

Thursday, 19, 1938

[National Press Club Dinner - Washington, DC]

FDR Speech File

INFORMAL, IMPROVISED REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
At the Annual Dinner of the National Press Club
Washington, D. C., November 19, 1938

PRESIDENT BRAYMAN, FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB:

I am very much touched by this token of what is a real and old friendship, a friendship which on my part I do not have to tell you, old and young, is fully reciprocated. And, incidentally, this engraved cigarette case comes on an anniversary of mine for it is just -- this is the twenty-fifth year, a quarter of a century, since I first came to Washington and first went to some kind of a party by the National Press Club in what I believe were its original headquarters. (Applause)

I have been a little appalled tonight by chins (laughter) (referring to cartoons depicting the various facial expressions of himself) and I am going to apologize in the morning to my trusty safety razor for things I have said in the past; I take them all back. (Laughter)

And I have been delighted to hear some things explained about happenings this past summer in Europe because it explains some telegrams that the Secretary of State got. (Laughter) (Referring to Bugs Baer's account of his trip to Europe, where he had evaded difficult situations by indicating that he was a relative of the President.) He got a telegram from Joe Kennedy in London (laughter) that a man named Baer claims to be the President's nephew (laughter) and the Secretary of State telegraphed back, "Probably." (Laughter)

And then he went over to Holland and our Minister there telegraphed over about an arrival that got into a certain amount of trouble

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.

... and, incidentally, ...
... to ...
... I first went to ...
... I believe ...
... (laughter) ...
... I have been a little ...
... (laughter) ...
... I am going to ...
... I have said in the past; I ...
... (laughter) ...
... I have been delighted to ...
... about ...
... (laughter) ...
... of his trip to Europe, where he ...
... (laughter) ...
... (laughter) ...
... (laughter) ...
... and our ...

in Amsterdam and that he might be all right because his ancestors came from the same little old Dutch village that mine did. And so it went. He went through France all right, even Italy. He got into Germany with a certain amount of trouble; he got into a concentration camp and they telegraphed about the President's cousin. They did not telegraph to us, they telegraphed to the German Ambassador in Washington and he replied to Berlin that he thought this was a queer attitude. (Laughter - applause)

I forgot to say that I have been studying these cartoons most of the evening and I think there is something in former associations that people have. You can tell, reading a newspaper story, more or less what the associations previous, the previous associations of a writer have been. I suppose it is the same thing with cartoonists. Take the lowest one of the third row: I do not know who drew it, but he must have been in close association with President Hoover. (Laughter) And then the last one in the second row: That cartoonist had probably been covering the Al Capone trial. The one above that is an old admiral -- he had been playing around with Charlie Murphy in Tammany Hall.

Well, it is very interesting but I am still worried about that chin; I am afraid if I have a nightmare I will wake up in the middle of the night leading for the chin. (Laughter)

As a matter of fact, you good people do not know what that cigarette case means to me. I have been having an awful lot of trouble with photographers for a long time. You know the little old package I carry around in my right-hand pocket; it is generally found in the middle of my desk and when there is some treaty to be signed or something like that and the photographers are all there, I have to reach

out to hide the label on the cigarettes. I am not doing any free advertising. (Laughter) Oh, I have had a chance. Clay Williams (Chairman of the American Tobacco Company) came in last year (laughter) and I began kidding him because the other people, some other brand, had been buying Senatorial endorsements at a thousand dollars apiece. He came back at me and said, "Mr. President, if you would endorse my brand I think it worth your while," and I said, "What would you call worth while? How much?" He said, "Fifty grand." I said, "How." I said, "That's good. In fact, it is so good I think I will have to consider it. What would you want me to do?" He said, "You and I are old friends. If you will write me a personal letter, starting off, 'Dear Clay,' and let me run it in my national advertising, fifty thousand dollars."

I said, "That is too good to turn down, Clay. Will you let me write the letter?" He said, "Yes, as long as it endorses Camels, it is all right." I said, "Clay, I will do it." He said, "That is grand." And then -- he is a suspicious fellow -- he said, "What else would you put in the letter?" And I said, "I will write, 'Dear Clay: I am happy to endorse Camels. I do so because, after a careful survey of the United States, I find that you and I are the only two people in the country that can smoke them without coughing.'" (Laughter)

In all these years, those twenty-five years, you, like myself, we have been doing good turns for people. We have been really producing good things and that is, I suppose, the difference between the members of this Club and those damned Japanese cherry trees. (Laughter) And so it may be said, "By our fruits ye shall know us." (Laughter)

And so -- I am sort of jumping backwards and forwards -- to go back to cigarettes, now I am safe, I won't do any free advertising

of Camels. And they won't be able to photograph that inscription from the distance from which Steve (Mr. Early) makes them take their photographs.

There is just one change -- I might as well announce it here -- that we are thinking of making in the Press Conferences at the White House. Early and McIntyre and Michelson, they do not know it yet. I have noticed a good deal lately, at the end of the Press Conference, after the boys are all out of the room, I would turn to Mac and Steve and Charlie and I would say, "Did I do all right?" And they would say, "H'm, yes." And then I would say, "What did you think of my answer?" And one of them would be sure to say, "Yes, but if I had answered it I would have said such and such a thing."

By just about ten minutes of this we would have a much better answer than we do have. So, after this, we are going to have a second Press Conference about half an hour after the first Press Conference, after we have talked it over, Michelson and Early and McIntyre, and I will give you much better answers than you could possibly get offhand.
(Laughter)

All that of course was off the record. But now I want to go back because I have been thinking that this was the twenty-fifth year and I want to come back to some of the thoughts that I have had about those early years from 1913 up through the war, thoughts of all the people who have left us. They are thoughts of the early people in Washington, people who helped to train me and, believe me, it was a very stiff course but a very wonderful course under the leadership and under the teaching of some perfectly splendid old friends of ours.

I remember, when I first went to the Navy Department, my

first Press Conference. There was an old man there, for he was an old man, who sort of took me under his wing and I stayed under his wing all those years -- old Mat Tighe. (Applause) Old Mat Tighe, he went around with some volume in the original Greek and he read it if the Press Conference bored him. He was a scholar and a gentleman.

And then there was old Eddie Hood, one of the grandest men that ever lived. (Applause) I think he was for a great many years, nearly a half a century, a faithful member of the staff of the Associated Press, a man who refused offers for appointment as Assistant Secretary of the Navy -- of course his name was not Roosevelt, that was one drawback -- and Assistant Secretary of State. He remained a newspaper man to the end of his days. He was the confident and unofficial adviser of a long list of Cabinet Officers and Government officials and their assistants.

And he was followed by one who might be called his successor as the Dean of the correspondents in Washington, Dick Oulahan, (applause) an urbane, able, kindly and above all a gentlemen with generous impulses, always generous impulses, by common consent the friend of all the young people who came down here in the Government service and one who was looked up to by all of his associates of the Press.

And I remember very well how mighty nice to me as a youngster, how mighty nice Gus Karger (applause) was. He was able to be faithful alike to his newspaper and to the public in expressing very deep political convictions, but a man who always had the objective side of reporting in view.

And Bill Crawford, (applause) one of the correspondents whom I knew, not only here in Washington but in later days when I had gone

back to New York and after I had gone to Albany as Governor.

Bill Price (applause) was another one who helped. As representative of the Washington Star, he became the first reporter -- so I am told, because it was in a sense before my day - the first reporter who was regularly assigned to ask White House visitors what the President had said. And this, so I am told, dated back to the days of Cleveland, the days, incidentally, when I was a very small boy in Washington and my family did something to me that I have never forgotten and never forgiven. I was five years old and the family took it into their heads that it would be nice if I wore a suit of Scotch kilts. We had a house on K Street, at about Thirteenth, and the family drove me out on the street to play with the little boys, clad in a Scotch kilt. I got about half a block away and was surrounded by about a dozen of them, all pointing their fingers and saying, "Oh, look at the little girl!"

And then Jack Nevin, (applause) Jack Nevin who told me, he and Mat Tighe, how to hold a Press Conference in the Navy Department. Able, energetic, a giant in stature and a glutton for work.

And then one who has left us very recently, Jim Hornaday, (applause) as kindly as he was able, a writer and a gentleman, whose death three years ago saddened all our hearts, one whom I described at that time as "A gentleman of the Press."

And then Jim Hay, (applause) Jim Hay, who, in many ways, had characteristics and attributes that Louis Howe had, a frail body but a sparkling wit and an indomitable spirit.

And finally, one whom I have known and whom we have all known for a great many years, who has left us very recently, to our loss, Rodney Dutcher. (Applause) I think that all our hearts, the

hearts of those who knew him well, are heavy tonight because he has left us. Those who look for news behind the news, as is the custom these days, know that the circumstances, the attendant circumstances of the passing of this brave soul are not merely poignant, because I think many of us feel those circumstances approach real tragedy. We, who do know, will long cherish the memory of his valiant spirit who was, first and last, a reporter of the day's events as he saw them, fearless in his determination to remain a detached and objective chronicler and, so long as justice and conscience were on his side, he did not fear anything else. There was and there is no braver newspaperman than Rodney Dutcher.

And so you see that this twenty-fifth anniversary has for me a great many personal memories, going back, as I have said, a quarter of a century, and one of those memories that I carry with me always is that there is no group of finer, more deeply sincere, though sometimes cynical on the surface, sensitive group of human beings in the world than the newspapermen of America. And, if there is one place in the world where they might lose that sensitiveness, might lose that inward understanding of their fellowman, that place is Washington, but here, I think, from my experience, they lose it least of all.

And so to you, my fellow members, I want to express again my very deep appreciation in having come here to this annual banquet tonight and the hope that I will be able to be with you again a couple of times anyway, (applause) and that when I go back to the house on the hill that you will receive me in my working clothes if I happen to come down here to -- what shall I say? -- write a column. (Applause, rising applause)