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Presidential Visits Down East

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FROM THE COLLECTIONS
PRESIDENTIAL VISITS DOWN EAST

Although George Herbert Walker Bush transformed his summer home at Kennebunkport into a vacation White House, and Hannibal Hamlin, Nelson A. Rockefeller, and Edmund S. Muskie have come close, Maine has yet to claim a United States president as its own.

In spite of this, a number of sitting presidents have made campaign and pleasure trips down east. George Washington is said to have hooked a codfish off Kittery during a visit to the Piscataqua in 1789, and Bill Clinton rallied the faithful at Portland's Hadlock Field on October 7, 1996. Broadside, ephemera, and photographs documenting various of the intervening visits are part of the collections of the Maine Historical Society.

James Monroe made a successful progress through southern Maine in the summer of 1817. James K. Polk and his secretary of state, James Buchanan, visited the aging, but powerful merchant Asa Clapp in July 1847. In 1873 President Grant visited Portland and Bar Harbor and made an unscheduled trip to a North Haven inn. President Arthur stopped at Bar Harbor in 1882, followed by Harrison seven years later. Theodore Roosevelt, who had camped in the Maine woods as a boy, took the train to Bangor and other communities in 1902. On the same journey, he called on former Speaker of the House Thomas B. Reed, at the latter's Portland home. William Howard Taft preferred the more leisurely approach by cruising the coast in 1910 aboard the yacht *Mayflower*.

In August 1921 President Warren G. Harding was in New Hampshire when he accepted an invitation to play golf at Poland Spring. In those uncomplicated days, he decided to stop at a hospital in Oxford, but got turned around at Harrison, "landing far up among the Oxford Hills." His driver had to ask directions from the rather astonished locals before reaching the resort. Alas, the chief executive dubbed his first shot.



Franklin D. Roosevelt's love for Maine was probably only surpassed by that of President Bush. F.D.R. summured on the Canadian island of Campobello and spent much time off our coast, which he called "the most beautiful sailing grounds in the world." It was from Rockland, too, in 1941, that Roosevelt reported his secret meeting with Prime Minister Churchill and announced the "Atlantic Charter." With the notable exceptions of Truman and Reagan, all postwar presidents came to the Pine Tree State: Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter to campaign, and Eisenhower and Kennedy to relax. Ike went fishing at Lake Parmachenee and spoke at Colby College, while J.F.K. spent time under sail off Pemaquid.

This appears to be it for presidents visiting while in office. Of course, Franklin Pierce graduated from Bowdoin College. Bucksport's fabled Jed Prouty Tavern claims that Presidents Martin Van Buren, William Henry Harrison, John Tyler, and Andrew Jackson all slept there. John Adams was a practicing attorney here prior to the Revolution, and no doubt other chief executives touched shore during their lives. A growing information file at the MHS Library is expanding our knowledge.

William David Barry