



# Foundation Document Overview

## Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site

New York



### Contact Information

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## Purpose



*The purpose of ELEANOR ROOSEVELT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to recognize the lifework of Eleanor Roosevelt, wife and political partner of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and preserve and interpret a place central to her emergence as a public figure, so that current and future generations can understand her life and legacy as a champion of democracy and pursue discussion about human rights issues.*



## Significance

Significance statements express why Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Val-Kill, which was part of the historic Roosevelt Family Estate, was a Roosevelt family retreat, as well as Eleanor's home and office, from its construction in 1926 until her death in 1962. During the time she spent at Val-Kill, she hosted political discussions with a wide range of people and formulated her social and political beliefs.



## Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Cottages and Dependencies**
- **Val-Kill Landscape**
- **Museum and Archival Collections**

Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Natural Resources**



## Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **At Home on the Hudson River.** The Roosevelt family's Hyde Park estate nurtured the boy who became president and was a family compound where Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt created an environment to promote political and social change.
- **A Powerful Partnership.** Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt experienced personal challenges and relationships that helped them forge a partnership focused on social and economic progress that would make a difference in the lives of all people.
- **Legacy and Memorialization (Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt).** The political and social legacies of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt are interpreted and memorialized at Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Sites, including their burial site and the FDR Presidential Library.
- **Advocacy and Activism.** Eleanor Roosevelt's lifetime advocacy for human rights and world peace was grounded in her belief that the individual must participate in his or her community and government to facilitate change.



# Description

The 181-acre Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site was established by Congress in 1977 to preserve Mrs. Roosevelt's cherished home at Val-Kill on a part of the historic Roosevelt Family Estate. Here she founded Val-Kill Industries to provide new skills and employment opportunities for unemployed local farm workers. At her Val-Kill home, she wrote books and newspaper columns, served as the first U.S. delegate to the United Nations, chaired the committee that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and came into her own as one of the most influential figures of her time.

Purchased by Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) in 1911, Val-Kill soon became a favorite family picnic site. In 1924, FDR urged Eleanor and her friends Nancy Cook and Marion Dickerman to build a cottage there so they could enjoy the peace and solitude year-round.

Stone Cottage was completed in 1926. Val-Kill Cottage, built in 1926 as a furniture factory for Val-Kill Industries, was run by the three women. Eleanor Roosevelt converted Val-Kill Cottage to her residence in 1936–1937; it became her year-round home after FDR's death in 1945.

Eleanor Roosevelt loved the beauty and tranquility of the Val-Kill landscape, characteristics that endure today. Val-Kill Pond is a central feature around which Stone Cottage and Val-Kill Cottage are arranged. Lawns, gardens, woodlands, and forest plantations set out by FDR surround the structures. The plantation, known as "The Secret Woods," is said to be where Eleanor Roosevelt read stories to her grandchildren. The agricultural context of Val-Kill remained important throughout Eleanor Roosevelt's life, and she actively sought to continue it after FDR's death, when she and her son Elliott launched a business venture called Val-Kill Farms.

