

# Introducing Mrs. Nesbitt, White House Housekeeper

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WASHINGTON—"First door to your right," the White House doorman said.

I entered a room of the Presidential mansion and found cordial Mrs. Henrietta Nesbitt, the Roosevelts' housekeeper, busy at her desk.

I knew that I was in for an interesting interview with the White House pilot, for the only difference between my reception and that of a visiting dignitary was that the music of the Marine Band was lacking.

Appreciating the fact that house-keeping for a President and First Lady is no small job, and that there is always plenty to be done, I refused to infringe on her generosity.

Without her telling me, I could readily sense that Mrs. Nesbitt is an experienced housekeeper—and one who can see that things are properly done on a minimum budget.

That she is liked by all the employees is evidenced by the constant praises they sing of her. She gets the example for her subordinates to follow—that of finding pleasure in her work.

"Besides myself and the ushers all employees are colored," she said.

"These include the doormen, hall-men, personal maids for the President and First Lady, chamber maids, the, the President's valet, cooks, butlers and waiters."

"Is Mrs. Roosevelt's personal maid colored too?" I asked.

"Oh yes," she retorted, "Mrs. Roosevelt usually uses colored help. That's all she has used in her home in New York City ever since I've known her."

"Do you pick the help for Mrs. Roosevelt, Mrs. Nesbitt?"

"No, Mrs. Roosevelt always does her own selecting of help, and I must say that she has never picked one yet that has disappointed her."

"I should think that the doormen's duty is the most important. What is your opinion?" I asked.

"I can't agree. The heart of the house is in the kitchen. The food must be well prepared and those in charge of the kitchen must be able to plan; in view of this I consider the cook's duty a very important one."

Miss Ida Allen, who came to the White House with Mrs. Roosevelt is head cook.

Mrs. Nesbitt doesn't like to refer to Miss Allen as the dietician because she is well trained as a cook and, "When a person is well pre-

not familiar with spoon bread and several Southern dishes and I have developed a particular liking for them. Corn-pone was new to me and I like it quite well."

When you consider the fact that most of the Roosevelt employes are Southerners, you can understand why so many Southern dishes are introduced.

"The Southern dishes prepared by Miss Allen, together with several new dishes introduced by Miss Shella Hibben, a Southerner, have caused Mrs. Roosevelt to become interested in the Southern dishes," said Mrs. Nesbitt.

On her desk was a Southern cook book bearing the inscription, "De way to a Man's heart." The book, is written in Southern dialect and is a gift to Mrs. Roosevelt from one of her friends.

When asked to name Miss Allen's good qualities in the field of cooking, Mrs. Nesbitt replied, "Miss Allen is a good cook, a good executive and sees that her work goes on very smoothly."

The doormen do all of the formal receiving of guests into the White House. They find out who they want to see and what is wanted and refer them to the usher. They also escort incoming guests to their rooms and handle their luggage for them. Mrs. Nesbitt considers John Mays the "dean" of White House doormen.

Mays has been on the door for twenty-four years, having been among the first colored doormen appointed. She admires the doormen for their skill tact, and courtesy in handling guests.

Mrs. Nesbitt has floorman on every floor, but she considers the job of the first floorman the most difficult. Asked why that was, she explained that the first floor is open to the public from 10 a. m. to p. m. and that he must see that the floor is clean by 10 and again after the public hours are over. There is no immediate rush to put the other floors in shape, and they usually require attention once a day.

On the Presidential floor there are various valet duties that may be assigned to the hallmen.

There are also maids on each floor, with chamber maids and maids for house guests on the two upper floors.

Miss Mary Foster is Mrs. Roosevelt's personal maid and usually accompanies her on all trips.

Miss Maggie, who has been at the White House for twenty-four years is the head maid, and "understands

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Mrs. Nesbitt doesn't like to refer to Miss Allen as the dietician because she is well trained as a cook and, "When a person is well prepared to cook there is no need of worrying about a diet." So, Miss Allen is "head cook" and does all of the cooking with the help of an assistant. She is directly in charge of the kitchen.

The menus are planned by Mrs. Nesbitt and Miss Allen jointly.

"She often has good suggestions, and I frequently ask them of her. We look over the pantry together to see what is there and then plan the mean," stated the housekeeper.

"Have you developed a special liking for any of Miss Allen's recipes?" she was asked.

Certainly", she replied, "I was

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Miss Maggie, who has been at the White House for twenty-four years is the head maid, and "understands her business," according to the housekeeper.

The butlers have charge of the two dining rooms and handle the menus. All salads and desserts are prepared by them and supervised by Alonzo Fields, head butler.

"Field's responsibility is great," declared Mrs. Nesbitt. "He directs all White House luncheons and has a lot of planning to do."

"A good butler must be ambitious, able to anticipate people's needs, be alert, courteous and efficient. He must see that thing is needed before it is asked for," Mrs. Nesbitt explained.

The Presidential valet is Irving McDuffie, who has been with the President for seven years.

When asked what she thought of the group as a whole, Mrs. Nesbitt promptly retorted, "If they are in the White House they are all well qualified, and as far as I am concerned I wouldn't like to make a change."

"We have a nice aggregation of men and women who work together harmoniously. The fact that some have been around for twenty-four years is sufficient evidence that they work well and know how to get along."

The housekeeper thinks that better work is accomplished in private homes when all employees are of the same nationality, stating,

"Up north some of the private homes have various nationalities--Greeks, Italians, Negroes and Caucasians, and that's a bad combination because there's always some misunderstanding somewhere.

Credit for picking such employees was given to Mrs. Roosevelt, Mrs. Nesbitt declaring.

"Mrs. Roosevelt was always able to pick out efficient people."

Mrs. Roosevelt brought six of her New York help with her which included Irving McDuffie, alert; Mrs. Elizabeth McDuffie, maid; Mary Foster, her private maid; James Mingo, butler, Ida Allen and Elizabeth Moore, cooks.

The house keeper gave Mingo credit for keeping things lively around the house, declaring:

"He is very jovial and always has something on the end of his tongue to make everyone laugh.

Meals for the employees planned by Miss Allen, Mrs. Nesbitt declares. "She