

Michelle Obama tours Executive Mansion

Posted 11/10/2008 8:04 PM |



By Joyce N. Boghosia, AP

First lady Laura Bush and Michelle Obama sit in the private residence of the White House Monday, Nov. 10, 2008, after the President-elect and Mrs. Obama arrived for a visit and tour. (AP Photo/The White House, Joyce N. Boghosian)

By Deb Riechmann, Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — From the kitchen to the Lincoln Bedroom and others cloaked in history where her daughters will nod off to sleep, Michelle Obama visited the White House living quarters Monday, led through the Executive Mansion's 33 rooms by someone who knows them well -- first lady Laura Bush, a resident for nearly eight years.

"She took her for a full spin," Bush's spokeswoman Sally McDonough said of the tour, which lasted about an hour. "They went in every single room. They spent time talking about their children and life at the White House."

Michelle Obama and her daughters toured the White House after her husband was elected to the Senate in 2004, but had no inkling then that she would someday live there.

Now, she's just weeks from moving in.

Laura Bush's personal tour included the famed Lincoln Bedroom, which she helped renovate, as well as where her daughters, Jenna and Barbara, lived. Having called the White House home for eight years, the first lady has put her imprint on nearly every part of the private residence.

She told Michelle Obama she was free to bring in her own furniture or switch out what was there, and reassured her that she could "really make the girls' rooms their rooms," McDonough said.

"The place is a museum," said Doug Wead, a former aide to President George H.W. Bush and author of a book on presidents' kin. "The principle rule: The higher up you go in the White

House, the greater the freedom to redecorate and change," he said, referring to upper floors of the private quarters.

During her visit to Washington, Michelle Obama checked out at least two of the city's top private schools for daughters, Malia, 10, and Sasha, 7. They now attend a private school in Chicago.

She also met privately in the Map Room with Adm. Stephen Rochon, director of the executive residence and chief usher.

"After the tour, the first lady and Mrs. Obama visited in the West Sitting Hall where they discussed raising daughters in the White House as Jenna and Barbara Bush were similar in age to Malia and Sasha when they visited their grandfather, President George H.W. Bush, during his presidency," said Stephanie Cutter, spokeswoman for the Obama-Biden transition.

Monday's pre-Inauguration Day ritual between the two women dates back 100 years.

On Dec. 11, 1908, Edith Roosevelt, wife of President Theodore Roosevelt, gave William Taft's wife, Nellie, a private tour. Nellie Taft overcompensated for her nervousness by acting a bit haughty, said Carl Sferrazza Anthony, historian for the National First Ladies' Library in Canton, Ohio. "After lunch as the two walked into the Green Room, Nellie quipped in a whisper loud enough for Edith to hear, 'I would have put that table over there.'"

Over the years, first ladies have shown little trouble putting aside politics when it comes to the tour -- even if their husbands are from different political camps. President Lyndon B. Johnson's wife, nicknamed Lady Bird, was long acquainted with Richard Nixon's wife, Pat, so the meeting was warm and friendly.

As they walked by the media on their tour, first lady Barbara Bush gave Hillary Rodham Clinton a warning: "They're going to be all over you," Bush said, according to Myra Gutin, a professor at Rider University in New Jersey who has written extensively about first ladies. Clinton thanked her for the advice, but said she already had firsthand knowledge about the pitfalls of dealing with the media.

Other tours have led to tense, uncomfortable moments.

During the Great Depression, incoming first lady Eleanor Roosevelt asked President Hoover's wife, Lou, to see the White House kitchens.

"Mrs. Hoover pulled herself up and said 'Mrs. Roosevelt, I have lived in this house for four years. I have never stepped inside the kitchen and I do not intend to do so now,'" Anthony said.

Jacqueline Kennedy had just delivered her second child by Caesarean section when she arrived for her tour. Her doctor had insisted she use a wheelchair, but she didn't ask for one and first lady Mamie Eisenhower didn't offer one.

"They said goodbye," Anthony said. "Mamie Eisenhower went off to her bridge game and Jackie Kennedy got into the limousine and pretty much collapsed and had to be in bed for weeks."

Copyright 2008 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.