

National First Ladies Library
Canton, Ohio
July 23, 1999

**PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION**

National First Ladies' Library Event
Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
Canton, Ohio
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... (inaudible) to the McKinley's and to the library. I'm also delighted to be here again with Dr. Sheila Fisher, who has been an inspiration and a strong supporter and one of the reasons we are able to celebrate the library today.

And I'm particularly pleased to be here with two people whom I enjoy and admire so greatly—your Congressman and his general. Both Ralph and Mary Regula have contributed so much to preserving our nation's priceless heritage. And they are owed a great deal of thanks, not only by those of you who are represented by the Congressman, but from the rest of us as well. Because their contributions expand our understanding of historic preservation and extend our appreciation as to the much greater depth that historic preservation can and is playing in our nation's present and future.

As you may know, I came here this morning directly from the memorial service held for John Kennedy, Jr., his wife Carolyn, and her sister Lauren. I know that your thoughts and prayers, like mine and so many millions of Americans, are with these two families at this time of unbearable sadness and loss. As the President said the other day, "It is times like this that we really stop to recognize that as big and diverse as our country is, we can come together as a national family. We can come together in sorrow or in joy if it reflects the values that we honor most."

This afternoon, we're here to celebrate efforts to preserve for future generations some of that common American history that we all share and value so deeply. The story is not only of America's first families—in particular, First Ladies—but of families everywhere who come together, in good times and in bad, to make America what it is today. And as in most families, there are some who take on the special role of caretaker. Someone who makes sure that we keep and preserve our family photo albums and letters; who seeks to keep distant memories alive; and who won't let priceless pieces of our history—our nation's history—get lost or damaged.

Fortunately for all of us, Congressman Regula has taken on that role as steward, becoming one of the staunchest supporters in Congress on behalf of the national effort to "Save America's Treasures." It is thanks to his tireless leadership that Congress provided \$30 million in federal matching grants, enabling communities across the country and federal agencies like the National Park Service to preserve our nation's most significant treasures.

But as with most worthwhile endeavors, preserving America's treasures cannot—and should not—be solely a federal responsibility. Because after all, preservation in the United States has always involved both the public and the private sectors. Generous individuals, foundations, and corporations have always stepped forward. That is why we enlisted the

National Trust for Historic Preservation as our non-profit partner for Save America's Treasures. And I'm delighted that as of this week, we have been able to raise \$34.2 million in private funds—and those private funds are supporting projects around the country that tell the stories of our lives as Americans.

Over the past year, I've had the privilege to visit some 30 sites which the National Trust and its partners are saving and preserving—from George Washington's winter headquarters on the Hudson River, to the ancient dwellings of the Pueblo Indians in the Southwest, to the Breed Street Shul in Los Angeles. Each of these American treasures is a living textbook, a glimpse into the past, and a lesson for the future. And were it not for these preservation efforts, each one might very well have been allowed to crumble away, taking a piece of our history with it.

So that is among the reasons that I am particularly pleased to be here in Canton today, where this community has made such a strong commitment to preserve its history—and our nation's legacy.

I have just visited the restored Saxton-McKinley House—the home of our 25th president and his wife, Ida. That house now houses the First Ladies' Library. If you have not been there yet, I hope you will take the time to visit this extraordinary place. It is a perfect example of a preservation partnership, as a federal agency, a foundation, and an innovative project combined to make this a living site.

I saw so much in my short visit, and I commend all of you for it. Although I have been something of a student of first ladies since finding myself in this position a few years ago, there were many things that I had never seen before—including some priceless photographs of those who served as first lady and hostess for our first presidents. I was also pleased to see that a precious family heirloom—Ida McKinley's silver inkwell—has recently been presented to the First Ladies' Library [by the daughter of Ida's grand niece, Mary Gunn]. And it now sits where it always sat, here in Canton and in the White House, on Ida's personal writing desk in the parlor there.

As I looked at that inkwell, I marveled at how 100 years ago, Ida would sit at that desk and correspond with her friends and family by dipping her pen in ink. Today we tap away at a keyboard that instantly links us to the world. One hundred years ago, we drove from place to place in a horse and buggy, and could only dream of flying to far-away places. This week, we commemorate the 30th anniversary of man's first walk on the moon and the first of our shuttle missions ever to be commanded by a woman. In 1900, women did not compete in professional sports, and today we celebrate America's Women's Soccer Team as the World Cup champions.

So as I looked at Ida's inkwell, I thought about how the role of women—and first ladies—has grown and evolved over this past century, and how much we still needed to learn about their lives, their achievements, and their aspirations.

That's why Mary Regula's commitment to create the National First Ladies' Library is so important. Because now, especially, we understand how critical it is to preserve and document

that ever-evolving legacy of women's contributions to our nation. Today we've gathered here at the City National Bank Building, which, as Mary has explained, will be the future site of the First Ladies' Library Education and Research Center. And I'm very pleased that, as Kitty Higgins announced, this renovation has been designated as an official project of Save America's Treasures.

As I traveled to historic—and even prehistoric—sites around our country as part of our “Save America's Treasures” tour, again and again I have stood in a place preserved through the leadership of women—women like Mary. Almost a century ago, journalist Virginia McClurg and philanthropist Lucy Peabody persuaded the Colorado Federation of Women's Clubs to work to make Mesa Verde a national park. Ann Pamela Cunningham founded the Mt. Vernon Ladies Association to save George Washington's home. Alice Longfellow preserved her parents' home and belongings, including family papers and even the children's drawings. And today, more of us will be able to learn about the first ladies of our country because of the work and dedication of Mary Regula and all the other women who have worked with her, such as Sheila, and all the rest of you who are docents and contributors to this great project. And I salute and thank you very, very much.

What this project demonstrates is that as we approach the new millennium, we have a unique opportunity to expand our horizons and think more profoundly about what it means to preserve, and what values that preservation represents to us. Already, we are embracing more of our history and broadening our understanding of who did shape it. We're also widening the circle of who is responsible for taking care of and preserving that history. Saving our treasures is no longer a specialized or isolated practice of experts or curators. It is not even the province of just private citizens working by themselves alone. It is truly up to all of us, as you here in Canton have demonstrated.

Every community has a treasure in its own backyard that tells a unique story. And any American of any age can be a caretaker of our heritage, and thereby give a gift to our future.

As I was listening to the Pledge of Allegiance, I thought of the school children around America who have made such contributions. There were, for instance, school children outside of the Philadelphia area who learned about the Save America's Treasures campaign to save the home of Harriet Tubman, the courageous ex-slave who led so many other slaves to freedom. These students brought pennies to school every Friday and raised \$1,100 to help preserve that historic home. I think of the citizens of San Francisco who organized yard sales and sent in small donations to restore the beautiful Conservatory of Flowers overlooking Golden Gate Park, where families for generations had spent Sunday afternoons. And nearly a century ago, the more than one million school children from around the world who raised \$500,000 to build the McKinley National Memorial, which I will visit this afternoon.

These are the kinds of efforts that have always represented the best of America. And I think about how all of us can be imaginative in contributing to this history. The President and I started the White House Millennium Council because we knew we wanted to do more to mark this important passage of time. Certainly, we understood that this would be an opportunity for

great New Year's Eve parties. But more than that, it would allow us to take stock of who we are as Americans. And we chose as our theme, "Honor the past; imagine the future." That is what is happening here today.

I want to thank everyone who has made this gift to the future possible. I want you to stop and think about not only the tangible gifts—like the library and the soon-to-be renovated bank building—but even more important, perhaps, the intangible values that define us as Americans: Our responsibilities to one other. Our gift of freedom. Our commitment to respect and tolerate our diversity; to understand how unique America is. And our capacity to come together in sorrow and in joy to express the common values we honor most that bind us together.

One hundred years ago, President McKinley said, "Let us ever remember that our interest is in concord, not conflict, and that our real eminence rests in the victories of peace, not those of war." Those words—like our efforts to preserve America's treasures—honor our shared past. But they also serve—even a century later—as a blueprint for our common future.

I look forward to the lessons that will be learned and passed on through this library and the expanded understanding it will give us of the roles that these women played in our country's history. And by doing so, it will help to open our eyes to the kind of future that together we can imagine to make our country even greater. Thank you all very much.