

## Mrs. Bush's Remarks at Preserve America Visit to the Mount Estate and Gardens

The Mount Estate and Gardens  
Lenox, Massachusetts

4:07 P.M. EDT

MRS. BUSH: Thanks, everyone, and thank you, Barbara, for the very kind introduction and for everything you, and Stephanie and everyone with Edith Wharton Restoration has done for this historic estate.

Lord Tugendhat, thank you, and George Ramsden, thank you both very, very both for your contributions to The Mount. And thank you for traveling to join us here today.

I'd like to thank Janet Pumphrey, the chairman of your Board of Selectmen, for welcoming me here to Lenox.

I'm so happy to be here in the Berkshires, which really are breathtaking. Your town is blessed with both the beauty of God's creation and man's, because in addition to being a mountain retreat, Lenox is also a beacon of culture --literature, art, theater, and music.



Now, I'm told that another big attraction in Lenox is the Canyon Ranch Spa. (Laughter.) When people heard I was coming to Lenox for "preservation," I guess they thought maybe I was going there. (Laughter and applause.)

But today I'm here to congratulate Edith Wharton Restoration on the terrific work you've done to rescue The Mount, and to talk about how we can make sure our historical treasures, like Edith Wharton's home and library, are preserved for future generations.

Last year at the White House, when The Mount won a Preserve America Presidential Award, I was there to see Edith Wharton Restoration recognized for the transformation of this historic home. And at that ceremony, I determined that I wanted to see the home of one of my favorite writers myself. As a librarian and a lover of literature, I believe it's important for Americans to be able to visit the homes of our most renowned and beloved authors.

Edith Wharton designed and built The Mount in 1902, but by 1980, this once-beautiful estate had become an eyesore. Thanks to the dedication of each one of you with Edith Wharton Restoration, The Mount is now as Edith designed it. This is a very special place, and you've done a wonderful job restoring this home to its former glory.

The Mount is where Edith completed her first novel, "The Valley of Decision." She wrote one of her most famous books, "The House of Mirth," here. The Mount was her refuge and inspiration. This is where she formed some of her closest friendships, and where she met with those friends to discuss literature -- conversations that she treasured.

The physical structure of The Mount also offers us a window into Edith's mind, and reflects her interest in interior design. When Edith designed The Mount, she followed the principles she had developed in "The Decoration of Houses," rejecting the Victorian clutter of her day in favor of the elegant simplicity that's here in this house now.

When we read Edith's work, we understand how important it is to preserve this monument to her views on design. In Edith's chronicles of New York society -- like "The Age of Innocence" -- we come to know the people who populate her novels through the descriptions of their homes and furnishings. Design is as much a character of Edith Wharton's as Newland Archer, Lily Bart, or Ethan Frome.



The Mount is also a reminder of why it's so important to protect America's historical treasures. In 2003, President Bush announced the Preserve America Initiative, to encourage communities to preserve and care for our priceless cultural and natural heritage. Preserve America can help boost local economies, because recognized historical landmarks attract visitors and businesses to communities.

Since President Bush announced the initiative, we've honored historical organizations, history teachers, and entire communities for their commitment to preservation. In fact, 410 American communities have applied and then been accepted to be Preserve America communities. Next week, we'll recognize four more Preserve America Presidential winners, like The Mount was last year.

The Mount's restoration has been recognized with this Preserve America Presidential Award. You've received many other awards for your work, including a more than \$2.8 million grant from Save America's Treasures. Save America's Treasures, which works to help rescue the enduring physical monuments to America's tradition, has been very enthusiastic about The Mount, and I want to thank them for their very generous support for Edith Wharton's home.

I know that all of you are very happy to receive every one of these awards. But in December, you acquired something that I suspect you may have wanted a little bit more: Edith Wharton's personal library. This is an amazing collection that contains 2,600 volumes -- the books Edith collected, read, and cherished throughout her life.

Edith was self-educated. When she was 10 years old, she was first allowed to enter her father's library, and on that day, her life changed forever. During her childhood, that library was one of her favorite places.

And now you have her own collection, which documents Edith's personal and intellectual growth, and her development as a writer.

Many of these books contain notes and editorial changes that Edith made in her early editions of her own works. Several books have inscriptions from her close friends, who were historical figures in their own right -- people like President Theodore Roosevelt and Henry James.

This collection would not be here at the Mount without the help of Lord Tugendhat and George Ramsden, so thank you both very, very much for bringing Edith's library from England. And, of course, a special thanks to Robert and Elisabeth Wilmers for your generous gift that made the acquisition of this collection possible.

Congratulations to each and every one of you.

Thank you for showing me this beautiful estate and Edith's magnificent library. And thank you for your devotion to preserving America's literacy and historical treasures.

Thank you all and congratulations. (Applause.)

END 4:14 P.M. EDT