
Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”

The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945

**Series 2: “ You have nothing to fear but fear itself:” FDR
and the New Deal**

File No. 1069

1937 September 11

**Hyde Park, NY –
Remarks to the Roosevelt Home Club**

STATEMENTS FILE

INFORMAL, EXTEMPORENEOUS REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
at the Annual Gathering of the Roosevelt Home Club
Moses Smith's Farm at Val-Kill, New York
September 11, 1937, 3:15 P.M.

(On the platform, among others, were Mrs. Roosevelt,
Mrs. O'Day, Mayor Spratt, Judge John E. Mack, James Townsend and
Arthur Smith, the latter newly elected President of the Roosevelt
Home Club.)

MINE HOST, PRESIDENT ARTHUR AND JOHNNY:

I am awfully glad that this has become a ~~family~~ established
annual occasion and I hope it will go on through all the years.

I wonder how Spratty (Mayor Spratt) in his speech had spoken
of the rigors of official life) would feel if he had to sleep in a
strange house about ten months out of the year the way I do. I can't
even go home at night. (Laughter) I don't know, I suppose there are
six or eight acres on the south side of the White House grounds, but
we country people, down there we call it the back yard. And so it
always seems like a city, even if you live in a huge affair like
the White House, comfortable as it is.

I wish I could get back here a little bit more often, and
I wish, when I do get back here, I could have a little bit more time
for myself and for the neighborhood. As a matter of fact, in spite
of that famous fishing trip, ^{where plane} we had a ~~pismim~~ arriving with a huge
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Present Home Chat

had more than two or three hours since I came back from Washington this time to myself, largely, of course, due to the world conditions, and they are not any better than they seem to those of us who read the newspapers. They are pretty serious and I am glad, as Mrs. O'Day said, that we are going to do everything we can in the United States, not only the people of the United States but the Government of the United States, to keep us out of war. (Applause)

Some people laugh at planning. Well, keeping out of war requires some planning, just as much as running things in these school districts takes some planning. In the old days people did not have to plan very much. A good many years ago I helped to edit a book reproducing the town records, the early town records of the Town of Hyde Park. Even then there had to be all kinds of planning -- that was well over a hundred years ago -- to protect the community against certain dangers. Well, they were local dangers. They had fence viewers and pound masters and all kinds of things that we have been able to get rid of with the progress of civilization. They did not know a lot of things in those days that we know today. If they had known them, we would be a whole lot better off today.

In an old Poughkeepsie newspaper of 1841 -- I think it is just about a hundred years ago -- the man who owned this farm that we are standing on at this time produced the largest yield of corn of any farmer in Dutchess County, a very much larger yield than almost anybody in Dutchess County could possibly raise today.

Well, Moses knows and I know what this farm was like when we came here. It was brought to a condition that was caused by lack of planting. Well, you could not blame them seventy-five and a hundred years ago for putting nothing back into the land because the land was virgin land and, after all, the main thing was to get all the cash you possibly could out of the land. Dutchess County was the granary of New York City and the more corn you could ship down there the richer you were. But of course we know today that if our ancestors and the original owners of this land of ours had known enough about agriculture, as much as we do, and had put things back into the soil, we would be a whole lot better off in these modern times. And so it goes; we have had a lot of narrow escapes because we haven't thought much beyond the end of our own noses.

I was driving through the middle part of the County the last time I was here in early August and I was struck by the number of lovely streams we have in the County, not only the larger creeks, like the Wappingers, but also a lot of the smaller creeks, and it occurred to me what a wonderful escape we had. I don't suppose there are more than a dozen people who remember^{the} escape we had. John Mack will because he, to a certain extent, ^{the} were responsible for the escape. Back only about fifteen years ago there was a bill introduced in the Legislature by the New York City representatives to give the city of New York the right to come up into Dutchess County and create a great water system, the watershed with reservoirs on

the headwaters of the Wappingers Creek, the main branch and the branch that runs up towards Clinton Hollow, and the same thing with the headwaters of the Roeliff Jansen Kill, which runs along the boundary, a large part of the boundary, between Columbia and Dutchess Counties. The bill, as I remember it, passed one House and yet there was hardly anybody in the County of Dutchess that woke up to the fact that our resources were being taken away from us.

I was south at the time. I telegraphed to John and John went up to Albany and we succeeded in preventing the passage of the bill. In other words, we were just thinking to the ends of our own noses and no further. As I remember it, the newspapers of the County took the view that the purchase of these lands for the reservoirs would bring a lot of money into the County, forgetting entirely that while it might bring some cash into the county, and while it might put a lot of people to work for two years or three years or four years, it would take, after that was over, most of the water supply out of the county, and also the water level and make ^a/vast acreage, thousands and thousands of acres, uninhabitable. There would be no purchasing power left, there would be reservoirs that nobody could use -- you could not swim or boat on them. There would be no agriculture, nothing at all and nobody employed except a few people to watch the dams. And all for a few dollars today, not thinking about the future.

Well, that was an escape that the county had and there were very, very few people in the county that woke up to the danger at that time. I think most of us are very happy today that we saved the water of this county because, as we see things now, we know the real demand there is on the part of people from the outside, New York City and other places, to come up here and establish homes, the real chance there is ~~is~~ plan for permanent lakes in the county, for a better water supply, to bring people out to join us and increase, incidentally, not only our population but the wealth of the county.

I use that just as a local illustration. You can go on in a thousand different ways. Whoever thought a hundred years ago about the system of highways we have today? I can remember, when I was a small boy, that the people who owned land in the county paid practically nothing in the way of highway taxes. They did pay in teams and labor and every farmer was assessed so many days with his team of oxen or his team of horses and a couple of men to work on the roads. It saved us a lot of money but you can't keep roads going or build roads that way today, so we have come down to a cash basis.

I have been a little amused, as most people in the town of Hyde Park have, by the outcry by certain -- what shall I say? -- groups in the county against the construction of the East Park -- Rhinebeck Highway. However, it is being built (applause) and I ~~was~~ ^{had} a hat on it. (Applause) One of the primary reasons it got built

Green

was that two years ago I spoke to Fred ~~XXXX~~, the Superintendent of Public Works in Albany and I said, "Fred, you have been promising me that highway for ten years." I said, "Fred, I bet you a hat you won't get it started in two years;" and he came under the wire by ten days and I bought him a hat and I am glad to ~~pay~~ buy it. (Applause)

As a matter of fact, on the building of that highway you may be interested to know this little fact: It goes away back to a conference I had with the Highway Department long before I became Governor, somewhere around 1925 or 1926~~x~~ at that time the traffic on the Post Road was getting very, very heavy, and the accidents were increasing. As I remember it, it was before it was widened out to the present width, but it was a good road. In this conference it was laid down, as a matter of state policy, that eventually, because of the increase of automobiles, the State would try to have two parallel State highways all the way from Westchester to Albany in order that the traffic on the road next to the river could be relieved and part of it diverted to the other road.

Way back then, ten or twelve years ago, it was determined on the state map that the parallel road on this part of the river would be this road right out here at the end of the lawn. In other words, that the road from Poughkeepsie north would follow up along Violet Avenue, the Creek Road, to Rhinebeck and there they would take, as the second road, what they called the River Road west of the Post Road up past Anandale and Riverdale into Hudson. In other

words, this is nothing new in spite of what people have called the political aspect in getting a highway into the town of Hyde Park. We are, all of us, mighty glad to have it and I am glad I ~~won~~ my bet and so are you. (Applause)

I would like to keep on talking about many things all afternoon. I never know quite what to talk about or when to quit.

I hope -- I cannot tell definitely -- but I hope between now and November I will be able to spend a good deal more time here at Hyde Park. (Applause) And I hope that things are going to quiet down internationally so that I will only have to work four or five hours a day instead of ten or twelve. And, in spite of all he said about the job, I would willingly swap with George Spratt and then maybe I would look as healthy as he does. (Laughter)

It has been perfectly fine to see you. I wish we could transfer some of these parties to the White House lawn. We did have one awfully nice party last year and I was awfully glad to see those of you who came down and I hope that you also will return this call during the coming year.

It has been fine to see you. (Prolonged Applause)

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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.

(Underlined material not in transcript before this point)

... about the same territory, the same conditions giving a sound and full rock base which as I

saw it is greater in size than I have ever seen before and although still strong enough to stand

it seems to have lost some of its strength so rapidly that I fear it will not long last. I have seen many more to the north but these stand against mountains which I could not find. I think the main reason for this is that there is no water available to serve as a source of energy. The streams which come down from the mountains are very small and, indeed, because we

are at the bottom of a valley, there is little water available

I have never seen any water in a road bed nor since I have I
not seen one in which a road has been built on top of it. There
is also in fact no water at all. Consequently our car has always
had a dry engine and a bad one at that. Last night we had
a good rain which gave us a chance to wash the car and
the engine but even I fear that the water will not be enough
to keep the engine running. We have had to stop twice
since we started work here and I wish you would go out and give
me some advice about what to do. Please let me know if you can

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