

Presidents stop in Eastern Idaho

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BY BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political Editor

Idaho is a small state population-wise, but most of the presidents and presidential nominees have come to Idaho, many of them to East Idaho, since the turn of the century.

This writer has had the opportunity to personally interview all of them except President Eisenhower during the more than 35 years I have been affiliated with The Post-Register. That goes back to the days of feisty Harry Truman.

Of all, Truman was by far the most popular among the newsmen to interview. He was common as an old shoe and reporters felt like he was talking to his backyard neighbor—that is, if you're on speaking terms with your neighbor.

Truman was a blunt-speaking president, both at the rostrum and in private. But he was the type who would put his arm around you as compared with most of the others who had a regal air, such as Jack Kennedy, Eisenhower, and Richard Nixon, in particular.

Actually, Jimmy Carter also is easy to talk to, as was President Gerald Ford. Perhaps of all, Eisenhower and Nixon were the most disliked by most newsmen who followed the presidential parties in their trips. Truman was in Idaho Falls on a couple of occasions, but the one in June, 1948, when he was campaigning is the most memorable.

He rode on back of the presidential train when it stopped at the Idaho Falls station, and he vowed then he would win the presidency in his "give them hell" style.

Truman was again in Idaho Falls on Sept. 14, 1962, when he came to boost Democratic candidates, mostly to help the re-election efforts of U.S. Rep. Ralph Harding. This time he came in a twin engine plane, speaking briefly at the airport and holding a press conference at the old Rogers Hotel.

A member of the national press corps remarked, "it's like a breath of spring to talk to Truman after what we had," meaning Eisenhower and Kennedy.

He also visited the Eastern Idaho State Fair at Blackfoot. Asked why he consented

to speak at a \$12.50 dinner when his other appearances were limited to \$100-per-plate, he said he liked the poor people and he came here because of that.

President Warren G. Harding visited in Idaho Falls and went by train to Yellowstone National Park during his reign as president in 1922.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt also passed through Idaho Falls in the late 30s, but it was near midnight and he was asleep. His wife, Eleanor, did come out to talk at the back of the train, but the crowd booed her because they wanted to see Roosevelt.

President Eisenhower was not readily available to the press, but he did travel to Boise for a brief appearance during his term of office.

President Nixon came to Idaho Falls August, 1971, making two stopovers in Idaho Falls, and touring Teton National Park. He was pleased with the warm reception he received here.

He also was at Sun Valley in connection with a governor's conference, along with Barry Goldwater, during a presidential campaign. Both were interviewed by this reporter at press conferences and also at an informal cocktail social.

In fact, Nixon also delivered a speech in Idaho Falls when he was a young California congressman some 25 years ago. Nixon's wife, Pat, also visited in Idaho Falls and also Yellowstone Park, Sept. 19-20, 1972. She gave a short talk to a crowd gathered at Ravsten Stadium for her visit.

President Lyndon B. Johnson and his vivacious wife, Lady Bird, were here in May, 1960, when he was the powerful Senate majority leader and was seeking the presidency. He lost the nomination to John Kennedy but was picked and elected as Kennedy's vice presidential choice.

Johnson delivered the Jackson-Jefferson Day talk that night at the old White Elephant, now an annex of the Department of Energy. His speech was mostly one of story telling, anecdotes and political platitudes.

On Aug. 26, 1966, he spoke to some 12,000, mostly AEC personnel at the INEL, then

known as the National Reactor Testing Station. He was on hand to dedicate the historic EBR 1, which made the tests that led to the first atomic lighting Dec. 20, 1951. Among those on hand were Glenn T. Seaborg, then the AEC chairman, and Admiral H.D. Rickover, who envisioned the nuclear submarine developed at INEL.

The closest President Ford got to Idaho was speaking over a telephone hookup to the State Republican Convention at Moscow in 1976. This writer had the opportunity to interview him by telephone.

However, Ford did come to Yellowstone Park and spoke on plans for expansion of the national park service program Aug. 30, 1976. More than 2,500 heard him in a talk near Yellowstone's famous Old Faithful geyser.

In fact, Ford was a park ranger in the summer of 1936, and a good one, reports indicate.

This writer interviewed President John Kennedy twice during his term, once at Pocatello and another time at Jackson, Wyo., six weeks before his assassination on Nov. 22, 1963.

It comes to memory asking him about the proposed Burns Creek Dam in the South Fork of the Snake River, which he was not familiar with, but later explained in a talk at Pocatello that he warmly supported it.

Many other of the nation's leaders have come to Idaho. Among these were Sen. Goldwater, the Republican presidential contender; Sens. George McGovern and Edward Muskie, presidential candidates, at the Idaho Democratic Convention at Sun Valley in 1972; Sen. Robert Kennedy toured the Fort Hall Indian Reservation before he also was assassinated in June, 1968, and many others.

Illinois U.S. Rep. John Anderson, now the formidable independent presidential candidates, was here a dozen years ago in connection with a party event and made an impressive impact.

Reagan was here May 12, 1976, while campaigning for the presidency, barely losing the nomination later to Ford.

He landed at the airport, granted an

exclusive interview to this writer while riding from the airport to the Civic Auditorium, and then delivered a major talk there. His campaign manager here at the time was Dennis M. Olsen, now the state party chairman.

Almost forgotten, Reagan came to Idaho Falls before he entered the political arena as a promoter and salesman for General Electric when that firm held the prime operating contract for the old Aircraft Propulsion Plant the NRTS, now known as the INEL. That was in 1963, and he recalled that in the 1972 interview.

Perhaps President Carter is better acquainted with East Idaho and Idaho Falls than any other president.

He came to the NRTS several times while a young Navy lieutenant after being graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and serving under Admiral Rickover.

It was in the summer of 1974 when Carter was the Georgia governor that he came to Pocatello, preparing then for his successful campaign two years later.

This writer enjoyed an exclusive 45-minute interview with him because there was no other newsmen present. Actually this reporter went there because Carter was chairman of the National Democratic Campaign Committee, not that he was a leading presidential contender. Also Gov. Cecil D. Andrus wanted a newsmen there and no one else appeared interested.

When Carter was elected to the presidency, this writer was invited to the White House with the first batch of newsmen from the nation, the only one from the West, for a day seminar. It included an hour press conference with the president. That was in Nov. 17, 1977, and Carter promised then to back SAREF, and the INEL research and development programs. He has supported the INEL operations, but his efforts in behalf of SAREF have been less than enthusiastic.

Carter also visited first in Yellowstone and Teton National Parks, and floated down the Middle Fork of the Salmon River in August, 1978, on a vacation trip and his exposure to newsmen was limited.