

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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Recently I received from Bernard Ryan, Jr. two copies of the Kent Quarterly published by the Kent School Corporation, Kent, Connecticut. Volume III. Spring 1989 which I received, contains about a twenty-page article entitled "The Roosevelts at Our House" by Bernard Ryan, Jr. who grew up in Albion, N.Y. It is a fascinating story of his memories as a child, of the Roosevelt's visits to his family home located on North Main Street, Albion. With column space being limited, I have selected only a very brief excerpt for you to read here. The two copies of the Kent Quarterly are however, available at the Swan Library for those interested in the entire story which is well worth reading. The accompanying photo shows the Roosevelt's 1930 visit to the Ryans. From the left: Harriett Ryan, Governor Roosevelt, Judge Bernard Ryan and Eleanor Roosevelt. The two boys on the left: William Ryan and on the right Bernard Ryan, Jr.



Chairman; my father is Orleans County Democratic Chairman) and Father Sullivan and Doctor Brodie and a great many others, and out on the porch Frank Mahoney, the butcher, is carving big hams for all the people on the lawn because Mama invited the entire town to "a buffet luncheon for the Governor," and Mama tells Gertrude to serve the hot biscuits now (Mama is from Alabama.) The Governor is jolly.

But suddenly, just as he is about to dig into his plate of ham and potato salad and biscuits, he stops and looks around, "Why," he says, drawing out the word, "where's William?"

"I guess he went up to his room," says Mama. "You know, Governor Roosevelt, he's really an awfully shy boy."

The Governor puts down his knife and fork. "You just go tell him I won't eat one bite until he's here with me."

And he doesn't Mama gets Bill (who is seven—I am five), and everybody makes room for Bill's plate on the card table in front of the Governor, and the meal proceeds. The Governor says things that make everybody laugh. He enjoys his lunch—especially the biscuits.

After lunch the Governor shuffles through the side door and out onto the porch. The photographers from the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle and the Times-Union want to take our pictures. We gather round as Elliott lets go of his father's arm and the Governor stands alone with his canes. The crowd is out in the front yard, but we are around here on the side because the side porch faces south and the light is better for the photographers (the porch runs thirty feet across the front and forty feet down the side of our big brick Victorian house built in 1891, the year my father was born and the year his father died while his home was under construction and his wife was pregnant.)

Bill and I and Mama and Daddy and Mrs. Roosevelt are in all the pictures. When my mother was getting ready for the Governor's visit, Mrs. McNall (mother of my pal, Tom McNall) called her and asked if she wouldn't like her to "take the boys for the day" so we wouldn't be underfoot. Mama said, "Why, Terese, I wouldn't deprive them of that, they're part of the family and they'll be part of the event." So here we are, Bill and me in our white linen suits (short pants and matching tops) and Mama smiling up at the Governor and Daddy very tall and proud and Mrs. Roosevelt smiling down at Bill and me, in a photo that hangs in my father's study, in the same house, for 49 years afterward.

THE ROOSEVELTS AT OUR HOUSE

By Bernard Ryan, Jr.

When I think of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, I am taken far back to a summer morning and I am in the yard in front of the house in which I grew up. Tony Acri is there in his worn white overalls, with his hammer hanging from the loop below his right hip and his flexible rule in its special pocket. He is measuring and sawing big planks. He assembles them into a broad ramp that rises from the edge of the driveway to the level of the porch, some six or seven steps above the ground and higher than my head. My father has hired Tony to build the ramp because the Governor is coming.

The Governor arrives, a day or two after Tony Acri finishes the ramp, with a great wail of sirens from far off down Main Street. Motorcycles roar and throb into the south driveway and follow its horseshoe around around behind the house, past Gertrude Eibl, who works for my mother and stands on the back porch holding the baby and calling, "Hello, Governor Roosevelt!" as the opening car circles past the line full of diapers hanging there. (Afterward, a friend of my mother says, "Weren't you mortified to have the Roosevelts come in the wrong way and go round back past those diapers?" To which Mama replies, "The Roosevelts have five children of their own. I reckon they've seen diapers before.")

He is a big man with two canes. He stands up in the open car and shuffles onto the running board, then onto the ramp built by Tony Acri. A young man, his son, steps beside him, and the Governor takes his son's arm and the son takes one cane. They move up the ramp slowly but steadily. Soon the Governor is sitting inside, in the big wing chair beside the fireplace, with a card table in front of him. We sit around him — Mama and Daddy and Mrs. Roosevelt and the son, whose name is Elliott, and Herb Reed (he is Orleans County Republican