

August 31, 1940

[Roosevelt Home Club]

FOR Speech File

INFORMAL RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS AT THE MEETING
OF THE HUNTERS HOME CLUB, HYDE PARK, AUGUST 31, 1943.

BY HUNTERS

If you were proceeding strictly according to the Hatch act, I would not mention politics. But, of course, after being introduced by the new, the Acting Postmaster of Hyde Park, who, by his very presence here today as President of the Club is violating the act, all I can say to you is that, honestly, there are exceptions to every law. We are not a political club in the last analysis. This is a gathering of a lot of neighbors in this and adjoining townships who come here every year to get acquainted again.

I wish I could, as John Jack has said, see more of you in the course of the year. And it should not be taken politically if I say I hope I will see more of you -- in time. But I cannot help feeling that there are two things that we can and we do think about every year in these gatherings. They are both things that have come to this country very largely in the last ten years. We have got to know each other, not just in the town of Hyde Park but all over the nation. We have come to be interested in every part of the nation and in what goes on in every other part of the nation. We have become interested in our own geography. We have come to know something about floods and resources and all kinds of places that we never heard of before. And, in the same way, geographically I think we are coming very fast to knowing more about the rest of the world and to appreciate that what goes on in the rest of the world is bound to have an effect on all of us, on our own private lives and our own family lives and our own community lives.

I think it is a great lesson that has come to us, that we have learned. And, in the same way, we have begun in this process of getting to know each other better to understand more about what we used to call "politics" when we used it in the good sense of the term, not the old sense of the term because that wasn't a very good use of the word. We are more honest today in our politics than ever before.

I go back -- I am not so terribly old yet -- I go back to days in this County, in this State, when honesty was not the best policy. We can remember events in our own town, in our own County, in the lives of those of us who are older, that we are not very proud of. But there has come up a better day in the running of all kinds of government. I think that is true because I have been all over the country many times. I think it is true of the great majority of states and counties that the choice of our representatives to run our governments is a freer choice, a clearer choice, and on the whole, a better choice, than it used to be in the old days.

When I use that word "politics" I am not speaking just of holding an office, I am thinking about the relationship of people who hold many kinds of offices, to the people in their country or their state or their city or their community. Do you know, for example, why and how I got interested in the problem of government in relation to old people? It was because -- and this was many, many years ago -- out here on Quaker Lane, there was a family of old people. One of them, one of the old gentlemen, had been the supervisor of this town, in, I think, 1873. In fact he had succeeded my father as supervisor of the town. I was away at the time, I did not hear about it until months after it had happened. They were very, very old. They had mortgaged their farm up to the hilt and beyond it. There had come a heavy winter and one day, when the postman went out there, he saw no trucks. He went in and found that one of these old people -- they were about eighty years old and I think there were three of them -- had gone out to the barn to milk the one cow that was left and he had been frozen to death. They took the other two people, the town old -- they were perfectly sane -- but they put one of them into the Hudson River State Hospital for the insane and they put the old lady into some old ladies home. The home that they had lived in was gone and they were dependent solely on the care of the state. They were put in institutions; they could not live and die where they had been born.

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.

Well, that wasn't so long ago. It was fifteen or twenty years ago that that family, a fine, splendid Dutchess County family, that had been here for I don't know how many generations, that had held positions of honor and trust -- and that was their end. So I got to thinking about old people, about the security of families in their old age.

That is why we began to plan and we are getting somewhere with it today, between the states and the federal government. That is what we call -- what I call -- the security of American citizenship. It applies tremendously to old people and it also applies tremendously, although we haven't found the solution yet, to the young people of the Nation. There isn't any panacea for that because, as we all know, we go through what we call "cycles", up changes and down changes, times when everybody is at work and other times when very few people are at work. And we are providing for that; we have made a beginning with unemployment insurance.

I am using understatement. You all know what I mean because most of us back home talk in terms of understatement. This year, for example, if you asked almost anybody in the audience, including myself, about the crops of the country we would say, "well, they are fair to middlin'", which, on the whole, means "pretty good". When we are talking about the problems of schools or of health, we say, "well, it isn't so bad", meaning "it is pretty good." When we ask, "Is there much unemployment?" and the answer is, "well, we ain't worried about it much." it means that almost everybody has got something to do. That is why, taking it by and large, as far as the comforts, the work of the United States as a whole goes, things are "fair to middlin'" which means, from our point of view, that they are very good.

In all this work that has been referred to on defence, there is one point that should be made very, very clear and that is defense, of course, against enemies from the outside and also defense within our own borders, our own communities, against things that can happen to take away from us what we have accomplished in these later years. That is why I think it is pretty good policy to understate things in a political year.

Most people understand what that means. We are not going to go back, I hope, in the next few years on what we have accomplished. Certainly this community -- and we are a pretty good cross-section of thousands of communities in 3200 counties in 48 states -- we are getting on awfully well. On the whole, awfully well when I think of the changes that have come about -- physical changes, good roads, grand schools -- they are perfectly splendid and I am proud of them. We have people coming from all over the United States to see our new school buildings. We are giving our children good education and most people have got jobs. As I say, this cross-section of America that we live in and represent is a very hopeful sign just so long as we do not let it slide backwards. That is going to be the big problem but it is a very simple problem and I think there is a pretty good prospect of having the good work go on.

I was going to say something more about those school buildings, about the fact that a famous American came back from the other side the other day. He hadn't been here for several years and I drove him past the new high school. He said, "That is the finest example of architecture for a public building that I have seen put up in this country in the last twenty years." They are putting supplements in magazines to tell about what is being done in the way of buildings in Dutchess County. We are reverting, perhaps, to what you might call an idiosyncrasy of my own that we should revert, in building buildings, to the old fieldstone that the original settlers used. I am sticking in fieldstones wherever I get a chance. And I am fairly practical on that because it does not cost any more than brick and it lasts a whole lot longer than wood.

and the old buildings. I often think of them. I think it was 1871 that the old brick building in the Village of Hyde Park was built by my father when he was President of the Trustees of the School District. Well, for our type of life that building has lasted 70 years, which is a pretty honorable length of life for a building, even for a schoolhouse. And we think of the small schools around here, the one-room schools, as we used to call them -- I don't think any of them were painted red -- and they have performed a splendid service in their long and honorable lives. We shed a tear, perhaps, when the old Red Pot School goes or something up in Fallickil, or one of the other old districts of the town, but those buildings have lived to an honorable old age and I honestly believe that the children that have been trained in them in the past, many of us, many of you, the children of our generation, are going to be equalled and surpassed by the children of the next generation.

I am awfully glad to get this chance to see you and to talk with you a little informally as I have today. I wish old Spratty would make a speech. I wish John Mack would make another speech. I wish Eddie Conger, who, by the way, is the first Federal Judge we have had in Dutchess County in, I don't know how long -- perhaps ever -- would make a speech.

We have a couple of candidates here who may get elected to Congress, one from this district and one from the district across the River.

I am going to tell you a secret. I am afraid these people down here were told this morning or were sent word that there wouldn't be any announcement from this meeting, absolutely none, no politics in it. Well, there isn't any politics but there is something I can tell you. It is a perfectly tremendous secret which will probably be on the wires in ten minutes.

I have here, sitting almost directly back of me the successor of a very splendid old friend of mine, the successor of Jim Farley, the successor in the Postmaster Generalship in place of Jim who has made such a splendid record in that office. Jim now, with a family to support, finds it necessary -- as some of the rest of us may have to do -- to go back to private life. It has been on the fire for a few weeks and now it is all cooked and on Tuesday, or possibly Wednesday next, the name of another old friend of ours who has been here many times and who was responsible for the building of the new Library over on the Post Road, who got money for it from all over the United States.* He came from Montana and lived in New York and then, because of business interests, became a citizen of Pennsylvania, which is a pretty good record. In other words, he knows the country and is going to know a lot about the mails and communications of the country from now on -- and that is my old friend, who has been a friend for a great many years, Frank Walker. Get up, Frank.

It has been fine to be with you. Thank the Lord that rain hold off. I don't know why it did, whether it was John Mack who prayed or whether it was the Governor who prayed or whether it was just old fashioned Roosevelt luck.

Just one word in closing: I think it has been four or five years since the Governor of our own State of New York has been to this gathering. Herbert Lehman is here today and I hope he will come many times again.

* (insert) will be sent to the Senate.