

YANK

May 25, 1945: p. 8

NEW YORK MOURNS



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.

N Y M O U R N S

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 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 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