

Roosevelt's Funeral

How the nation took the news of a President's death and how the word came to GIs overseas.

The caisson which carried the body of President Roosevelt moved from the Union Station toward the Capitol.



THE funeral march stretched for a thousand miles. The train, with the flag rippling from the engine, had come up from Georgia, past the old battlefields of another war fought 80 years ago. There was a great hush over the land. The people came and stood by the tracks as the long train rolled on, bound for Washington and later a quiet garden high above the Hudson. The President was dead.

The train moved slowly through the night. At Charlotte, N. C., a troop of Boy Scouts started to sing "Onward Christian Soldiers," and massed thousands took it up in a mighty chorus. Along the way people dropped to their knees in prayer. Bells tolled a requiem.

By countless thousands the people came to say good-bye to Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Men in overalls, men with gnarled hands, women with shawls, kids, wet-eyed and solemn, lined the tracks and bowed their heads.

("There is the hope of the future," said the economist who once had been a Brain-Truster. "If Franklin Roosevelt's hopes and dreams are deep enough in the heart of the people, the people will make them come true.")

There had been only one other pilgrimage like this in American history. That had taken place 80 years before, almost to a day, when a wartime President had been borne on a long trek to Illinois and a tomb that became a shrine. His name was Abraham Lincoln.

Across the silent countryside soft with spring, past the sprawling green fields of Virginia, Franklin Roosevelt came back to Washington. There in the Capital, shimmering in the hot sun, where he had four times come in triumph after Presidential campaigns, the President rode again. The last campaign had ended for the man who once described himself as an "old campaigner who loves a good fight." Now he rode in a flag-draped coffin on a black caisson drawn by six white horses.

At the Union Station and along the broad streets leading to the White House, where the President had ridden so often to the crowd's acclaim, the silence was broken only by the muffled roll of drums and the muted dirge.

Five hundred thousand persons saw the coffin on the caisson and sensed that men would speak of this hour 100 years from now.

Roosevelt's Funeral

("Once when I was traveling on a campaign train with Franklin Roosevelt," said the senator, "a little boy came running up the tracks as the train started pulling out of the station. And the little boy yelled, 'Hey, Mr. President, thanks for our new WPA toilet and thanks for everything.' Franklin Roosevelt was the people's hero. The people were his hero. A long time ago he whipped infantile paralysis, and after that he wasn't afraid of anything. No wonder they called him the Champ.")

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt had asked that no one send flowers to the funeral, yet in the stately East Room of the White House, where the closed coffin rested, flowers banked three sides of the room, high against the wall. There were flowers sent by kings and flowers sent by obscure people whom the President never saw. A little boy in Chicago sent a bouquet picked from his back yard. "I was sorry," he wrote, "that I couldn't come to the funeral."

The weather was sultry on this funeral day, much as it had been on April 14, 1865, the day Abraham Lincoln was shot in Ford's Theater. And in the East Room, where Lincoln had lain in state, the mourners gathered at the bier of



As the funeral procession arrived outside the White House grounds, the waiting crowd showed its sorrow.

Franklin Roosevelt. Great men of the world were there. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden had flown to Washington from London. He looked grave and worried. Prime Minister Winston Churchill had planned also to attend the funeral of this "cherished friend" but canceled his plans because of the urgency of the war situation.

Cabinet members and diplomats were there. Supreme Court justices, congressmen and men famous in literature were there. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt was drawn and tired, but her step was firm and her head was high. Harry Hopkins, closest of the Presidential advisers, who had flown to Washington from the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., where he had been ill, grasped the back of the chair in front of him so tightly that his knuckles gleamed white.

Roosevelt's Funeral

Near the Roosevelt family sat President Truman, his wife and daughter, Mrs. Woodrow Wilson and Crown Princess Martha of Norway. The new President and his family entered the room so quietly that no one had time to rise. He stared straight ahead, his jaw outthrust. In this hour of mourning, he seemed quietly confident, as though at this flag-draped coffin of his fallen leader he was gathering will of spirit for the task ahead.

The coffin was flanked by flags and rested on a catafalque centered near the east wall. From the wall on either side looked down full-length portraits of George and Martha Washington.

At each corner of the coffin was a guard. Two GIs, a corporal and a pfc, and a marine and a sailor all stood rigidly at attention. The stillness was broken only by the gentle whirring of a fan. To one side of the room sat the President's wheel chair, empty.

(And in the park across the street from the White House, where the people had gathered to talk in low tones, the old man said: "The greatest thing that Franklin Roosevelt did was teach the people that this land is theirs; that the earth's abundance belongs to the people; that they need only the will to gain the power.")

In the East Room, rich with history and heavily fragrant with flowers, the Rt. Rev. Angus Dun, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, prayed for "steadfast courage in adversity; for sympathy with the hungers and fears of common men; for trials met without surrender, and weakness endured without defeat; for unyielding faith in the possibility of a more just and more ordered world, delivered from the ancient curse of war."

The bishop, at Mrs. Roosevelt's suggestion, quoted the words with which Franklin Roosevelt on a bleak inaugural day more than 12 years before had restored a desperate nation's faith: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

The bishop closed with familiar words that rang through the long room: "Through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

The mourners left the White House. Outside, other mourners still stood, crowds of them. They had stood through a sudden downpour of rain, and now their clothes steamed in the sun.

That night, again through hushed, crowded streets, the President's coffin was carried to the train for its journey to Hyde Park, N. Y. Twelve years before, Franklin Roosevelt had come to the White House at a time of crisis, with millions of unemployed roaming the nation's streets, and he had offered sympathy, hope and bold experiment. Now he was no longer untried. Twelve years before he had reassured the people with the solemn word that the "money changers have abdicated . . . the people have not failed." Now the people were telling him quietly and reverently that he had not failed. They watched the hearse roll to the train, and they bowed in honest grief. His place in history secure, the President was leaving the White House forever.

("Some people compare him to Lincoln," said the professor who had once helped draft New Deal legislation, "and it's true that he was attacked and abused like Lincoln. But Franklin Roosevelt patterned himself after Jefferson and Jackson. He proved, as Jefferson did, that a man can be a great gentleman and at the same time a great commoner. And he was tough like Jackson, a hell of a fighter.")

ONCE more the body of Franklin Roosevelt was borne through the night. And again the people in the villages and towns and farms waited in the darkness while the train rolled past.

Riding with the President on this last journey were men and women who had come to Washington 12 years before, eager to wipe out old laws

Roosevelt's Funeral

and write new ones. This night they were tired and troubled. The New Dealers were getting old, and they had lost their leader. Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace and Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes had boarded the train together, walking arm in arm. "Roosevelt's musketeers," said a man in the crowd.

The train moved through the night, and the dim lights of the towns etched the faces of the people standing near the tracks. Across one station there was a line of boys and girls—boys holding caps in their left hands and girls with pigtailed. They stood with chests thrust out at attention. A band played "Hail to the Chief." Some of the kids were crying.

Northward the train rolled, taking Franklin Roosevelt home. At the edge of a little town an old man was spearing waste paper with a pointed stick. In his right hand he carried a greasy blue cap. As the train passed, the old man put on his cap, drew himself jerkily up and saluted. His heels were together, his chest was out. Clearly he had saluted before, maybe in some war long ago.

("I rode with him on all four of his campaigns," said the reporter. "A lot of people praising him the most now are the ones who fought him the hardest. That would amuse the old man. He always knew the pitch on those phonies.")

At lonely crossroads and in great cities, the common people had come to say their own good-bye to this crippled man who once had taken a crippled nation and helped it walk once more.



The next morning was Sunday, April 15, 1945. At 10:15 A.M. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, four times chosen by the people as President of the United States, was committed to the earth of his beloved Hyde Park birthplace.

Against a 15-foot hemlock hedge surrounding the old garden which the President long ago had designated as his burial place, files of soldiers, sailors and marines stood rigidly at attention, their eyes fixed on the flag-draped coffin. A battalion of gray-and-white-clad West Point Cadets was massed at one end of the garden. The cadets' crepe-hung drums rolled mournfully across the chill morning air.

The Rev. Dr. W. George W. Anthony, rector of St. James Church of Hyde Park, quoted from "Requiescat" by John B. Dykes:

*"Now the laborer's task is o'er;
Now the battle day is past:
Now upon the farther shore
Lands the voyager at last.
Father, in thy gracious keeping,
Leave we now thy servant sleeping."*

Three cadets fired deliberately spaced volleys across the President's grave. A bugler stepped

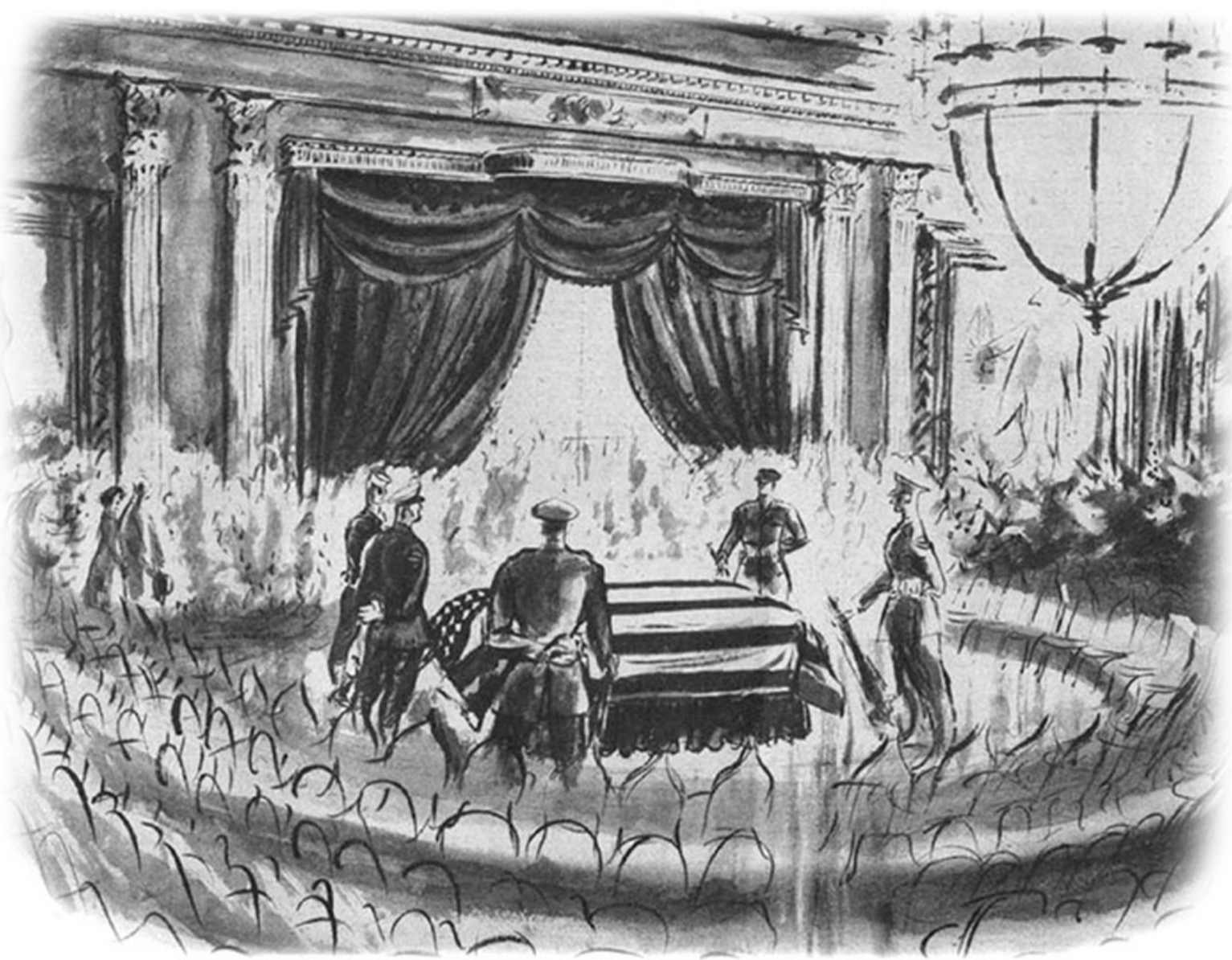
Roosevelt's Funeral

forward and softly blew taps. A sergeant of the honor guard selected to carry the coffin lifted the American flag from the top, folded it carefully and handed it to Mrs. Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt, ashen-gray but dry-eyed, accepted it proudly.

("Last time I talked with him," said the neighbor, "the President told me he didn't know how history would record him as a President, but he said he knew for sure that he was one of the best doggoned tree-growers ever to come up the pike.")

Within a half-hour after the burial all the mourners had left. Franklin Roosevelt was alone in the garden where he had played as a boy and where he had teased a childhood playmate named Eleanor. The only sound was the footbeat of sentries walking their posts.

—Pfc. DEBS MYERS
YANK Staff Writer



The Virginia Depot

LYNCHBURG, VA.—At 2 in the morning it was warm, and the faint scent of flowers mixed with the odors of coal smoke at the station.

The handsome kid who handled the mail sacks cried orders to his driver, who gunned the old Chevy truck noisily. The handsome kid climbed in beside the driver and looked up at the platform above the tracks as the Chevy rolled away—looked up with the magnificent arrogance of a 16-year-old at the legs of the women above.

At track level, two Southern Railway detectives stood in self-conscious importance, knowing that soon they could lift their hands and command all Americans to move aside, move back to a certain line. They were the men in charge, conscious that two hours from now they could report that all had been handled according to instructions. They were hard men, and they had their orders.

"We have our orders," they said. Their credentials were in their left hip pockets. One of them showed his badge to a man who wanted to park his car on the track level.

A few older men stood by the platform railing talking in a soft accent. They were talking about the family. They traded sentences in the sympathetic undertones of old friends of the family: their voices were the voices of those who gather at the home and stand outside on the porch, picking carefully and slowly over the events that follow a death in the family. "One of the boys started home by plane as soon as he heard the

Roosevelt's Funeral

news from his mother." a man said solemnly. "I don't guess they all can come."

Two squads of soldiers wearing MP armbands marched in columns of twos down the platform and were posted by a staff sergeant. They took interval to the left and stood at parade rest. A woman watched the staff sergeant and said, "He don't care how long they stand there, does he?" She marveled at the staff sergeant, marveled that this man could order 24 other men to stand like statues until he said they could do something. "They could stand there until 12 o'clock tomorrow for all he cares." Her voice carried wonderment.

At 3 or a little after a train came in, and the people on the platform watched.

"They're loadin' that one. You know they wouldn't be loadin' express on his train," a man said to his wife. His wife said nothing.

A freight came through and temporarily interrupted the conversation of two Negro men. One had taken off his hat as the earlier train came in, then hastily put it back on when he realized this was not the train. He and his friend were talking about past funerals. They had been talking about whether the President could be buried at Arlington, and now they were talking about soldiers of Virginia who had been buried with honors. "That was the first time I ever saw the Richmond Blues," said one. "I mean all them men was tall, too." The freight rolled off, southbound.

Twenty minutes later two state cops went down



Members of the Roosevelt family await the funeral train in Washington. L. to r.: Lt. Col. and Mrs. John Boettiger, Brig. Gen. and Mrs. Elliott Roosevelt, Mrs. James Roosevelt.

and cleared the people from the track level. People moved quietly now, and the talk that had been clear became muted. An older Negro man and his wife stood apart and watched as half a dozen teen-agers invaded the platform from the parking space outside. The teen-age boys wore dark pants and light coats with padded shoulders, and the girls wore slacks and short light coats and had peasant scarves wound in

Roosevelt's Funeral

turbans on their heads.

The old Negro couple watched them approach and the old man whispered to his wife, "Now, look at that." His words were scarcely audible. He and his wife moved off, down to the end of the platform where other colored people stood. The old man was scowling. A teen-ager shrilled, "There's Shirley!" and waved.

By 3:40 the people who had waited longest at the platform railing were joined by those who had set their alarm clocks and now began to come, carloads at a time in family groups, to the station. They spoke to one another, these groups, as they found places by the railing. They were compact, clannish groups. One seemed to be composed of civic-club citizens. They spoke biting words aimed at those who had cleared the track level. "It's just these officials we have here. Why can't we stand down there?" They looked coldly at the cops, who were unaware of them.

"Why can't we stand down there?" a black-haired young woman said in a sharp accent that cut deep into the low voices of Virginia around her. "His last trip through Lynchburg, too."

A big guy rolled up to the railing and was greeted by a group. "What brought you down here?" they asked. "Same thing that brought you," he answered boisterously. "Curiosity got the best of me." He laughed heartily.

The black-haired young woman looked scornfully across, and her voice was biting. "And he had to die——"

The whistle blew far up the tracks, and the sentence was unfinished. The crowd composed itself silently at the railing. From the track level came the echo-distorted command, "Present arms!" The people—400 of a city of 40,000—stood immobile at 4 in the morning. The noise of driving rods cut out from up the track, and then there was the sound of the bell.

Two engines coasted through, drawing the darkened train, and the people tensed for the sight of something they could remember—lights in the vestibules and in the lavatories, a man in a gray suit with one hand in his pocket riding the bottom step of a car.

A light showed in the last car. The car went by, shades up, and for a moment there showed a corner of a flag, red and white, and there was the impression of a red silk bow. Or perhaps there was no bow at all. The train was moving very fast. But there was red and white, and what appeared to be a bow, and that was what the people on the upper platform were able to see.

"It was the last thing in the car," a woman's voice said softly.

The people at the railing stood only until the click of the rails was lost in the rising whisper of those who had come to pay their last respects.

—Sgt. MACK MORRIS
YANK Staff Writer



Roosevelt's Funeral

New York City

NEW YORK, N. Y.—All over New York City people were stunned by the news from Warm Springs, for this was one of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's greatest strongholds. The news flowed into the subways and busses and flowed out again over the city.

The people heard it by word of mouth and radio, and they stood around in little groups in the streets waiting for some word that it was all a mistake and the President was still alive.

When it was learned there was no mistake, crepe-draped pictures of the President were put up in the windows of places as unlike as Saks-Fifth Avenue department store and Paddy's Clam House. Candy-store owners reached over and pulled out the plugs from their juke boxes. In the Trans-Lux Newsreel Theater on Broadway the manager came out and made the announcement. In 10 minutes more than half the people in the theater had rushed out, many crying.

Nowhere was grief so open as in the poorer districts of the city. In Old St. Patrick's in the heart of the Italian district on the lower East Side, bowed, shabby figures came and went, and by the day after the President died hundreds of candles burned in front of the altar. "Never," a priest said, "have so many candles burned in this church."

In the poor Jewish district around Delancey Street every store was closed on Saturday, normally the biggest business day of the week. One man started to open his ice-cream parlor on Saturday afternoon, but dozens of people gathered in front of the shop, cursing angrily. The man hastily closed down again.

In the shelter of the Eighth Avenue subway entrance on Houston Street, a little old woman in a black shawl sat on the sidewalk on an empty orange box. She kept swaying back and forth and sobbing and saying over and over again, "He was such a good man, he was such a good man, he was such a good man."

A cop passed by and he should have made her move, but he made believe he didn't see her.

In all the store windows were Yahrzeit glasses, the mourning candles that Jews light on the death of a member of the immediate family. The



THESE AMERICANS, CROWDING AT THE WHITE HOUSE GATES WERE AMONG MILLIONS WHO GRIEVED FOR THE DEAD PRESIDENT.

sprawling Essex Market, which Mayor LaGuardia built to get the push carts off the streets, was closed. But inside, the market looked like a section of firmament. There were Yahrzeit glasses burning on all the hundreds of little stalls.

A man started hawking 1944 Roosevelt campaign buttons in the street, yelling "Get your

OldMagazineArticles.com

Roosevelt's Funeral

Roosevelt memorial button — 15 cents." The people drove him off the street. A 6-year-old kid went by saying to her mother: "I wished we lived in Washington. In Washington the kids didn't have to go to school." The mother wound up and landed one on the kid's backside.

Just before 4 o'clock when the funeral services were about to begin at the White House, Mrs. Fannie Kornberg brought a radio down from her home and set it up on the outdoor counter of her little store at the corner of Rivington and Essex Streets. Her store is named Harry's Cut Rate Candy Corner, Imported and Domestic. Harry is somewhere in Germany with the Third Army. Mrs. Kornberg connected the radio, and in 10 minutes a crowd of about 50 persons gathered among the pickle barrels to listen to the services.

There were little men in white aprons, old men with derbies and white beards. There was a prim woman who looked like a school teacher, and another who might have been a social worker. One well-dressed middle-aged man in a gray Homburg looked strangely like the famous picture of the grief-torn Frenchman—watching the Germans roll into Paris in 1940. They all faced the radio and listened without speaking.

At 4 o'clock there was a moment of silence, and on the radio a bell began to toll. It was almost a signal. Those who were not already crying cried now. The crowd wept with a long, prolonged hum. A woman clasped her 8-year-old son and said, "Not in my lifetime or in yours, will we again see such a man."

About the same time 35,000 people were gathered in City Hall Park to hear formal memorial services conducted by Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, president of Columbia University. At 4:05 the rain suddenly came down in torrents. The people stood bareheaded in the rain and listened. They stood there for nearly half an hour, getting drenched to the skin. Fewer than 1,000 of the 35,000 left to find shelter in the nearby buildings.

—Sgt. BILL DAVIDSON
YANK Staff Writer

The Hudson Valley

BEACON, N. Y.—In 1910 a young man made a campaign speech in Bank Square. He wore a blue flannel coat, white duck pants and white shoes. The speech got a lot of applause, and the opposition felt that notice had to be taken of it.

"It wasn't a great speech," the opposition said. "The womenfolk were gawking at his fancy clothes and the men were taken in by that new-fangled auto contraption he brought down here."

The young man got elected state senator from Dutchess County. He was the first Democrat in the county who had received that honor in 51 years. His name was Franklin D. Roosevelt.

After 1910 the young man came back to the square seven times to speak to his friends and neighbors. Harold Brilliant, the local cop, recalled. This quiet Sunday morning Harold sat on the Bank Square curb. There were few people on the streets, and the square itself was almost empty. A warm sun began to nudge over the mountains and into the Hudson Valley as the chimes of the Methodist Church on Main Street announced the 6 A.M. memorial service for the

Roosevelt's Funeral

31st President of the United States. The funeral train from Washington to Hyde Park was due to pass through Beacon about 8.

Harold took off his faded blue cap, scratched his head and pointed to the other side of the square. "He'd drive down from Hyde Park through Wappingers Falls and come into the square from North Avenue." Harold said. "Old Morg Hoyt would be waiting for him. Morg introduced him back in 1910. They always said the same things to each other. Mr. Roosevelt would say, 'Hello, Morg. You don't look a day older than you did back in 1910.' And Morg would answer, 'Neither do you, Franklin.' Then they both would laugh. It was something to see."

The men of Beacon were full of their memories as they waited for the train. "In the old days," they kept saying, "in the old days. . . ."

Thomas Pendell, owner and publisher of the *Beacon Light*, the town weekly and one of the oldest Democratic papers in Dutchess County, said he had known Franklin D. Roosevelt all his life. In the old days, he said, his father, Robert Pendell, used to talk politics with the young Democrat from Hyde Park.

"We used to have a farm on the corner of Violet Avenue and Dorsey Lane, just about six miles from the Roosevelt farm," Thomas Pendell said. "Young Roosevelt would ride down on his horse, and he and my father would talk politics. Later, after he bought one of the first autos in Dutchess County, he would drive down on a Sunday and take my mother for a ride. They had a standing joke between them. They both would pretend they were courting. It was funny with nine of us kids running around the farm."

Jimmy Dondero, who runs the Dondero candy store on Spring Valley Road with his brother Eddie, remembers things too. His family has owned the store for 50 years, and the young bloods of Dutchess County used to meet there to argue politics. The boys would sit on orange crates, Jimmy said, and gab. The boys were Franklin Roosevelt, Ferd and Morg Hoyt, Jim Meyer, Ed Perkins and young Jimmy Forrestal, who is Secretary of the Navy now.

"Franklin Roosevelt was always asking questions," Jimmy Dondero said. "When the boys would get into an argument he would just listen to both sides, say nothing and then, when it was through, ask more questions. One day he came down here by himself and sat with my brother Ed and I. He began asking those questions and finally I says to him, 'Why are you always asking so many questions?'"

"He laughed and said, 'Well, Jimmy, the only way a man can find out what the people want and think is to ask them.' I guess that's what he did down there in Washington. He found out what the people wanted and gave it to them."

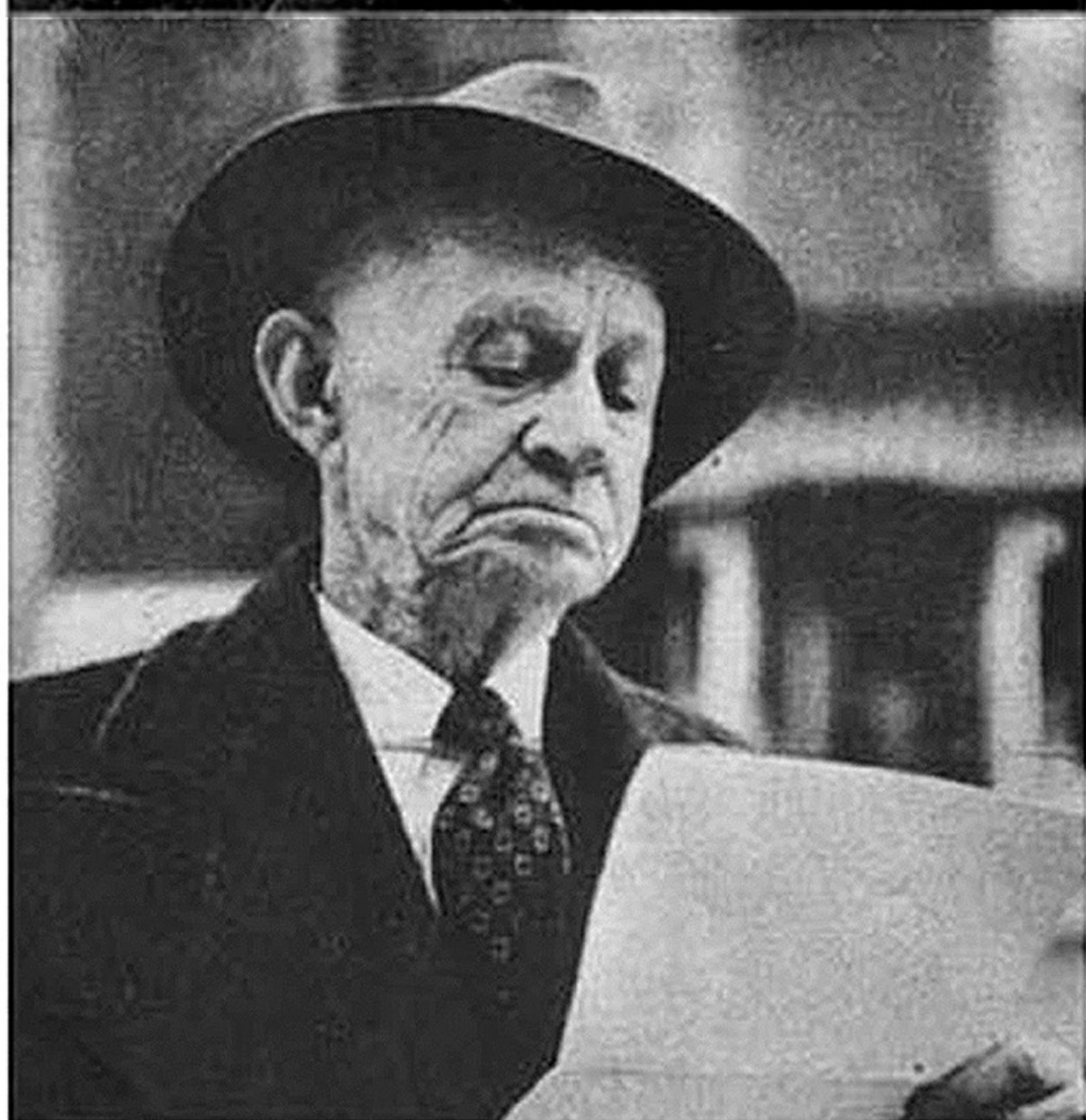
Old Sam Middleton said he had never thought much of young Roosevelt's politics. Sam has been a bedrock Republican for the 70-some years of his life.

"I remember him when he was a kid," Old Sam said, "and he used to visit with the gang that used to hang out in the town cops office at the jail house on Bank Square. I guess he was about 17 then. He would stay there, blowing steam off his belly, until the wee hours. Many's the night there was just old Ted Moith, the night watchman, and young Roosevelt left. I never liked his politics, but I'll say this for him: He was a great gentleman and a good Roosevelt."

Morgan Hoyt, who always introduced Franklin

Roosevelt's Funeral

Morgan Hoyt reads a letter from friend FDR.



Roosevelt when he came to Beacon to speak, had the most of all to say. Morg is 82 now, and he and young Roosevelt were fast friends, he said, from the time Morg stumped the county for the Hyde Park Democrat back in 1910. They kept up a steady correspondence through the years.

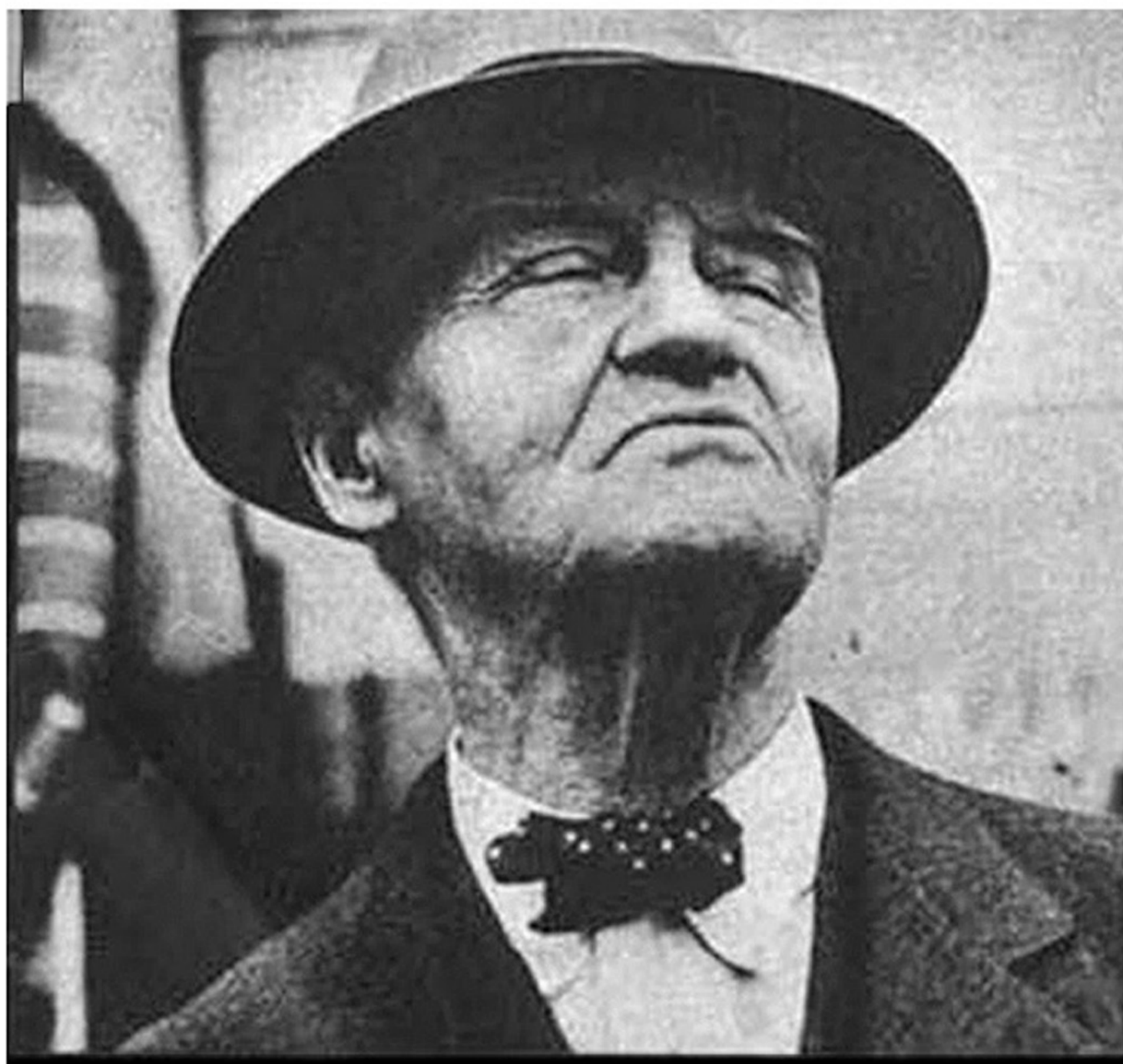
Morg's last letter from his old friend came just after the President returned from Yalta.

The letter, addressed "Dear Morg," read:

"Now that I have returned from my trip overseas, I can tell you that I have received a real thrill from your letter of January 25. Those were good days that you recall—that 1910 campaign, the Sheehan fight, and all the other things that went to make life interesting. As you well observe, those tranquil days are a far cry from the present but the comparison helps us to see things in their due proportion.

"I still say, thank God for the old days and for old and tried friends like you."

"There were a lot of things about that first campaign," Morgan Hoyt said, "that showed then the kind of fellow he would turn out to be. A fellow named Harry Yawkey had the first auto-



Sam Middleton remembered Roosevelt as a boy

Roosevelt's Funeral

mobile in Dutchess County and we decided it would be a good idea to stump the county in the contraption.

"One day we were up in the Cove—that's up the valley—young Roosevelt, Ed Perkins and myself, and we ran over a farmer's dog. Ed and I decided to get the hell out of there as soon as possible. But young Roosevelt insisted we go up and tell the farmer about the dog. The Cove in those days had some of the orneriest Republicans in the county and we tried to talk him out of it. But he had his way.

"Ed and I expected to get chased off the farm with a shotgun, but when Franklin told him the news the old farmer smiled and said, 'I've had six dogs killed on this farm and you are the first culprit that owned up to it. Young man, I'm going to vote for you.'"

The sun had pushed over the mountains and its light flooded the whole valley. By 8 o'clock everybody in Beacon seemed to be at the railroad station. The crowd was quiet, except for a road station. The crowd was quiet, except for a curly-haired baby who was crying. A low rumbling came from around the bend and the crowd stirred. The curly-haired baby stopped crying.

The train puffed around Beacon Bend. It came slowly through the station, each coach making a melancholy, wind-swishing sound as it passed. In no time at all the train was out of sight, going on to Hyde Park, 19 miles away. Harold Brilliant, the town cop, stayed in the station after the crowd had left. For a long-time he said nothing. Then Harold took off his cap and scratched his head.

"He's gone," the town cop said.

—Pvt. JAMES P. O'NEILL
YANK Staff Writer

YANK

OldMagazineArticles.com