice Lee Roosevelt, was named for her late mother, Roosevelt's first wife, who had died of Bright's disease, two days after her daughter's birth. Theodore and Edith had five children of their own: Ted Jr., Kermit, Ethel, Archie, and Quentin.¹⁵

McKinley's assassination heightened concern over the new president's safety and the Secret Service sealed off the estate whenever he visited. "They are on guard tonight with orders to keep everybody off the grounds," the *New York Times* reported at the beginning of Roosevelt's 1902 vacation. Agents kept watch as passengers arrived at the Oyster Bay station and shadowed strangers and suspected "cranks." At Sagamore Hill they turned away all those not on the daily guest lists.¹⁶

Perpetually in motion, Roosevelt only slowly resigned himself to the cordon of Secret Service operatives that surrounded him. Whenever he could, he struck off unguarded and alone, saying the revolver he carried gave him adequate protection. Capt. Archie Butt, the president's military aide, said it was impossible for the agents to predict what the president would do next. "He never takes them unto consideration, and he darts from the house sometimes and is well a mile away before they have a chance to follow him." But the agents were not deterred. "They do not allow his feelings in the matter to change their feelings at all and one always tries to keep him in view," Butt said. The agents watched the house when Roosevelt slept and installed trip wires on the grounds to warn of intruders. Although he bristled at the restraints, Roosevelt soon began calling the agents by their first names. "At Oyster Bay he would sit out on the porch with them, chatting and swapping stories," said James Amos, Roosevelt's valet and butler.¹⁷

And Roosevelt eventually concluded that "the Secret Service men are a small but very necessary thorn in the flesh." Not that they could stop a determined assassin, he wrote to Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge. "But it is only the Secret Service men who render life endurable, as you would

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realize if you saw the procession of carriages that pass through the place, the procession of people who try to get into the place, not to speak of the multitude of cranks and others who are stopped in the village.”¹⁸

Still, his family remained concerned about his safety. On Monday, September 15, 1902, near the end of his first presidential vacation, Theodore and Edith threw open the grounds at Sagamore Hill to the people of Oyster Bay and Nassau County. At least 8,000 people shook the president’s hand, drank his lemonade, ate his ginger snaps “and carried away as souvenirs the cups from which they had drunk.” The Secret Service and private guards handled security. But that did not satisfy the president’s eldest son, Ted. Mindful that McKinley had been shot at a public reception, he stood next to his father and carefully “watched every hand before it was extended to the president.”¹⁹

When Roosevelt returned to Oyster Bay in the summer of 1903 he found two local bands so bent on giving him a rousing reception that competition for the honor had turned into a feud. Only after the Secret Service intervened was the leader of one band persuaded not to play “Dixie” while the other performed the “Star Spangled Banner.” When the presidential train arrived on June 26, the bands marched and played in proper order, children sang, and salutes were fired by striking gunpowder laid out on iron anvils. There was one discordant note. When a man rushed the president and tried to embrace him, an agent sent him reeling with a jab to the chin. Ignoring the incident, Roosevelt climbed on a chair so that those in the back of the crowd could see him, and thanked Oyster Bay for its welcome: “When I get near here I am not the president, I am your neighbor and friend,” he told them.²⁰

At about 4 p.m. on most days Roosevelt shed business for strenuous fun: tennis, horseback riding, swimming, hiking, rowing on the bay, or romping with the children. That schedule led to a scene in the president’s Sagamore Hill library which had many retellings: Roosevelt was engaged with an official visitor when a boy with a grievance appeared in the doorway. “Cousin Theodore, it’s after four,” said the boy. “By Jove, so it is! Why didn’t you call me sooner?” the president replied. Then, to his guest: “I must ask you to excuse me. I never keep boys waiting. It’s a hard trial for a boy to wait.”²¹

While the late afternoon outings took many forms, point-to-point obstacle walks were favorites. Often as many as 20 boys trailed their presidential leader on the cross-country “scrambles,” following the rule of “over or through, but never around.” That meant climbing rocks and tearing through thickets and brush. “If they came to a wall they had to climb it; if they came to an inlet in the bay they had to swim it,” said James Amos.²²

Corinne Robinson, the president’s sister, recalled a day when the direct line led through a bath house with a steeply pitched roof. Surely her brother would have the sense to go around.

"Needless to say, he did not, and I can still see the somewhat sturdy body of the President of the United States hurling itself at the obstruction and with singular agility, chinning himself to the top and sliding down on the other side."²³

Roosevelt, himself, shook his head over the birthday romp his daughter, Ethel, had asked him to organize in the barn: "Of course I had not the heart to refuse; but really it seems, to put it mildly, rather odd for a stout, elderly president to be bouncing over hayricks in a wild effort to get to a goal before an active midget of a competitor, aged nine years."²⁴

The adventures continued summer after summer. In July 1906 the president took his younger children and their friends on an all-night camping trip, putting them under overturned boats when it rained. "It only kept them dry in spots; however, not one of them complained," he said. On other jaunts the president told ghost stories at an evening campfire, keeping his youthful audience hanging on each word. Around the dinner table, he told friends that he wanted no weak and misty emanations but active, vigorous ghosts, "the kind that knock you over and eat fire." Archie Butt said that in his dinner table conversation Roosevelt was like "a perfect flying squirrel," changing subjects so fast that listeners could scarcely keep up.²⁵

In good weather the president often walked out with his axe, exuberantly chopping down trees blocking a favorite view. "I think Mr. Roosevelt cuts down trees merely for the pleasure of hearing them fall, just as he swims and plays tennis merely for the pleasure of straining his muscles and shouting," Butt commented.²⁶

With the first lady's encouragement, Noah Seaman, Sagamore Hill's farm manager, often called on Roosevelt when extra help was needed at haying time. "He joked and talked with his fellow workers, drank from the same bucket and dipper, and always insisted on Seaman . . . putting his name on the payroll and paying him a day's work," James Amos recalled.²⁷

For newspapers, the Roosevelt family at Oyster Bay became the summer story. Readers everywhere eagerly followed not only the news that emerged from the president's vacation but also accounts of picnics, rowing, tree-chopping, summer haying and obstacle races. Reporters eagerly pursued the smallest details, sometimes exaggerating, and often annoying the president in the process.²⁸

Sagamore Hill was adequate for family and friends but not quite grand enough for a president the world wanted to see. So in the spring of 1905, a new North Room designed by architect C. Grant LaFarge took shape at one end of the house. It quickly became a stage set for the Roosevelt presidency. Ionic columns set off the richly paneled walls. A great stone fireplace rose under the arched and beamed ceiling. A few steps lower than the rest of the house, the room was roughly 40 feet long and 30 feet wide. Roosevelt hung the walls with buffalo heads and other trophies of the hunt, balanced his cavalry sword on a rack of elk antlers, and tossed

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his Rough Rider's hat on a tine. "Really I like it better than any room in the White House which, as you know, is my standard of splendor!" he told LaFarge. "Just sitting in it was a joy, and will be a joy to me as long as I live."²⁹

In the summer of 1905, Roosevelt found himself and Sagamore Hill at the pivot point of international politics. For a year, Russia and Japan had grappled for control of northeast Asia, a contest that saw Japan win stunningly one-sided military victories. After much maneuvering, the two nations agreed to meet at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Roosevelt, whose advice had been sought earlier while on a hunting trip in Colorado, opened the conference at Oyster Bay and, from a distance, acted as mediator.

Baron Komura, the chief Japanese delegate, was one of the first visitors under the North Room's beamed ceiling. Roosevelt told him he hoped Japan would not insist on more than Russia could give. Komura responded with a list of nonnegotiable demands, including heavy reparations and territorial concessions. The Japanese delegate was quickly followed by Sergei Witte, the chief Russian envoy. "We are not conquered," he insisted. If Japan made unfair demands, Russia would resume the war and fight "to the last extremity."³⁰

On August 5, the two delegations met for lunch on the presidential yacht *Mayflower* in Oyster Bay Harbor. Launches darted between warships, pennants fluttered, cannon boomed, and bands played national anthems while a flotilla of private craft lay back to watch the show. But American diplomats worried that a presidential misstep could sink the talks. To the surprise of some, Roosevelt handled the protocol with the finesse of an otter slipping into water. He propelled the touchy, easily offended chief delegates into the *Mayflower's* salon before either could check whose highly polished shoe had entered first. A cold buffet was consumed while standing, removing concerns about the protocol of seating arrangements. The president's toast was a showpiece of smoothly crafted neutrality: "To the welfare and prosperity of the sovereigns and people of the two great nations, whose representatives have met one another on this ship."³¹

The most audacious gamble of Roosevelt's presidency was under way. Many would accuse him of overreaching if the talks collapsed. And the news from Portsmouth was not at all encouraging. The conference quickly stalled as the Japanese demanded a hefty indemnity and sovereignty over the strategic island of Sakhalin, which they had occupied. The Russians refused to pay a cent or surrender an inch of territory. Russia announced it was prepared to send its delegates home, and resume the war.³²

"I am having my hair turned gray by dealing with the Russian and Japanese peace negotiators," Roosevelt wrote to his son Kermit. "The Japanese ask too much but the Russians are ten times worse . . . because they are so stupid and won't tell the truth." But Roosevelt persisted. In a

stream of coded cables he made suggestions to world leaders and urged Tokyo and St. Petersburg to compromise. He was acting, he said later, like "a very polite but also very insistent Dutch Uncle."³³

On August 25, as rain fell and a northeast wind whipped Long Island Sound, Baron Kaneko, a Japanese envoy, visited Roosevelt at Sagamore Hill. "There certainly seems to be a bad deadlock," he told reporters afterward. But when asked to forecast the outcome he offered a shred of hope. "It is a good deal like this weather," the baron said, glancing at the dark and sullen skies. "We may have bright sunshine tomorrow." The envoy's visit was followed by a flurry of activity in the executive offices above the grocery store. "The wires from there were humming with messages, which several attaches of the executive staff were kept busy codifying," the *New York Times* reported.³⁴

Roosevelt clearly needed a diversion and one awaited on the choppy, turbulent waters of Oyster Bay Harbor. That afternoon a carriage rolled from Sagamore Hill to a pier jutting into the bay. The rain fell in slanting, wind-driven sheets and waves washed over the pilings. Roosevelt clambered into oilskins, boarded a Navy launch, and headed out toward Long Island Sound. Waiting for him were the officers and crew of the torpedo submarine USS *Plunger*. Roosevelt wedged himself through the hatch and disappeared below. *Plunger's* log recorded the time as 3:30 p.m.

Two miles out the submarine's conning tower and periscope vanished from sight. For the first time ever an American president had dived in a submarine.

Page one headline, *New York Times*, Saturday, August 26, 1903:

PRESIDENT TAKES PLUNGE IN SUBMARINE
Remains Below the Surface for Fifty-Five Minutes
He Manoeuvres the Vessel Himself

While the submarine held steady twenty feet under the surface, its commander, Lt. Charles Preston Nelson, showed Roosevelt the grid of dials and gauges, the steering, electrical and air supply systems and the torpedo firing mechanism. The president spoke with the gunners, looked through the periscope, then took the controls himself and steered the submarine close to the bottom. Then Nelson put *Plunger* through its paces: surfacing bow first, submerging, and then surfacing again, this time stern first, at times with all the on-board lights turned off. "I have never seen anything quite so remarkable," the *New York Times* quoted Roosevelt as saying.³⁵

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The president's undersea exploit earned him a newspaper scolding. "He really ought to restrain himself from doing these stunts of adventure," the *New York Times* lectured in an editorial entitled, "Our Submerged President." Submarines constituted an "appreciable peril," the newspaper said. As president, Roosevelt had no right to risk his life in "some new-fangled, submersible, collapsible or other dangerous device." Roosevelt offered private explanations. "I went down in it chiefly because I did not want to have the officers and enlisted men think I wanted them to try things I was reluctant to try myself," he told a concerned friend. But his first reaction as he stepped from *Plunger's* streaming deck may have been closer to the mark: "I've had many a splendid day's fun in my life but I can't remember ever having crowded so much of it into just a few hours."³⁶

The rain stopped. The skies cleared. But the deadlock remained. When delegates met on August 29 reporters picked up rumors the Russians had asked for their hotel bill. At about noon the nickel-plated telephone rang on Roosevelt's desk. William Loeb answered it, listened intently and asked for the message to be repeated. "What is it?" Roosevelt asked. The Associated Press was reporting that Russia and Japan had agreed to compromise on all points and would move immediately to draft a peace treaty. Japan had listened to Roosevelt's plea and given up its demand for an indemnity, and Russia had ceded the southern half of Sakhalin Island. "This is splendid; this is magnificent," Roosevelt roared. The gamble had paid off. "It's a mighty good thing for Russia, and a mighty good thing for Japan," Roosevelt told Loeb. "And it's a mighty good thing for me too!"³⁷

Soon the North Room had still more trophies to display: A tankard from the czar of Russia and a magnificent gold-mounted Samurai sword from the emperor of Japan. Then another trophy arrived. In December 1906 Roosevelt's diplomatic success earned him the Nobel Peace Prize, making him the first American to win the Nobel in any field. He brought the gold medal home to Sagamore Hill and stored it with the family silver in the iron safe that stood in his pantry.³⁸ *

*T.R.'s Nobel gold medal is now displayed in the Roosevelt Room in the West Wing of the White House.



WESTERN NEW YORK HERITAGE INSTITUTE, CANISIUS COLLEGE

President Theodore Roosevelt seen hunting.

THE HUNTER

NO PRESIDENT HAS BEEN MORE CLOSELY LINKED BOTH TO THE PRESERVATION OF NATURE and the thrill of the hunt than Theodore Roosevelt. The contradictions were evident even in his own time. Over the years of his presidency, Roosevelt rode through snowdrifts to shoot bear in Colorado, chased coyotes on the Oklahoma plains, and laid plans to shoot lions and elephants in an epic African safari once he left the presidency and the White House. He also took pleasure in the outdoors even when he left his rifles in their racks in the Gun Room at Sagamore Hill.

John Burroughs, the distinguished naturalist, said Roosevelt kept his promise to shoot no living thing even as the two surveyed the herds of elk in Yellowstone National Park in the spring of 1903. One morning, summoned from his tent with his face still covered in shaving lather, Roosevelt watched mountain goats leaping down impossibly narrow trails. He spent a day entirely alone, walking the trails and watching herds of elk. At other times he and Burroughs sought out birds. "He usually saw the bird or heard its note as quickly as I did (who) had been teaching my eye and ear the trick of it for over 50 years," Burroughs said. Moving on to California, Roosevelt joined John Muir, naturalist and champion of California's Yosemite, for another outing undisturbed by gunfire. Muir and Roosevelt slept on fir boughs under the looming trunks of the sequoias. It was, Roosevelt said, "like laying in a great solemn cathedral, far vaster and more beautiful than any built by the hand of man."³⁹

Roosevelt's summary of his Yellowstone experience embraced the idea of preserving something unique in nature: "The geysers, the extraordinary hot springs, the canyons and cataracts unite to make this region something not wholly paralleled on this globe," he said as he dedicated Yellowstone's new gateway arch at Gardiner, Montana. "It must be kept for the benefit and enjoyment of all of us."⁴⁰

"All hunters should be nature lovers," he wrote in 1905, calling on hunters to help preserve wildlife, "whether big or little." Burroughs called him that "rare combination of the sportsman and the naturalist." In the nearly eight years of his presidency Roosevelt added about 150 million acres to the national forests and created the National Forest Service to protect and manage them. The lifelong bird lover and big-game hunter created 51 federal bird sanctuaries and four national game reserves. He signed legislation establishing five new national parks and created sixteen national monuments, including California's Muir Woods, the grove of sequoias named for his companion at Yosemite in 1903.⁴¹

But Roosevelt did not abandon chances to shoot game. And he appealed for his fellow citizens, and the newspapermen who followed him everywhere, to leave him alone while he hunted. "Give me a fair show to have as much fun as even a president is entitled to," he asked in April 1905 as he took a break from a speaking tour to shoot coyotes in Oklahoma.⁴²

The party took off on horseback following a pack of forty greyhounds. A certain amount of risk was involved because the plain was occupied by "one huge prairie-dog town." But Roosevelt said the horses knew their business and dodged the holes. The greyhounds ran the coyotes to a panting halt and the president reported bagging a dozen of the "sharp, wary, knowing creatures."⁴³

A week later the nation's most famous hunter reached Colorado in search of bear. Roosevelt's party camped in a grove of leafless aspen and big spruce near a stream still rimmed with ice, then set off with a pack of 26 hounds. One bear was quickly cornered with hounds swarming over it in such numbers that Roosevelt held his fire for fear of hitting a dog. Then he got "a clear view of his great round stern and pulled the trigger." The wounded bear rolled downhill, followed by the pack of excited dogs. Roosevelt arrived as the bear rose. "And with another bullet I broke his back between the shoulders." There was a lull in the action; the horses often found themselves belly deep in snow. Finally the hounds picked up a scent and pursued a bear up a mountain until it climbed a tree. Roosevelt brought it down with a single shot. It crashed through the branches and buried itself in the snow. Later he shot a third bear in similar fashion.⁴⁴

Roosevelt's more ferocious instincts blended with a naturalist's close observation. He made mental notes of the wildlife he saw in camp: the four-striped chipmunks, white-footed mice, a "brushy tailed" pack rat. "There were eagles and ravens in the mountains, and once we saw sandhill cranes soaring far above the highest peaks."⁴⁵

The White House secretariat traveled with Roosevelt on hunting trips as well, maintaining contact with Washington. On a trip to Colorado Roosevelt went into the woods after bear, and executive secretary William Loeb set up headquarters at a hotel in Glenwood Springs. A



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President Theodore Roosevelt on horseback in Wyoming.



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Theodore Roosevelt is photographed visiting the Big Trees of California with his party.

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coded message arrived from Secretary of War William Howard Taft reporting a new, hopeful, and still secret development in the year-old Russo-Japanese war: Japan was ready for peace talks and sought Roosevelt's advice on how to move forward. Loeb thought the message too important to wait or entrust to a messenger. So he rode horseback over a snowy mountain to deliver Taft's cable himself. Roosevelt considered the implications, then decided to return to Washington a week early. It was the first step in the diplomacy that led to American mediation of the war.⁴⁶

Of all Roosevelt's hunting trips, the one he considered the least successful was the one that did the most for his reputation. In November 1902, the president spent five days pursuing bear through Mississippi's marshes and did not get a shot. "Simply exasperating," he grouched. It was the first hunt Roosevelt had allowed himself since becoming president and to satisfy the demand for stories he granted three reporters once-a-day access to his hunting camp. They were eager for any development. On the morning of November 14, the hounds picked up a scent. After a long chase they drove a scrawny and exhausted female bear into a pond. Since Roosevelt was miles away, a guide roped the bear, slammed its head with a rifle butt, and waited for the president. Arriving, Roosevelt found a dazed and exhausted black bear tied to a tree. He refused to shoot. "Put it out of its misery," he told the others, who ended the bear's life with a knife.

Back at camp, the tale was told and news stories were written. While Roosevelt continued his fruitless hunt, his countrymen were reading of the sportsman president who refused to shoot a defenseless creature. The ultimate fate of the luckless bear was somehow glossed over. At his drawing board, *Washington Post* cartoonist Clifford Berryman read the articles and created a legend. He sketched an appealing bear with big ears and eyes. He drew the president turning his back, holding up his hand, refusing to shoot. The delighted public demanded more bear cartoons. Soon the little bear became Berryman's cartoon mascot, offering side commentary on the issues of the day.

That winter, Brooklyn storekeeper Morris Michom produced a few stuffed bears and placed them in his window with the sign, "Teddy's Bears," using the popular nickname Roosevelt so disliked. They sold quickly. At roughly the same time an American toy buyer in Germany discovered that the Steiff Toy Company had a new line of stuffed bear cubs with plush fur, button eyes, and moveable arms and legs. He ordered 3,000 and they, too, sold out. Soon millions of Teddy Bears were in the hands of children.⁴⁷



In this cartoon by Clifford Berryman, President Theodore Roosevelt is seen escaping the White House for his retreat at Pine Knot. November 1, 1906.

“REST AND REPAIRS”

PINE KNOT

SAGAMORE HILL AND THE AMERICA WEST WERE NOT THE ONLY LOCALES THE ROOSEVELTS enjoyed for relaxing. Not far from Washington and on the slopes of Virginia’s Blue Ridge the Roosevelts found a house that was as free of sham as the farm workers for whom it had been built originally.

Roosevelt first saw it in early June 1905 and called it “the nicest little place of the kind you could imagine.” Edith Roosevelt called it perfect for the “rest and repairs” they both needed. The name she chose was as unadorned as the house: Pine Knot.⁴⁸

Pine Knot’s best feature was the broad front porch that framed a view of rolling meadows and Virginia’s Blue Ridge. Made from unpainted pine boards, the house itself lacked electricity, plumbing and a telephone. The single ground floor room, measuring 12-by-32 feet, could have been dropped in the center of the new North Room at Sagamore Hill with space to spare. One newspaperman said it was “probably quite the most unpretentious habitation ever owned by a president of the United States.” Another called it “a right crude place.”⁴⁹

But Pine Knot met the Roosevelts’ needs for a refuge from the White House and a more peaceful alternative to Sagamore Hill with its stream of visitors, curious reporters, ringing telephone, and sacks of urgent mail. The first lady made the arrangements, paying \$280 for the house and fifteen acres of pine and white oak in Albemarle County, seventeen miles south of Charlottesville. Roosevelt took to it immediately, found an axe, and began cutting down trees to improve the view.⁵⁰

In Roosevelt style, the porch was quickly and grandly named the piazza. “It was lovely to sit there in the rocking chairs and hear the birds by daytime and at night the whippoorwills and little forest folk,” the president wrote to his son Kermit. “There was no one around the house to bother us at all.”⁵¹

The Roosevelts brought no White House servants with them their first weekend, left the Secret Service agents at the Charlottesville railroad depot, and fended for themselves. On Saturday evening the president fried two chickens for dinner and served them with biscuits and corn-bread. They had cherries and wild strawberries for desert. They sat on the piazza after dinner, then moved inside and read by the light of kerosene lanterns.⁵²

Some work began to improve the place, but the fundamental simplicity of Pine Knot was not altered. The Roosevelts added two fireplaces of native stone. They faced each other across the single, large downstairs room and brought warmth and flickering firelight to cool evenings.

In the nearly four years remaining in Roosevelt's term, he and Edith visited Pine Knot eight times. They stayed for just a weekend or for as long as six days. In the spring they ate breakfast around 10 a.m., looked for birds and wild flowers in the meadows and woods, and rode horses along the red dirt roads. In the fall the president hunted and was often in the woods before dawn. Roosevelt almost never conducted business at Pine Knot. But he dictated to a stenographer on the train rides to and from the farmhouse.⁵³

After their first visit they generally brought household staff with them and borrowed a cook from neighbors. Historian William Harbaugh, Pine Knot's chronicler, writes that when their train pulled in two days after Christmas in 1905 they brought "so much baggage—mattresses, rugs and blankets, trunks and suitcases, guns, ammunition and saddles, boxes of groceries and two crates of beagles and white setters—that they looked like a traveling theatrical troupe."⁵⁴

Roosevelt considered the elusive wild turkey "the king of American game birds" and by the fall of 1906 was determined to bag one. Reporters for the Richmond Times-Dispatch followed his progress through the woods until a headline could report, "PRESIDENT GETS HIS WILD TURKEY." Roosevelt provided his own description of the 13-hour hunt: "The turkey came out of cover not too far off and sprang into the air, heading across the valley and offering me a side shot at forty yards as it sailed by. It was just the distance for the close-shooting ten-bore duck gun I carried; and at the report down came the turkey in a heap. It was an easy shot."⁵⁵

Rambling near Pine Knot in May 1907, Roosevelt had a wildlife sighting so unusual that ornithologists are still debating exactly what he saw. Roosevelt had no doubts at all. By the opening years of the 20th century the passenger pigeon, once numbered in the billions, was thought to be extinct, exterminated by commercial hunters. But Roosevelt, a lifelong birder, reported:

On May 17, 1907, I saw a small party of a dozen or so passenger pigeons, birds I had not seen for a quarter of a century and never expected to see again. I saw them two or three times flying hither and thither with great rapidity, and once they perched in a tall dead pine on the edge of an old field.⁵⁶

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Roosevelt could have settled the issue by bringing down a bird with a shotgun for biologists to examine. "Nothing could have persuaded me to shoot them," he wrote. "There were mourning doves in the field for me to compare them with, and I do not see how I could have been mistaken."⁵⁷

In May 1908, Roosevelt welcomed John Burroughs to Pine Knot. He was so eager to show off his knowledge of local birds that he took the naturalist on a mad dash through the fields, woods, briers, and marshes, seeing little for all their sweat.⁵⁸

They set off at a slower pace the next morning, stopping to watch a Bewick's wren dart in and out of a fence, listening to a gray gnatcatcher singing in a plum tree and puzzling out the identity of blue grosbeaks in an open field. They saw no passenger pigeons and Burroughs was skeptical about Roosevelt's sighting. But in four days they observed and listed more than 75 species of birds and fowl.⁵⁹

Burroughs said he was worried about the president's security. In the darkness, a mile from another house, Pine Knot seemed vulnerable. Roosevelt slapped his pocket. "I go armed and they would have to be mighty quick to get the drop on me." Stepping outside, Burroughs heard sounds in the brush. The next morning Mrs. Roosevelt told him that at her request a pair of Secret Service men arrived at 9 p.m. each day, stood guard through the night, then retreated to a nearby farm house during the day. "She did not let the president know of this because it would irritate him," Burroughs said.⁶⁰

One night, with both men reading by the light of a kerosene lamp and Mrs. Roosevelt occupied with needlework, Roosevelt suddenly slammed his hand on the table with explosive force. Burroughs recalled: "He had killed a mosquito with a blow that would almost have demolished an African lion."⁶¹

Theodore Roosevelt impacted and altered the presidency as few others have done. He worked hard, and he played hard. In his hands and in his time the presidency became a full-time occupation, and he learned to accommodate a need for renewal and a change of scene with the changing demands of the office. In his final White House year, Roosevelt worked hard to make William Howard Taft his successor and saw the voters affirm his choice in the November elections. As his own time in office drew to a close, he began planning his next great adventure, his hunting safari in Africa. Sagamore Hill, and American politics, would be waiting when he returned. The presidency and the concept of what a presidential retreat might mean had been profoundly altered.

LAWRENCE L. KNUTSON

NOTES

1. *New York Times*, "The President Arrives Home in a Storm," July 6, 1902.
2. Sherwin Gluck, *TR's Summer White House, Oyster Bay*, (Oyster Bay, N.Y.: Sherwin Gluck, 1999), pp. 2–3; estimate by National Park Service historian Amy Verone, Theodore Roosevelt National Historic Site, Oyster Bay, N.Y., based on letters known to exist.
3. *New York Times*, July 11, 1902; Gluck, *T.R.'s Summer White House*, p. 29.
4. John E. Hammond, *Oyster Bay Remembered*, (Huntington, N.Y.: Maple Hill Press, 2002), pp. 59–61; Gluck, *TR's Summer White House*, pp. 11–14.
5. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 9, 1903.
6. Hammond, *Oyster Bay Remembered*, pp. 279–80; Gluck, *T.R.'s Summer White House*, pp. 2–3; Gluck, fig. 16.
7. John Gable, "Introduction," in Gluck, *TR's Summer White House*, pp. i–ii; *New York Times*, "Will Send Messages Around the World," July 2, 1903.
8. *Brooklyn Standard Union*, May 1903, as reprinted in *The East Norwich Enterprise*, June 13, 1903; *New York Times*, July 5, 1904.
9. Hermann Hagedorn, *The Roosevelt Family of Sagamore Hill*, (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 133; *New York Times*, "The President's Plans," July 6, 1902. John Gable, executive director of the Theodore Roosevelt Association, has said: "The president of the United States could no longer take a vacation or a holiday without keeping in continuous contact with the government in Washington and the rest of the world."
10. Theodore Roosevelt, *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951), letters 1152–1153; letter, July 10, 1902.
11. Albert Loren Cheney, *Personal Memoirs of the Home Life of the Late Theodore Roosevelt* (Oyster Bay, N.Y.: The Cheney Publishing Co., 1919), p. 76;
12. Alice Roosevelt Longworth, *Crowded Hours*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), p. 53.
13. William Seale, *The President's House*, (Washington, D.C.: The White House Historical Association, 1986), vol. 2, pp. 668–669.
14. The "Bully Pulpit" discussion has been attributed to Roosevelt and George Haven Putnam by *New York Times* columnist William Safire, 1982.
15. Theodore Roosevelt, *Selections from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt to Henry Cabot Lodge, 1884–1918*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), vol. 2, pp. 223–24; *Theodore Roosevelt, Autobiography*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), pp. 308–9; Hermann Hagedorn, *The Roosevelt Family of Sagamore Hill*, (New York: Macmillan, 1954), p. 2; Edward J. Renehan Jr., *The Lion's Pride, Theodore Roosevelt and His Family in Peace and War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 11.
16. *New York Times*, July 6, 1902.
17. Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex*, (New York: Random House, 2001), p. 122; Archibald Butt, *The Letters of Archie Butt*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1924), pp. 82–83; James Amos, *Theodore Roosevelt: Hero to his Valet*, (New York: The John Day Co., 1927), p. 82.
18. Roosevelt, *Selections from the Correspondence to Henry Cabot Lodge*, pp. 223–24.
19. *New York Times*, September 16, 1902.
20. *New York Times*, "The President At Home," June 27, 1903.
21. Hagedorn, *The Roosevelt Family of Sagamore Hill*, p. 152.
22. Amos, *Theodore Roosevelt, Hero to His Valet*, p. 81–82.
23. Corinne Robinson, *My Brother Theodore Roosevelt*, (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), pp. 210–11.
24. Theodore Roosevelt, *Theodore Roosevelt's Letters to His Children*, Joseph Bucklin Bishop, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919), p. 540.
25. Roosevelt, *Selections From the Correspondence to Henry Cabot Lodge*, pp. 222–23; Noel F. Busch, T.R., *The Story of Theodore Roosevelt and His Influence on Our Times*, (New York: Reynal & Co., 1963), pp. 82–83; Butt, *Letters*, p. 88.
26. Butt, *Letters*, p. 88.
27. Amos, *Hero to His Valet*, pp. 84–85; Amy Verone, *A Constant Pleasure, Theodore Roosevelt at Sagamore Hill*, an essay in the catalog for the 1998 National Portrait Gallery exhibit, *Icon of the American Century*.
28. Hagedorn, *The Roosevelt Family of Sagamore Hill*, pp. 155–58.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 232–33.
30. Morris, *Theodore Rex*, p. 405.
31. William Henry Harbaugh, *Power and Responsibility: The Life and Times of Theodore Roosevelt*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1961), pp. 279–80.
32. Nathan Miller, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Life*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1992), pp. 444–48.
33. Theodore Roosevelt to Alice Roosevelt, September 2, 1905.
34. *New York Times*, "'No Concessions'—Kaneko," August 26, 1905.
35. Log of the USS Plunger, U.S. Navy Historical Center Archives, Washington, D.C., August 25, 1905; *New York Times*, "President takes the Plunge in Submarine," August 26, 1905; Hagedorn, *The Roosevelt Family of Sagamore Hill*, pp. 226–29. Roosevelt's staff said nothing about his adventure until he returned; newspaper reports apparently were based on eyewitness accounts.
36. *New York Times*, "Our Submerged President," August 27, 1905; Letter, Theodore Roosevelt Speck von Sternberg, September 6, 1905; Busch, T.R., p. 207.
37. Miller, *Theodore Roosevelt, A Life*, p. 447; Hagedorn, *The Roosevelt Family of Sagamore Hill*, p. 230; Henry F. Pringle, *Theodore Roosevelt*, (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1931), p. 272.
38. Sagamore Hill National Historic Site, Oyster Bay, N.Y., Historic Furnishings Report, p. 51.
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40. Theodore Roosevelt, speech at Gardiner, Montana, April 22, 1903, *New York Times*, "The President Helps Lay a Cornerstone," April 25, 1903.
41. William H. Harbaugh, *The Theodore Roosevelts' Retreat in Southern Albemarle: Pine Knot 1905–1908*, (Albemarle County Historical Society: Charlottesville, Virginia, 1993), p. 22; Theodore Roosevelt, *Pastimes of an American Hunter*, pp. 339–40; Burroughs, *Camping and Tramping*, p. 80.

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42. *New York Times*, "Arrives in Oklahoma," April 9, 1905; *New York Times*, April 19, 1905.
43. Roosevelt, *Outdoor Pastimes*, pp. 100–20.
44. *Ibid.*,
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87.
46. Morris, *Theodore Rex*, p. 382.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 172–74; H. Paul Jeffers, *Roosevelt the Explorer*, (New York: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2003), p. 125.
48. Harbaugh, *The Theodore Roosevelts' Retreat in Southern Albermarle*, pp. 1–3, 6, 10. The president first visited Pine Knot, June 8–11, 1905.
49. Walden Fawcett, quoted in Harbaugh, *Pine Knot*, p. i; *Charlottesville Daily Progress*, May 21, 1907.
50. Harbaugh, *Pine Knot*, p. 1.
51. Theodore Roosevelt to Kermit Roosevelt, June 11, 1905, *Letters*, p. 1209.
52. Harbaugh, *Pine Knot*, p. 10.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 29, 48–49.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 26; *Richmond Times Dispatch*, Nov. 1–4, 1906; Theodore Roosevelt, "Small Country Neighbors," *Scribner's Magazine*, November 1907, pp. 383–95.
56. Harbaugh, *Pine Knot*, pp. 32–33; Roosevelt, "Small Country Neighbors," *Scribner's Magazine*, November 1907.
57. *Ibid.*
58. Harbaugh, *Pine Knot*, pp. 37–40; John Burroughs, "With Roosevelt at Pine Knot," *Outlook*, May 25, 1921; John Burroughs, *Under the Maples*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1921).
59. Burroughs, *Pine Knot*, p. 2.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 3; Sylvia Jukes Morris, *Edith Kermit Roosevelt*, (New York: Modern Library, 2001), p. 294.
61. Burroughs, *Pine Knot*, p. 3.

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