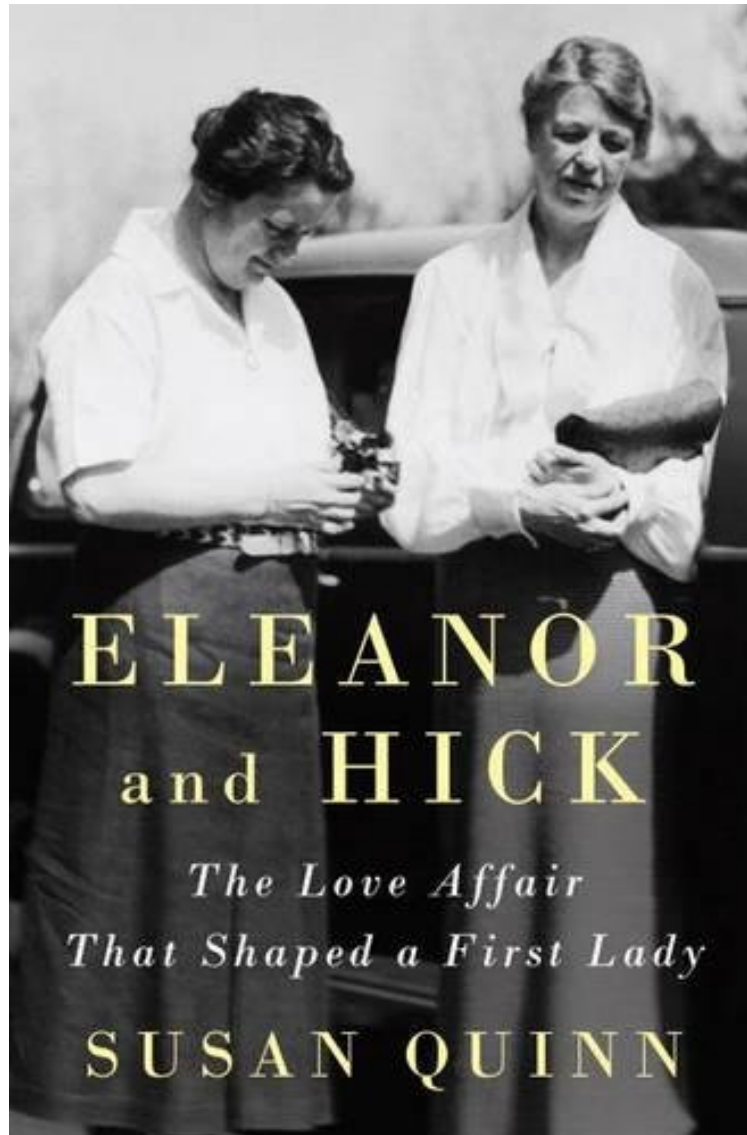


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Eleanor and Hick: The Love Affair That Shaped a First Lady

Susan Quinn

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Susan Quinn : Eleanor and Hick: The Love Affair That Shaped a First Lady before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Eleanor and Hick: The Love Affair That Shaped a First Lady:

203 of 207 people found the following review helpful. A penetrating look at one of the great women of our times By Neal Reynolds As an 83 year old, I am part of a homophobic generation, and as such, I initially felt uncomfortable with this book's allegation of Eleanor Roosevelt's being a lesbian. However, I gained a better understanding of Eleanor

Roosevelt, the woman and of her lover, reporter, Lorena Hickock. Through this book, I relived my early years, especially the WWII years. The book depicts the relationship between the two women with tenderness and understanding and this indeed impressed me. I found this to be a very easy and fast read, one that I've gained understanding from....not only understanding of the relationship, but also understanding of just what was going on through those years in which I was too young to have understanding of what was going on in the world. And so I recommend this book with only slight reservation. The author does wander a bit. However, that's not really bad. This is a good read for all those interested in the history of the Roosevelt years. I no longer feel disturbed by the author's allegations. I've gained a new perspective and I do strongly recommend this book.

53 of 55 people found the following review helpful. Sands of Time By BeatleBangs1964 In recent years, Eleanor Roosevelt's (1884 - 1962) bisexuality has been made public. For a number of years, she and her partner Lorena Hickock (1893 - 1968) developed a deep and close personal relationship. Both women had survived childhood abuse. Both chafed at the androcentric, chauvinistic world in which they lived. Both were drawn to each other. This is a very fast paced book and to the author's credit, no apologies are made for the fact that these two women loved one another. Another good thing about this book is that it shows how two women can successfully find love and it helps dispel homophobia, which sadly was the order of the day when these women met one another. The tone of acceptance can be found throughout the book and that is what makes it such a good read. It is well known that FDR had a mistress for many years. It is also well known that these two distant cousins who married did not have a marriage made in heaven. Their son Elliott Roosevelt chronicles this in his books about Eleanor and Franklin. Eleanor and Lorena wrote each other loving missives over the years which support the fact that they loved each other intimately. To author Susan Quinn's credit she presents this loving pairing in a straightforward and matter of fact manner, much as Hick covered the news during her career as a news reporter. These women in some ways appear to be obverse sides of a coin. Eleanor was the classic "poor little rich girl" whose society mother was disinterested in her. The then future First Lady grew up in an emotionally bankrupt house and had feelings of inferiority because of her appearance. Hick was born into poverty and became motherless at age 14. She went to work at a very early age and earned her diploma. For many years she enjoyed success as a news reporter despite an unsuccessful stint in college. She and Eleanor met when she was covering Franklin Roosevelt's first campaign for the 1932 election. It was then that the women developed feelings for one another which segued into intimacy. The only real complaint I have is that as other U.S. reviewers have noted is the shifting timelines. As the sands of time shift appears to be the mantra of this book.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Admiration, Inspiration for Eleanor, a heroine of her time By Sunny I've always enjoyed presidential history, both men and the women who were behind the president. If you have read FDR or FDR and Eleanor, the Roosevelt years, you may already know a lot of the material covered in this book. However, this time the emphasis is on the incredible women, Eleanor and Hick, who as First Lady and a news journalist, really shaped a lot of policy changes and made women see different choices were possible. It is well researched, but does not verify the extent of their relationship. It made no difference to me, I didn't need to know any extent of any physical intimacy for the period of time they were in each other's lives before events separated them. The bond of intimacy was very much one of supportive women, social causes, probably more intellectual than deeply physical. People used to be journal and letter writers. Eleanor needed people; Hicks seemed to need Eleanor more than anything besides her career. They were both misfits in their world with a great deal of emotional baggage from childhood of being unloved and not the social debutante. Eleanor came from a wealthy class; Hicks did not. Eleanor had difficulty feeling worthy and giving love (not that she didn't love) but FDR's polio and the strong influence of her mother-in-law, his need for the spotlight and mistress, often pushed Eleanor aside, except for being a worthy political helpmate. There is no doubt that polio and a political career deeply affected their marriage.

A warm, intimate account of the love between Eleanor Roosevelt and reporter Lorena Hickok a relationship that, over more than three decades, transformed both women's lives and empowered them to play significant roles in one of the most tumultuous periods in American history. In 1932, as her husband assumed the presidency, Eleanor Roosevelt entered the claustrophobic, duty-bound existence of the First Lady with dread. By that time, she had put her deep disappointment in her marriage behind her and developed an independent life now threatened by the public role she would be forced to play. A lifeline came to her in the form of a feisty campaign reporter for the Associated Press: Lorena Hickok. Over the next thirty years, until Eleanor's death, the two women carried on an extraordinary relationship: They were, at different points, lovers, confidantes, professional advisors, and caring friends. They couldn't have been more different. Eleanor had been raised in one of the nation's most powerful political families and was introduced to society as a debutante before marrying her distant cousin, Franklin. Hick, as she was known, had grown up poor in rural South Dakota and worked as a servant girl after she escaped an abusive home, eventually becoming one of the most respected reporters at the AP. Her admiration drew the buttoned-up Eleanor out of her shell, and the two quickly fell in love. For the next thirteen years, Hick had her own room at the White House, next door to the First Lady. These fiercely compassionate women inspired each other to right the wrongs of the turbulent era in which they lived. During the Depression, Hick reported from the nation's poorest areas for the WPA, and Eleanor used these

reports to lobby her husband for New Deal programs. Hick encouraged Eleanor to turn their frequent letters into her popular and long-lasting syndicated column "My Day," and to befriend the female journalists who became her champions. When Eleanor's tenure as First Lady ended with FDR's death, Hick pushed her to continue to use her popularity for good advice Eleanor took by leading the UN's postwar Human Rights Commission. At every turn, the bond these women shared was grounded in their determination to better their troubled world. Deeply researched and told with great warmth, *Eleanor and Hick* is a vivid portrait of love and a revealing look at how an unlikely romance influenced some of the most consequential years in American history.

The love affair between first lady Eleanor Roosevelt and journalist Lorena Hick Hickok has never been treated with as much care or attention as in Susan Quinn's *Eleanor and Hick*. Here, Quinn deftly traces the dissimilar but converging paths of these two complex women and gives new life to their intimate, dynamic relationship, against a backdrop of tremendous social upheaval. NPR.org, Best Books of 2016 Splendid. . . . Written with style and verve, and vigorously researched . . . filled with delightful details and provocative musings. Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Womens of Books* Fascinating. Susan Dunn, *The New York of Books* Making sense of this famous relationship has been complicated for historians, and Quinn concedes the impossibility of knowing what, exactly, happened between the two women physically. But, drawing extensively on their letters, she makes a strong case that the bond they shared was indeed romantic. . . . The abiding impression of this book is the intricacy of Roosevelt's intimate life. *The New Yorker* A poignant account of a love affair doomed by circumstance and conflicting needs. Combining exhaustive research with emotional nuance, Quinn dives deep to convey the differing characters of president and first lady. Richard Norton Smith, *The Wall Street Journal* Captivating In prose that reads as fluidly and mesmerizingly as fiction, Quinn tells the story of the First Lady's marital discontent and determination to live an independent life despite her prominent position in the public eye, and of the 30-year-long partnership and love that unfolded between Roosevelt and Hickok Beyond just a compelling love story, *Eleanor and Hick* brings to light a different side of the early-20th century White House, revealing the significant impact of this unconventional relationship on American political and cultural history. *Harpers Bazaar*, Best Books of 2016 An engrossing double biography. . . . Quinn brings new depth to their epic, three-decade-long love story. *New York Post* Quinn writes about both women with great sensitivity, from the childhood wounds they both bore to their influence on one another as writers and social activists. Meticulously researched, engagingly written, and emotionally resonant, this is a welcome addition to the Roosevelt book shelf. *The Boston Globe* A brisk, readable account of the intersection between these two women. *New York Times Book* Quinn sorts through the over three thousand letters the two sent to each other honest, passionate and principled correspondence to create a fascinating picture of the power and joy of the women's subversive act and its beneficial impact on the country at large. *Brit Co.* Quinn has produced an intimate book, tender and wise. Stacy Schiff, *The Washington Post* Fascinating. People A delightful account. 1843 (*The Economist*) Apart from chronicling a beautiful and complex friendship, Quinn also makes a strong case here that Eleanor Roosevelt was the most politically significant first lady America has ever had. *Bookpage* *Eleanor and Hick* marvelously weaves the lives of these two women together, showing their fierce independence and yet continual dependence on each other. The book also reflects a refreshing change in cultural opinion, most likely one that will usher in books on other historical homosexual relationships just as well-researched and kind. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* Quinn tells Eleanor's always astonishing story from a freshly illuminating perspective and brings forward to resounding effect intrepid, eloquent, compassionate, and tough Hick. With episodes hilarious, stunning and heartbreaking, Quinn's compellingly intimate chronicle tells the long-camouflaged story of a morally and intellectually spirited, taboo-transcending, and world-bettering love. *Booklist* A well-researched dual biography. . . . Fast paced and engaging, this work will enthrall readers of presidential biographies and LGBTQ studies. *Library Journal* Quinn deftly explores how the unlikely relationship evolved, relying on correspondence between the women, oral histories in archives, various government documents, and numerous other sources that allow readers to learn a great deal about normally private affairs. A relentlessly captivating study of two remarkable individuals who helped extend the roles of American women in the public policy realm. *Kirkus* s (starred) Susan Quinn's tender book of love and loyalty set during the most tumultuous time of the twentieth century reads like a whispered confidence. The forbidden relationship between First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and hard-scramble journalist Lorena Hickok is one of the great love affairs in history, and yet it has remained largely untold. Thanks to Quinn, their beautiful and courageous story is a secret no longer. Mary Gabriel, author of *Love and Capital: Karl and Jenny Marx and the Birth of a Revolution*, finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award In telling with vivid detail the story of a remarkable relationship between two strong women, Susan Quinn has provided a new way to look at some of the most momentous events of the twentieth century. *Eleanor and Hick* is delightful, moving, penetrating history. David Maraniss, author of *Barack Obama: The Story* Eleanor Roosevelt's love affair with ace AP reporter Lorena Hickok, carried on just outside public view during the most public years of their lives, fascinates and inspires in Susan Quinn's irresistible telling. *Eleanor and Hick* is a powerfully moving and vital story that could not have been told in its day, and alters radically what we thought we knew about America's most influential and best-loved First Lady. Megan Marshall, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life* This is an important and probably unique

biography in the history of the U.S. presidency. The special virtue of Eleanor and Hicks that Susan Quinn permits us to see how Eleanor Roosevelt's long, intimate relationship with Lorena Hickok helped her become not just a First Lady but a great one: courageous, committed, compassionate and complicated. A triumph. Nigel Hamilton, author of *The Mantle of Command* About the Author Susan Quinn is the author of *Furious Improvisation: How the WPA and a Cast of Thousands Made High Art Out of Desperate Times* and *Marie Curie: A Life*, among other books. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *the Atlantic*, and other publications. She is the former president of PEN New England and lives outside of Boston, Massachusetts. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

chapter one Beginning to Trust By the time Franklin Delano Roosevelt was nominated for president, in August 1932, some doubted whether a survivor of polio, paralyzed from the waist down, had the strength to conduct a vigorous campaign, let alone lead the country out of the worst economic depression in its history. Even his advisers were worried. FDR came up with a defiant answer to all of them: a nine-thousand-mile, twenty-one-day trip through seventeen midwestern and western states aboard the Roosevelt Special. It was a trip perfectly suited to both FDR's temperament and his physical limitations. As soon as the train came to a stop, FDR stepped out on the rear platform, gripping the arm of his son Jimmy. The railing cut off sight of his lower body, so the public saw only his broad shoulders and chest as he delivered his one-minute address. Its nice to be back in Dubuque, he would begin, flashing his wide smile, adding, Im just here to look, learn, and listen. His speech was patrician, but his message was friendly, and his physical courage buoyed his worried listeners. Between stops, FDR had only to look out the train window to see just how bad things had become. In Chicago, there were blocks of lifeless factories, overgrown parks, and rows of vacant stores with blackened windows. Shantytowns, clustered along the railroad tracks, sent up smoke from cooking fires. In the rich farm country of Iowa and Ohio, the farmhouses were unpainted, the fences were crumbling, and food was rotting in the fields. By the time the Roosevelt Special reached Seattle, Roosevelt had reason to speak in the name of a stricken America and a stricken world. Even in such terrible times, however, Franklin Roosevelt managed to enjoy himself. He loved everything about campaigning, from the enthusiasm of the local crowds to the sparring with the newspaper boys. FDR's sitting room was open to all comers: local politicians got on and off, and close advisers and future cabinet members huddled late into the night, plotting a future course for a country in crisis. FDR enhanced his listening and learning with healthy doses of jokes, storytelling, poker, and booze. Eleanor Roosevelt waited until the return journey from the West Coast to join the Roosevelt Special. She didn't share her husband's enthusiasm for the cheering admirers on the campaign trail. It seems undignified and meaningless but perhaps we need it! she once confided. She wasn't comfortable with the jocular atmosphere around FDR, either. Try as she might, Eleanor didn't always get the jokes and was uncomfortable with the teasing. On her honeymoon, she had refused to join a bridge game that involved money, because she had been raised to think it was improper. Drinking, especially, made her uneasy. She had her own reasons for disliking even the smell of alcohol: her father had drunk himself to death, and it now looked as though her brother was going down the same path. Eleanor had plenty to say about policy issues. But the politicians and brain trusters who surrounded Franklin rarely thought to include her in their discussions. The exception was Louis Howe, a wizened little man with a scarred face and bulging eyes who had been a true believer in FDR's greatness since they met in 1911. Eleanor Roosevelt had been repelled by Howe in the early days: he was an inelegant chain-smoking newspaperman, the sort of person she had been brought up to avoid. But Howe's attentions to her in 1920, when FDR was running for vice president on the ill-fated Democratic ticket, went a long way toward changing her mind. When Franklin was stricken with polio on Campobello Island, Eleanor and Louis became a team. They were the only ones who believed that FDR had a political future in those years immediately following the diagnosis. Howe came to understand then that Eleanor could keep Roosevelt aspirations alive while FDR recovered. He urged her to lower her high-pitched voice and suppress her nervous giggle when she spoke in public, and he encouraged her to get more involved in New York politics. In time, he even had the idea that Eleanor should run for president herself. For Louis Howe, the trip on the Roosevelt Special was a dream come true: he'd been working toward the presidential run ever since Franklin Roosevelt first served in the New York state legislature. Shrewd political operative that he was, Howe was confident that the Hoover campaign was doomed and that FDR was about to become the next president of the United States. Eleanor Roosevelt didn't want to believe it. The spark that Howe had ignited in her had led to a new, independent life. She was the cofounder of a craft workshop called Val-Kill Industries, a cofounder and teacher at a girls school, and an activist with other women in New York politics. What's more, she knew a fair amount about the ceremonial burden involved in being First Lady: her aunt Edith had been an exemplary one for her uncle Theodore. She didn't want any part of it. She had been as passionate as Howe about FDR's political rehabilitation. But she didn't share his excitement now, as the Roosevelt Special gained momentum. It was comforting, under the circumstances, when the campaign train went off on a side rail so that she could pay a visit to an old friend who would understand and sympathize. Eleanor and Isabella Greenway had endured coming out as debutantes in consecutive years both looked upon it as more duty than pleasure and Isabella had been a bridesmaid in the Roosevelt wedding, staying by Eleanor's side as they organized the myriad presents and even composing some of the thank-you notes. Since then, Isabella had married Robert Ferguson, an old family friend, and moved with him to Prescott, Arizona, in hopes that the dry climate would cure his tuberculosis. Since Eleanor and her husband kept friends forever,

it was natural for them to take a day off from the campaign trail, away from press and public, to visit Isabella and her husband in Prescott. Journalists were more obliging in those days: photographers agreed not to take pictures that included FDRs wheelchair. No picture of FDR in a crablike position, as his prone and helpless body was lifted in and out of his automobile, ever made the newspapers. Giving the family a day off to visit friends was all right with them. What did surprise and rankle the reporters, though, was that an exception was made for one rookie Chicago Tribune reporter named John Boettiger, who for some reason was asked to come along on the private visit. No one resented this slight more than Lorena Hickok. Hick was the only female reporter on the Roosevelt Special and one of the top female reporters in the country, and she'd gotten there by fighting for stories. Most women, fellow reporter Walter B. Rags Ragsdale noted, were society editors or worked the social beat. The rarities were women who fought and scratched their way to the street as regular reporters. Another reporter who knew her well noticed that a red rash tended to develop on the back of Hicks neck if she thought she was getting cheated out of a plum assignment. Hick had already complained when she discovered that all the men on the Roosevelt Special had compartments or drawing rooms in which to sleep and work, while she was stuck with a small berth up toward the engine, in the neighborhood of the local reporters. So naturally she was furious about John Boettiger, an inexperienced reporter, getting special treatment. She decided to complain to Eleanor Roosevelt about it. Hick didn't expect the reaction she got: Eleanor Roosevelt invited her to come along too. Hick was intrigued, and a little puzzled. Eleanor had kept her at a distance in the past. When she had interviewed Eleanor at the governors mansion, she had been invited up to the drawing room for an elegant tea, poured from a silver pot. On that day, like all others, Lorena Hickok dressed to be taken seriously: a soft silk shirt collar over a suit jacket and a skirt, of course. She was a presence. Her legs were shapely, her shoes sensible. She had a round face with a strong, determined jaw, and intense, penetrating eyes. At five foot eight, she was broad without looking fat. Though hardly a fashion plate herself, Hick had felt sorry for Eleanor. She could tell that Eleanor felt homely, despite her warm blue eyes and winning smile. She dressed abominably, in Hicks view: her skirt was too long, her blouse was a terrible green, and she wore a hairnet with an elastic that cut into her forehead. She had inherited the protruding front teeth of the Teddy Roosevelt branch of the family. Yet Eleanor had a natural elegance when she moved. Hick was struck by her long slender hands and the graceful way she manipulated the tea things. At tea that day, Eleanor kept everything friendly but bland. Hick had a strong impression that the governors wife didn't trust her. That was why she was surprised when Eleanor asked her to come along to Prescott: something had changed. Hick, ever the reporter, soon figured it out: it all had to do with a long conversation she'd had late one night with Eleanors secretary, Malvina Thompson, as the two of them kept each other company on the Roosevelt Special. Malvina Thompson, known to everyone as Tommy, was much more than the usual secretary: she was Eleanors fiercely loyal friend and traveling companion, always willing to work at Eleanors demanding pace. The two had met while both were working on Al Smiths 1928 presidential campaign. Afterward, Tommy became secretary to Louie Howe, but she worked on the side for Eleanor. By the time FDR was elected governor of New York, Tommy and Eleanor were a full-time team. Tommy was married until 1939, and had another man in her life after that. But most of her waking hours were devoted to the woman she called Mrs. R. Tommy and Hick had a lot in common: they were born the same year, came from the working class, smoked, drank, and held strong opinions. It was natural for them to gravitate toward each other when work was done. The train moved along at a measured pace during the day, when FDR was sitting up in his custom-built chair in the parlor car. If it went too fast, the jerks and jiggles made it hard for him to steady himself for reading and conversation. At night, the engineer made up for lost time, hurtling through the dark. It may have been a train whistle late one night that prompted Tommy Thompson to share a childhood memory with Hick about her father, who had worked as a locomotive engineer on the railroad. He would sound three short blasts on the train whistle in a private salute as the train roared past the familys apartment windows in the Bronx. It was such a touching idea and so at odds with Hicks own childhood memories that it prompted her to open up to Tommy about her painful past. Hicks mother had died when she was thirteen, leaving her to deal with her violent, abusive father. Within a year, he remarried, and the stepmother kicked her out of the house. From age fourteen on, she had had to make her own way in the hardscrabble pioneer towns of South Dakota, living in other peoples houses as a hired girl. When Eleanor heard Hicks story from Thompson, it changed her view of the tough AP reporter. Because her own life had been scarred by loss and disappointment, she was drawn to others who had suffered and struggled. After that, she began to suspect what Hicks fellow reporters already knew. There was the surface Hick: blasé and shock-proof, a tough-minded reporter who knew how to drink and smoke with the boys, and who fought for her rights. Then there was the tender-hearted and sometimes shy Hick underneath, who bore witness to the suffering of ordinary people in those terrible times. Long before she joined the AP, back when she was a reporter for the Minneapolis Tribune, Hick could be relied on to find and tell the most vivid stories of hardship: long, detailed pieces about girls who came to Minneapolis from little farm towns and got into trouble, about an injured worker who decided to crawl under a bridge and starve to death, about an organ grinder whose monkey was stolen. Hick was still looking for such stories on the campaign trail. Her fellow reporter Rags Ragsdale would often cover FDRs whistle-stop speeches while Hick circulated in the crowd and talked to people about their lives. Many times, she came back aboard the campaign train, Ragsdale remembered, fuming and almost tearful over a hard-luck story she had picked up from someone in the

crowd. There were unending hard-luck stories. During a stopover in Topeka, Kansas, Hick watched Franklin Roosevelt address thousands of deeply tanned, grim-faced farmers, some so ragged that they reminded one of pictures of starving Mongolian peasants in the rotogravure sections of the Sunday papers. They did not cheer. They did not applaud. They just stood there in the broiling sun, silent, listening. After her day with Eleanor in Prescott, Hick realized why rookie reporter John Boettiger was getting special treatment: he was having an affair with the Roosevelts oldest child, Anna, who was unhappily married to Curtis Dall. Not long after, both Anna and John would divorce in order to marry each other. The divorce was fodder for the gossip columns when it finally happened. But when Hick came back from her day with the Roosevelts and briefed her fellow reporters, she talked about the ranch and the barbecue, not the affair. It was the first of many family secrets she would keep. The more important discovery Hick made that day was that Eleanor Roosevelt was at least as fascinating as her husband. Lorena was as excited as I ever saw her when she came back, Ragsdale remembered. From this time forward it became hard for her to write with the usual AP restraint about Mrs. Roosevelt. In the past, Hick had avoided writing about politicians wives: fashion, teas, and charity events were womens page stuff, and shed escaped that long before, during her initiation at the Milwaukee Sentinel. Eleanor, in turn, resisted the curiosity of reporters, especially if it touched on anything personal. Her grandmother had taught her that it was unseemly to appear in the public eye. I gave as little information as possible, she explained in her first memoir, feeling that that was the only right attitude toward any newspaper people where a woman and her home were concerned. Eleanor had good reason to be wary of all reporters. As the Boettiger incident would make clear, things went on in the Roosevelt household that needed to be kept away from the scandal-loving press. Whats more, Eleanor disliked the usual portrayals of the devoted political wife at least as much as Hick hated writing them. In Eleanors case, as Hick would soon discover, that ceremonial role was a faade that had little to do with who she really was.