

 BLOG



The Building of a Home

May 18, 2013

Shelter is necessary for the survival of the body, and houses provide that shelter; the building of a home, however, is a more tender necessity that sustains the heart.

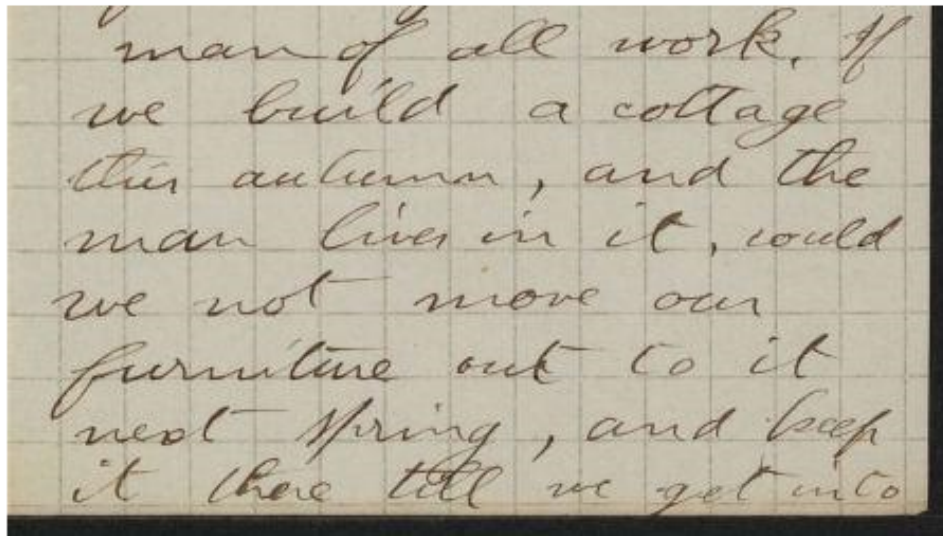
Theodore Roosevelt gave his whole heart to his first wife Alice. He was the epitome of the adoring husband, if his letters to her are any indication, and those letters reflect his devotion... or perhaps his romantic notions of marriage and his "sweetest of all little wives."

In **a letter to Alice** dated September 2, 1883, Roosevelt wrote, "I think all the time of my little laughing, teasing (sic) beauty, and how pretty she is, and how she goes to sleep in my arms, and I could almost cry I love you so."

Alice was expecting their first child after nearly three years of marriage and was staying with her parents at Chestnut Hill. Theodore was about to embark on his first trip to Dakota Territory, where he hoped to "kill some large game." The two had been apart for some weeks, and TR wrote about how much he missed his young wife.

"I have been miserably homesick for you all the last forty eight hours; so homesick that I think, if it were not that I had made all my preparations, I should have given up the journey entirely," he wrote.

TR did not "give up the journey, entirely," however. As if to alleviate his feelings of homesickness, he wrote more about making a home with Alice than about his upcoming trip. He had plans to build a house on the hill above Oyster Bay, where he had often walked as a child, and had already hired a man to begin work at the site - "road digging, well sinking, etc.," He mentioned that if they built a cottage there the man could live in it during construction. He wonders if he, Alice and the baby could move into the cottage the following spring and live there until the house was finished.



Detail, Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Alice Lee Roosevelt, September 2, 1883, MS Am 1541.9 (99). Houghton Library, Harvard University. Electronic copy sponsored by the Theodore Roosevelt Center at Dickinson State University. For reproduction or publication permission, contact the Theodore Roosevelt Collection, Houghton Library.

Little did he know that his hunting trip to Dakota Territory would lead to the purchase of a place that would become his part-time home within months of his first journey west. Alice died after giving birth to their daughter the following February. The house was unfinished.

His heart shattered, he turned to a rugged life in the badlands to alleviate his anguish. Working, riding, writing, and ranching, he slowly shook off his sorrow and he emerged from the badlands stronger, more determined, and ready to go home.

In time the house at Oyster Bay was completed and occupied by TR, his second wife Edith and their six children, one of whom was the product of his first marriage. Theodore finished the house for Edith, and her mark can be seen in the architectural details, as well as in the course of his life and career. She was a strong woman, and an equal match for her intellectual and energetic husband. Together, they created a vibrant home and filled it with children and memories.

Additional information about happenings at Sagamore Hill is located at the following URLs:

YouTube video about How I Love Sagamore Hill: A Photographic Collection by Xiomaro: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EgDIUAohZ4

How I Love Sagamore Hill: A Photographic Collection by Xiomaro: <http://www.xiomaro.com/TR.html#UZYVEcpTPLM>

Sagamore Hill Renovation Project: <http://www.nps.gov/sahi/parknews/index.htm>.