

June 2, 1934

[Groton School, Groton, Mass.]

FDR Speech File

--0708

INFORMAL EXTEMPORANEOUS REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
GROTON SCHOOL, GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS
June 2, 1934

(Your stenographer was instructed, because of conditions imposed by the Headmaster, not to take a position in the Dining Hall where the President was to speak, from which he could infer that he was not to take the President's remarks. It seemed to be the feeling that the President had come not as President but as an alumnus, and none of the atmosphere of his office was to attach itself to the ceremonies incident to Prize Day at Groton.)

(The following omits the opening of the speech and there are gaps due to the impossibility of hearing the President above the conversation of those in the immediate vicinity of the stenographer.)

..... because we are still all Groton boys and I don't think we will ever grow up in regard to Groton.

Mr. Peabody has kept this School in touch with the changing events of time and today it stands not only for educational service but, in our general American life, the School represents the best of civilization as it is today. But, with it all, these boys coming out from school this year are carrying with them the same thing that we carried with us thirty and forty years ago.

We have learned something more than mere education, we have learned, I think, in this School to keep on

Franklin D. Roosevelt Library

This is a transcript made by the White House stenographer from his shorthand notes taken at the time the speech was made. Underlining indicates words extemporaneously added to the previously prepared reading copy text. Words in parentheses are words that were omitted when the speech was delivered, though they appear in the previously prepared reading copy text.

(Your stenographer was instructed, because of conditions imposed by the President, not to take a position in the Dining Hall where the President was to speak. From which he could infer that he was not to take the President's remarks. It seemed to be the feeling that the President had come not as President but as an alumnus, and none of the atmosphere of his office was to attach itself to the ceremony in-olent to Fairs Day at Groton.)

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Mr. Paschke has kept this School in touch with the changing events of time and today it stands not only for educational service but, in our general American life, the School represents the best of civilization as it is today. But, with it all, these boys coming out from school this year are carrying with them the same thing that we carried with us thirty and forty years ago.

We have learned something more than mere education. We have learned, I think, in this School to keep on

learning, to adapt ourselves, to seize our opportunities as we go through life to meet the great changes that are taking place from day to day. And all through life, one has the feeling that if he could only apply even in some small measure the teachings of Groton, he will be able at least to live up to what the School would have him do.

We know today, no matter what walk of life we live in and no matter what part of the world we live in, that there have been economic changes and social changes taking place. I believe that in the family of Groton graduates there is a larger fertility, a greater ability to learn those things and to adapt themselves to the changing conditions and yet to keep on playing according to the rules of the game.

After all, one of the things we got out of the School was to learn to play the game according to the rules and perhaps, in these later days, some of us have come to realize that a very large number of millions of people have been compelled to play a game of life without many rules, a game in which there was selfishness, in which there was opportunity taken not to break the rules of that game but to let down on one's own code of rules

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so that selfish advantage might be taken of those who could not fight back.

So, because of this, we are beginning to ask not just schools or universities or professions to play the game of life according to rules, but we are asking a great Nation to adopt some of the rules that are based, in their fundamentals, on the teachings of Groton.

Now, they are not the kind of rules which are imposed, because in the world, as in Groton, the rules are not made just by a Headmaster, whether it be Mr. Peabody or President Roosevelt. The rules that grow up as a result of experience do not come from just getting one team together and laying down rules; they come because we get all the teams and all the coaches to put their heads together and evolve some kind of rules that will work for the general good. That is what we are trying to do today. (Applause)

..... Let me tell you a little story. When I went down to Warm Springs last Fall, a very good friend of mine who happens to own a great many cotton mills, a splendid man, came to see me. He told me how things were, in general, and then he said, "I want you to come over

and see what has happened in the past few months." I said, "Yes, what is it?" "Well," he said, "come over and see what they do with the first Saturday holidays they have ever had." Now, this is what happened to a cotton mill down in the South, a cotton mill that employed a population of fifteen or twenty thousand people, most of them the same kind of English stock which settled the Nation. And they were people who did not have even the fundamentals of education, people who had never been outside of their own hometown, people who did not know what play was. After a certain event took place, in that particular industry they were put on a five-day week and within two weeks a committee of the employees came to this friend of mine and said, "What will we do with our Saturdays; we have never had Saturdays off before? Do you think we can start what they call 'athletics'?" My friend said, "Yes". It turned out that they did not know how to play games, they had to learn. They learned how to play football and baseball and to swim. Everybody in the town became athletically minded and it became necessary to provide equipment and places for them to play. Then, one Sunday

morning after services, the Pastor said, "Wait a minute, don't go. How many people in the congregation have ever seen a steamship?" It developed that virtually none of them had ever seen the ocean or had ever taken a swim in salt water or been in a speed boat. So the next Saturday they got in a train, two hundred strong, and went to Savannah and went swimming and saw the sights.

They have built two more schools because so many children had been let out of the mills that they had to provide schools for them. (Applause)

Then we have the other side of the picture. Last year we were getting a great many reports as to conditions. They were coming in from time to time. We heard, for example, of families living in abandoned coal mines and in coke ovens, families of men who had been working for the coal companies and the steel companies and who had been thrown out of employment because of the lack of work. One of my friends happens to be the head of a great steel company and when I told him what I knew about this, about what was going on, he went down there on the first train he could get and changed the conditions.

From the standpoint of people in every walk of

life, whether they be engaged in the largest form of business or the smallest form of business, whether they be people on a farm or people in a profession, I believe very firmly that we are entering into a period where we can ask this whole Nation to live up to the simple rules of life, the rules of the game that we were told about and taught in this School many years ago.

And so, on this Fiftieth Anniversary of Groton School, I have come back to renew my faith, because I believe my faith, my faith in God and my faith in my country, comes most of all from having been here at School under Mr. and Mrs. Peabody. (Applause)

And so, Mr. and Mrs. Peabody, I am merely going to say that we graduates and masters of Groton through all these years have come back to greet you, to greet you two who have helped us so greatly to live. (Prolonged applause)