



Helen Hayes (center) and fellow actress June Havoc banter with President Kennedy before leaving on 26-nation tour to showcase American theater.

Presidents and First

Success opened the door of the White House to a great actress—but she had

AS A RESULT of Jacqueline Kennedy's efforts, the White House now reflects all the best aspects of American culture. This is important to everyone, but it is especially important to me.

I was born in Washington and came of age there. In my memory, the White House stands out as a place of childhood awe—and later as the scene of cherished moments with Presidents and First Ladies.

But when I was a youngster, my life was remote from the glitter of Washington society. Our home was a funny little house on Q Street, and the only time I got to the White House was for the egg rolling at Easter.

After the egg roll, we children sat around a red-checked tablecloth on the White House lawn, eating our colorful prizes. Above us on the balcony, President Theodore Roosevelt addressed the crowd. But to a child's eye he seemed a remote and not quite real figure.

Presidential inaugurations also were big events for Washington children. I recall watching an inaugural parade from the front room of one of the many shabby hotels (really flop-houses) that then lined the streets from the Capitol to within several blocks of the White House. My family and I shared a room rented for 25 cents a day, and we watched the gala event while munching deviled eggs and ham sandwiches, staple "picnic" fare in the pre-hamburger era.

Woodrow Wilson was the first President I saw face to face. I was a minor player at Poli's Theater, where the President frequently came to see our beautiful star, Izetta Jule, who was his friend. After one of our shows, Izetta introduced me to the President. He shook my hand. I simply

By HELEN HAYES

First Lady of the Theater

with Flora Rheta Schreiber

couldn't believe this was happening to Helen Hayes Brown!

We were humble people. My Grandfather Brown was an obscure Government clerk. My father managed a wholesale meat-packing concern. Mother had been a cashier in a drugstore before her marriage and as a housewife worked so hard that I can still see her hands, lye-stained from household labors.

My early identity as a girl from "the other side of the tracks"—and the distinction between the two sides is even sharper in Washington than elsewhere—haunted me at this first meeting with Woodrow Wilson, as it was to haunt me all through my life whenever I met the great.

I felt this awe, for instance, when I first met the Franklin D. Roosevelts, while I was playing the queen in "Victoria Regina" at Washington's National Theater. Mrs. Roosevelt invited me to lunch at the White House and, by a happy inadvertency, I mentioned that I didn't have a performance that evening. "Then you must come to dinner and the diplomatic reception," she said.

She sent a car for me, even though I was staying at the Hay-Adams Hotel, just across Lafayette Park from the White House. Stepping into the car, I asked myself: do I dare ask the driver to take me around town? I wanted my family in Washington to see me riding in a White House car and about to dine with the President of the United States. But I couldn't summon enough

courage to make that suggestion to the driver.

Arriving at the White House, I found the dinner was a small one, including only President and Mrs. Roosevelt, their daughter Anna, Secretary of State and Mrs. Cordell Hull, two Midwest governors, and me. When the President entered the room, he greeted me with: "And how is Your Majesty?" It was a charming bit of persiflage, and at persiflage he was always a master.

When Mrs. Roosevelt told us that she had invited 2,500 persons to the diplomatic reception, the President groaned.

"I tried to cut the list, but I couldn't," she said. "It isn't just the diplomats but all the others to whom it means so much. There's the backwash of other administrations, the widows of people who were important, all those fringe people. This is the one thing these people have to look forward to all year—shaking hands with the President."

2,500 Hands to Shake

It was the sort of earnest husband-wife spat that could have taken place at any dinner table. I felt that they were both right—Mrs. Roosevelt for her broad humanity and the President because it would be a difficult ordeal for him to stand while shaking 2,500 hands. Until this moment, I hadn't realized how greatly crippled he was from polio.

During the reception, Mrs. Roosevelt told me that the President needed a respite. She asked me to chat with him in his study.

I felt I would be struck dumb if left alone with the President—and I fulfilled my own prediction. He talked about his State of the Union message, which he was to deliver in a few days. "As a woman with no ax to grind, what do you think I should say?" he asked.

"You are asking me, Mr. President?" I heard

Miss Hayes met Gen. Eisenhower at a Red Cross rally. They clicked instantly—but she froze in Ike's presence when he was about to become President.



Ladies I Have Known

a hard time forgetting she was from "the other side of the tracks"

myself asking with a nervous little laugh.

He tried to draw me out, but I wouldn't be drawn. He pressed a stein of beer on me. I hate beer, but I drank it as though I were about to die of thirst. It was the only thing I seemed capable of doing during the 30-minute visit.

I think my mother had something to do with my reticence in the presence of the great. When I was a child actress, most stage mothers encouraged their children to go up to the producer after the show and say hello, but Mother insisted I should not impose on "big" people.

But my modest mother had her own moment of recognition by a "big" person, for in Herbert Hoover she found an admirer. When I met President Hoover, he told me that Mother's "Letters to Mary," which appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*, was "one of the best things I ever read." I couldn't wait to tell her about it.

I have known the Eisenhowers since Ike was a general. I first met him when we shared the same stage at a Red Cross rally.

When a photographer asked him to pose with my 6-year-old daughter Mary, he bowed deeply, turned to her, and said: "I would be honored to pose with you." Then he playfully remarked to me: "Your daughter is taller than you. My son John is taller than I am, too. It's awfully hard having your own child talk down to you." Ike and I commiserated with each other over our children's natural strategic advantages. That was the beginning of our friendship.

During General Eisenhower's first Presidential campaign, I was touring the country in the play, "Mrs. McThing." When I stepped off the train at Denver, Colorado's Governor Dan Thornton was there to greet me. "General Eisenhower wants me to bring you right over to visit with Mamie and her mother," he said.

When I entered the Eisenhowers' hotel room, the General greeted me warmly. Instinctively, I drew back. He was not yet President, but I knew he would be, and as much as I admired him as a man and a friend, I froze as I had done years before with Franklin Roosevelt.

"Go up and see Mamie," General Eisenhower said gently. I was glad to run away from my own embarrassment.

Later, when I was playing at the National Theater in Washington, Mamie came to a matinee and invited me to bring the four children in the cast to the White House pool for a swim. Leaving the young actors and the Eisenhower grandchildren splashing under the watchful eye of a



When Helen played "Victoria Regina" in Washington, Mrs. Roosevelt invited her to lunch.

Secret Service man, Mamie, her daughter-in-law Barbara, and I visited in the upstairs family sitting room. Suddenly the President appeared.

"Who are those children in the pool?" he asked Mamie. "I heard splashing and I thought it was David, but he wasn't there. I went to the dressing room to look for him; he wasn't there, either. But I found a strange boy on my exercise horse—stark naked. When the boy saw me, he said, 'Cheese, it's Eisenhower!' and ran off."

Mamie Yearned for a Private Life

I had to explain that the strange boy was Bobby Mariotti, who played my son on the stage and that he was Mamie's guest. The bewildered President was delighted to have me solve the riddle of the strange boy on the exercise horse.

As the Eisenhower second term entered its final phase, Mamie showed signs of wanting to be a private citizen again. One afternoon when I was visiting with her and her sister, Mrs. Moore, Mamie showed us her packing. "You have plenty of time—a year and a half, to be exact," Mrs. Moore reminded her.

"But it will take such a long time to get out of here," Mamie replied.

The house that Mamie was eager to leave will always hold memories for me—not only the memory of large events but also of small things.

The house has all kinds of strange errors of architecture. Mrs. Roosevelt showed me the room in which the King and Queen of England slept and which, to her embarrassment, had no closet—only a wardrobe.

I also shall never forget the time Mrs. Roosevelt showed me the President's bathroom with the Presidential shield firmly embossed over the tub. "It is a funny place for the Presidential shield," she remarked.

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