

August 30, 1934

[Roosevelt Home Club Members, Hyde Park]

FDR Speech File

INFORMAL EXTEMPORANEOUS REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE ROOSEVELT HOME CLUB MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

MOSES SMITH'S COTTAGE

August 30, 1934, 4.30 P.M.

(The President was introduced by Mr. Erden D. Acker.)

This is a very nice welcome-home party. I am certainly very glad to get back again.

About a year ago, a Constitutional amendment called the Norris Amendment was adopted by a sufficient number of States to make it a part of the Constitution. They made a great mistake when that amendment was adopted because it continued the old pernicious practice of having the Congress sit in Washington all through the lovely Springtime and it has meant that for another two Springs I have got to be in Washington instead of Hyde Park.

As a matter of fact, as you know, I have only been here for about 48 hours since last Fall and in the meantime I made a good many voyages into a good many places. When I got back here on Sunday, one of my neighbors gave me a very severe shock when he came up and shook my hand and then looked at me and said, "My, how fleshy you have got." (Laughter) And then, to cap the climax, one of these people - special writers -- I think they call them 'columnists' or something like that -- made the assertion, and of course anything that you see in the paper in categorical form must be true, he said that I put on twelve pounds. Well, I resent

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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.

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This is a very nice welcome-home party. I am certainly

very glad to get back again.

About a year ago, a Constitutional amendment called the Norris Amendment was adopted by a sufficient number of States to make it a part of the Constitution. They made a great mistake

when that amendment was adopted because it continued the old partisan practice of having the Congress sit in Washington all through the lovely Springtime and it has meant that for another two Springs I have got to be in Washington instead of Hyde Park. As a matter of fact, as you know, I have only been here

for about 18 hours since last Fall and in the meantime I made a good many voyages into a good many places. When I got back here on Sunday, one of my neighbors gave me a very severe shock when he came up and shook my hand and then looked at me and said, "Hi,

how lively you have got." (laughter) And then, to cap the climax, one of these people - special writers - I think they call them - columnists or something like that -- made the assertion, and of

course anything that you see in the paper in categorical form must be true, he said that I put on twelve pounds. Well, I protest

it. But of course you cannot quarrel with the press - you all know that. He just added a little figure one in front of the true gain - I did gain two pounds - and I came up here with the perfectly serious intention of taking off five. But there is a certain quality to Dutchess County milk and my mother's cooking, and the air that you breathe; I don't believe I am going to make good my objective.

I have had, since Congress went home, an exceedingly interesting trip. I did the queer and strange thing of going almost to the Equator in July. As a matter of fact, just between ourselves, I went to Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Cartagena, and Colombia, and the Canal Zone and Cocos Island, which is only a few degrees from the Equator, and Hawaii, and I never felt the heat until I got back in northern Montana, up next to the Canadian border. It was a very wonderful trip, took me to a lot of places I hadn't seen before, took me to a number of territories and dependencies of the United States which I had wanted to see because of the fact that you and I as Americans are responsible for them. The people in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, and the Canal Zone and Hawaii, no matter what their racial origin may have been, are still our fellow-citizens, and as such we have a very distinct responsibility for them as long as the American flag floats over them. So I wanted to see what some of their problems were at first hand; to see whether this great nation of ours was doing the right thing by these

fellow Americans of ours.

And then, on the way back, coming across the continent, I had the opportunity of seeing a number of very large public works which had been undertaken, partly to relieve the unemployment of the present time, but equally to develop great regions of our country in the future for the benefit of future Americans.

Of course you have heard me before -- you have heard me very often talk about things growing up like Topsy. Things have grown up like Topsy in a great many places in the country and we are paying the penalty today. The simplest illustration, quite aside of the problem of this year's drought, is the fact, as you and I know, that a great deal of land was taken up by people from the East and from the Middle West and put into cultivation -- land that ought never to have been cultivated. And so we are engaged as a nation in undoing mistakes of the past, rectifying them so that in the future we won't be paying so much of a penalty for those mistakes as we are paying today.

I always think in crossing the Continent about the people who went there -- went out West -- and I often wonder whether we people back home realize our responsibility. I think it was Dr. Poucher here today who first dug out the facts -- Dr. Poucher or Miss Helen Reynolds. When I was a small boy I used to go hunting up in the Town of Clinton, which isn't far from here as you know, and when I was a boy people used to talk about a certain section north of the Town of Clinton around Brown's Pond

they called "Kansas". Nobody ever knew why it was called Kansas, but it was called Kansas locally. We dug into the facts -- tried to look up the origin of the name and finally the best solution of the problem seemed to be this: That somewhere around 1850, when the State of Kansas -- I guess it wasn't even a state then, just a territory that had been opened for the white man -- when it was being developed by railroads that were being pushed across the prairie, some enterprising agent of the railroad, and of course every railroad out through that section was being presented in most cases with every alternate square mile or section of land on both sides of the track, which was a pretty handsome thing for those railroads, but didn't keep them out of the hands of the receivers, however -- and they sent back agents here through the older, settled parts of the country to get people to go out there. I take it that right here in our county there are a good many acres of what we might call "marginal land" that were settled by the Dutch and English and Scotch and Irish that ought never to have been settled, and in those days there were not only marginal lands in the county but marginal families, and I am sorry to say that there are a lot of marginal families in this town and county today, and you and I know it.

This agent went to Poughkeepsie, and it all came out in the papers in Poughkeepsie in the period, and with a horse and buggy he went out through the town and county. He got up into the town of Clinton and he had what you and I would call prospectuses today about this far land of Kansas, and he persuaded about

six or eight families north of Brown's Pond to accept his offer, and to get on an emigrant train which was to leave a week later from Poughkeepsie. They only had a week to move but these neighbors of ours of nearly a hundred years ago just closed up house and closed up the barn and went. They were behind in their taxes, probably. They were poor. They didn't see any future living up here in the Town of Clinton, so they decided they would move out to the new prairie land. So they went down to Poughkeepsie and got on the emigrant train and disappeared out of our county. Possibly they have kin who still live here. And it is an interesting fact that when I go through the United States, west of the Mississippi, there is hardly a state that I go into on any trip that somebody doesn't come up to me and say, "Governor", or "Mr. President, do you know a family back in Dutchess County named so-and-so?" And I say, Why, yes, I have heard the name." And then they would say, "Why, she was my grandmother" or "He was my grandfather." And they would ask, "Do you know what part of Dutchess County they lived?" Of course, I didn't know where grandpa had lived in Dutchess County 75 years ago. But there are people from this county all over the United States, especially out through the Middle West and Far West and they have a certain amount of pride of ancestry and they are asking today, trying to find out something about grandmother and grandfather and great-grandmother -- wanting to know something about the place they came from.

It rather thrills me to think of how this country all ties in together in that we, and when you come right down to it everyone of us has, proudly, an enormous number of cousins - they may be distant cousins - living in all sort of places in the United States, that we haven't any idea of, people that we never heard of in all our lives, and that is one reason why I am always thrilled when I go through the country. It is the fact that we have a solid nation. I think I have told you the story before, it is always worth repeating, the comparison that Lord Brice, the historian who was Ambassador in Washington twenty or thirty years ago, used to make between the United States and Europe; that here we have come from all kinds of stock, all kinds of nations in Europe, and yet here we have, most of us, got half a dozen different racial strains in us and yet here we are, all Americans; over three thousand miles one way and two thousand the other, talking the same language and essentially thinking along the same lines. It is a pretty thrilling thing, and Lord Brice used to go on and compare the struggles between nations in Europe, many of them nations that you could put inside half the State of New York, populations in those nations that you could put into half the State of New York, all fighting each other all the time, on economic lines and social lines, on war-like lines. Yet, excluding Russia, all the rest of Europe would pretty nearly fit into the United States.

Lord Brice would go on to say, "You are singularly blessed in America, because when there are new things to be done

you have got - not a melting pot - you have got a trying-out system through the different States. You don't have to do it all over the country at the same time, except in crises and emergencies, and when you people have crises and emergencies you seem to get together and keep together very well until the crisis or emergency is past. You can try out experiments along some one economic problem or another economic problem, to see if it works, or compare it with other similar experiments in other parts of the same country and gradually work out the solution of any problems that are cropping up every day".

And so while on the surface of things this country around here, and Dutchess County, looks fine, looks the way we want it to look - no drought, pretty good crops, while on the surface things are in better shape than they have been in a good long time, and I believe that the Home Club performs a real service in this town because it has given people an opportunity to learn more about problems, not just of the town, but of the country as a whole. But I hope very much, and I know you won't mind me saying this, I hope very much that the Home Club will more and more have meetings, and people coming to address those meetings who will tell the truth about conditions and about the methods that are being used to try to solve those conditions. The more we do that the more we will realize that if a farm family is on the verge of starvation in North Dakota, we people in the town of Hyde Park are helping to pay to keep

that family from actual starvation; if we have made mistakes in the settling of the country in the past, we in the Town of Hyde Park have got to pay to correct those mistakes. In other words, that we have a definite stake, not merely the spiritual side of it, or the social side of it, or the patriotic side, but the actual financial side of it. We people in the Town of Hyde Park, no matter whether we like it or not, we are paying, and will have to pay for the correction of mistakes that were made in other parts of the country in the past, and to pay to get things better.

Most of us, the great majority, see the country as a whole, see that unless we help to raise other people, they are going to drag us down and most of us are very willing to bear our share and to work for the attainment of the national objective.

By the way, I didn't know I was going to make an address until Moses told me so about five minutes ago, but I have been going on delivering not an address but a sermon.

I do wish that everybody in this country has a chance to know every part of the country, every other part where they don't live. I am awfully proud of the country and awfully proud of the way we are realizing our national responsibilities, and am very certain that the good people of our town - I know the members of the Home Club are all right, and I believe that most of the other people who don't belong to it will be willing

to go along and cooperate in a big program that has nothing to do with party and nothing to do with section, trying to be square to all, Republicans and Democrats and Socialists, and everybody else, no matter what they call themselves, no matter which party or church they belong to.

I am glad to see you all, glad to be back, and sorry that Congress will probably be in session again in the Spring, but I do hope that I will be able to stay here for another month, and if possible, violate all precedents by taking off a few pounds.