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. 1096

1937 October 13

Poughkeepsie, NY – Dedication of new Post Office
INFORMAL, EXTENSPARAJEUS REMARKS OF THE
PRESIDENT AT THE DEDICATION OF THE NEW
POST OFFICE AND IN COMMEMORATION OF THE
TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE FOUNDING OF THE CITY OF POUGHKEEPSIE,
NEW YORK, OCTOBER 13, 1907.

Mr. Chairman, Mayor Spratt, Mr. Postmaster, ladies
and gentlemen:

I have come today, not in an official capacity, not
to make a speech, but as one of your neighbors to take part
in your celebration.

Before I say anything about the history of Poughkeepsie,
let me straighten out this matter of my being an architect.

I think the easiest way to put it is this: If, when
this new Post Office is completed and the murals are in place
and you good people of Poughkeepsie have had a chance to look
at it, day after day, if, then, you like it, I will take all
the credit in the world. But, if you don't like it when it is
finished, why, I had nothing to do with it whatsoever.

As a matter of fact, what the Secretary of the Treas-
ury has said to you about government architecture is well worth
further study. The government every year builds a great many
buildings in order to conduct government business more efficiently.
The principal criterion for putting up a new building is, of
course, need. The second is economy. It probably is better, in
most cases, for the government to own a building than to rent a
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All over the United States, there are scattered the
most terrible monstrosities of architecture perpetrated by the
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of them were built during an unfortunate period of art, but in
these latter years we think that we have returned to the simpler
forms, returned to practical architecture, which, at the same
time, has beauty.

And during these past four or five years, partly be-
cause of the situation of unemployment in the Nation, we have
been enabled to bring into the Government service many, many
people who otherwise might have been out doing private work. To
these much credit is due for the improvement of the architecture
of all the Federal buildings in every county and every state of
the United States.

Poughkeepsie is to be congratulated not only on its
past but also on its future on this 250th anniversary of its
founding. This City has a memorable history, a history that is
concerned with the development of our earliest American civiliza-
tion, a history that goes back to the days when the first white
people came to the Hudson River on this side, in this section, and
began tilling the soil, began putting up mills on the banks of the
river, began organizing a county form of government.

As a community it became of sufficient importance by
the time of the Revolution to become for a period the Capital of
the State of New York. It had become of sufficient importance in
1788 to be the scene of the convention called to pass on the ratifi-
cation of the Federal Constitution. Only two blocks from here that
Convention met in the little old courthouse.
I have wished much that we knew more about that Convention a hundred and forty-nine years ago. We do know of the terrific struggle that went on between the Clintonians and the Hamiltonians; how, for many weeks, it looked as if New York State would fail to ratify the Federal Constitution. We know also that if New York had failed to ratify, this Union of ours would have been in the difficult predicament of having about half of its members, the New England States, separated from the other half of its members by the State of New York, not a member. That is why it was such a matter of importance. The deadlock, as most of you know, was over the question of whether the Constitution should be ratified in the absence of a Bill of Rights. The people, even in those days, were talking about freedom of religion and freedom of the press, just as they are rightly doing it today. And the Clintonian faction insisted that the Constitution should not be ratified because it had no Bill of Rights in it. The Hamiltonian faction, to which incidentally, my great, great grandfather belonged as a member of the Convention, said that it did not make much difference. It took leadership on the part of the Dutchess County delegates to suggest a compromise, the compromise that the State of New York should ratify the Federal Constitution in full faith and confidence that the Bill of Rights would be put in at the earliest possible moment. That is how we New Yorkers came to be a part of the Union and that is one reason why, at the first opportunity, a bill of rights was put in.

And then, after the organization of the Federal Government, years passed and this county, this part of the river, became the great granary of New York City. If you will go back in the history of Poughkeepsie to about the middle of the last century, you will find references to what you and I would call "booms". Mills were started up in different parts of the county. Organizations were being formed to build railroads into various parts of the county, and in the early 70's, a group of citizens talked about the first bridge over the Hudson River. Most of those plans were fulfilled.

Very few of us are old enough to remember those days, but most of us who are here can remember, not long ago, a couple of decades, a little more than that perhaps, one of our neighbors who had a vision. He had a vision about what we call "New Market Street". And we can remember the congestion of traffic down there at Main and Market Streets before this extension was built. In those early days Mr. James B. Sague, whom we ought to honor and do honor, planned the opening up of Market Street Extension. The result of the opening up of this Street gave him the vision, back in those days, that at the head of the street, with a vista extending over many blocks, there should be a some beautiful building, well erected and a credit to the city.

And so, though he is gone, his dream is coming true today, and at the head of New Market Street there will be what I hope you will say is an architectural gem.

Yes, I am glad to be here with my neighbors on this Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Founding of Poughkeepsie on the One Hundred and Fiftieth year of the signing of the Constitution of the United States. I think always of Dutchess County and its County Seat as a very close part of my life. And, although I am temporarily resident elsewhere, I get back here, as you know, just as often as public business will let me and I am going to keep on coming back and being your Neighbor.
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As a matter of fact, what the Secretary of the Treasury has said to you about government architecture is well worth further study. The government every year builds, whatever you like it or not, a great many buildings in order to conduct government business more efficiently.

The principal criterion for putting up a new building is, of course, need. The second is economy. It probably is better, in most cases, for the government to own
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All over the United States, there are scattered/most terrible monstrosities
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Poughkeepsie is to be congratulated not only on its past but also
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of our earliest American civilization, a history that goes back to the
days when the first white people came to the Hudson River on this side,
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As a community it became of sufficient importance by the time of the Revolution to become for a period the Capital of the State of New York. It had become of sufficient importance in 1788 to be the scene of the convention called to pass on the ratification of the Federal Constitution. Only two blocks from here that Convention met in the little old courthouses.

I have wished much that we knew more about that Convention a hundred and forty-nine years ago. We do know of the terrific struggle that went on between the Clintonians and the Hamiltonians; how, for many weeks, it looked as if New York State would fail to ratify the Federal Constitution. We know also that if New York had failed to ratify, this Union of ours would have been in the difficult predicament of having about half of its members, the New England States, separated from the other half of its members by the State of New York, not a member. That is why it was such as matter of importance. The deadlock, as most of you know, was over the question of whether the Constitution should be ratified in the absence of a Bill of Rights. The people, even in those days, were talking about freedom of religion and freedom of the press, just they are rightly doing it today. And the Clintonians
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[Handwritten text that is not legible due to poor quality or handwriting style]
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7/27/60

For background material see PPF 1820

Memo for Pres., 10/11/39

and enclosed letters from

H. N. MacCracken 11/21/37

& Helen Kanyon 10/11/37