

## F. D. R.'S DAY: Long Hours of Work, Study, Recreation Cram President's Daily Routine

If you could slip past the police on the White House lawn bright and early some morning, sneak into the Executive Mansion and break through the Secret Service men who shuffle up and down the corridors all night long, you would see standing patiently before the door of a room in the southwest corner of the second floor Irving Henry McDuffie, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Negro valet.

He has waited in the same place and in the same position every morning for the last four years, his head cocked toward the door, six newspapers under one arm.

McDuffie knows better than to scrape his feet, cough softly, or make any of the other "tactful" noises with which the experienced valet ordinarily rouses his master. The President is a sound sleeper, but of the automatic type. His eyes close easily. They open almost invariably at 8 o'clock every morning—without artificial assistance.

**Sleep**—Mussolini wakes in a cold, forbidding chamber that looks much like a sarcophagus. Hitler's bedroom is heavy with the ascetic atmosphere of a monk's cell. But President Roosevelt's sleeping quarters are neither plainer nor more ornate than those of the *John Taxpayers* scattered all over the United States.

The bed is long and white-enameled, a product of Mrs. Roosevelt's furniture factory at Hyde Park. On the walls at either side of it are naval prints and cartoons. A ship's bell rests on a small brown mantel. In one corner is a great mahogany wardrobe, near it a massive chest of drawers. All of the furnishings are practical, masculine and unmodern.



Mr. President is held to a rigid schedule by aids "Missy" and "Marv"

## F. D. R.'S DAY

Opinion differs as to whether the President is on the chipper or indigo side when he wakes in the morning, but in either case, his prebreakfast routine is the same. He relieves McDuffie of the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Washington Post*, the *Washington Herald*, and the *Atlanta Constitution*, and glances at the head-lines. (Last week, a half-dozen other papers were added to the list so he could keep in close touch with the flood disaster and the General Motors strike.) After this, he wraps himself in a silk dressing-gown, and relaxes while McDuffie plays barber.

**Breakfast**—Breakfast is next. It usually consists of cereal awash in milk and sugar, buttered whole wheat toast, and coffee. Boiled eggs, with bacon cubes and toasted *croutons* added, a favorite dish with the President, often ride in on the tray. The first of a series of some forty cigarettes follows breakfast, and then a strenuous mental workout with the papers.

Between 8:45 and 9, a delegation of the White House Secretariat glides in for a bedside conference. It usually comprises Marguerite ("Missy") LeHand, Marvin ("Marv") McIntyre and or Stephen ("Steve") Early. From them the President learns how many appointments he has for the day and how much time he can take out for writing speeches.

After the conference, the "Chief" slips into his clothes—unless, that is, there are reports on the table beside his bed which he wants to dig into before going to the office. The shirt which McDuffie brings in is always white with a soft collar; the suit is double-breasted and is either blue or gray. With none of these articles does the valet have to offer much help.

**Office**—By 10:30 President Roosevelt is at his desk in the executive wing of the White House. Here, against a background of ship models, Currier & Ives prints, and a stuffed tarpon, the executive day begins. The handsome oak desk is one of the least tidy in official Washington, owing to the Roosevelt inclination to hold on to the hundreds of gifts and curios which pour in every day. In addition to toy donkeys and pigs, there are likely to be several paper-weights, memorandum-pads, and books.

Inevitably there will be 200 or more letters, selected from a daily average of 1,800. These are disposed of with great rapidity with the help of "Missy" and "Marv." Some get answers dictated by the President, nine out of ten are answered by one of the secretaries.

The rest of the morning is taken up with conferences. Each conference is supposed to last from five to fifteen minutes, depend-

### F. D. R.'S DAY

ing upon the importance of the visitor. "Marv" tries to hold his chief rigidly to the schedule, but finds it difficult. If the President is enjoying his chat, he forgets about time and leads the conversation into a score of channels. When this happens, McIntyre pops into the office, watch in hand, to urge the visitor on his way.

**Lunch**—Some of Mr. Roosevelt's predecessors made lunch-time a two- or three-hour period of relaxation by returning to the White House to eat with their families, but the boss of the New Deal has discovered that, with eighty of 135 heads of Government Departments, Boards, Commissions, Authorities and Corporations reporting directly to him, he must budget his time sparingly. To accommodate callers who might otherwise never see him, he instituted "luncheon conferences" at which he is likely to digest with his toasted cheese sandwich, creamed potatoes, lettuce salad, prunes and milk, a complicated report from Harry L. Hopkins on the progress of the Works Program, or a financial resumé from the Secretary of the Treasury. Menus for these conferences are under the direct supervision of Mrs. Roosevelt.

After lunch there are more callers. Even his children have to make appointments to see him during the day. Between appointments he sandwiches in telephone chats with Congressional leaders and Cabinet heads, and long periods of name-signing (autographed pictures, letters, *etc.*), which the President numbers among the most boring of his routine duties. Also there are more papers to be read in the afternoon—three Washington dailies and four New York.

If there is a play-time period during the day, it comes between 5:30 and 6, when, with the help of his personal companion, Thomas E. Qualters, the President lowers himself into the White House swimming-pool and for half an hour splashes about with boyish verve. He goes up to the famous Oval Room, after his guests have gone, and does some of the most important work of the day. Here there are a chair and table copied from the comfortable ones Thomas Jefferson used at Monticello. The chair is equipped with a high back and long leg-rest; the top of the table twirls about so papers are always within reach. On the walls are the United States flag and the flag of the President, historical naval paintings, a portrait of Mrs. Roosevelt. On the mantelpiece, window-sills, and every other available plane surface are ship models.

Here the President pores over departmental reports which are more complicated than usual; here "Missy" takes dictation for very special letters; here is manufactured the new Roosevelt book; here he gets his one chance to day-dream.

**F. D. R.'S DAY**

And here the President's day ends. A little past midnight Mr. Irving Henry McDuffie glides into the cozy Oval Room. By 12:30 the lights on the second floor of the southwest corner of the White House are out.

[OldMagazineArticles.com](http://OldMagazineArticles.com)