

Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt Visits Orange

From an article in the Orange County Historical Society *Newsletter*:

The January 4, 1934 *Orange County News* reported a visit by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to the town of Orange. Shortly after the visit, the Tea Room mentioned was removed [relocated] to make way for the current Orange County post office.

“Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, wife of the President, and Mrs. L. A. Hickok of Washington, D.C. had lunch at the Robert E. Lee Tea Room on Main Street, Monday afternoon. Mrs. Roosevelt was driving a Plymouth roadster, and was en route, after spending Sunday night in Charlottesville, where with Mrs. Hickok, she visited the University of Virginia and Monticello. She talked to the White House while at the Tea Room. Messrs. William C. Williams and R. H. Rawlings were among those who shook hands with the first lady of the land, and both gentlemen were impressed with her gracious and warm personality.”¹

A second article in another OC Historical Society *Newsletter* by Paul Slayton adds more detail:

“This month’s visit of Hillary Rodham Clinton was not the first time one of the nation’s First Ladies has visited our county. Dolley P. Madison was, of course, a resident of the county for over forty years, and a number of First Ladies have visited Orange at various times. The article below commemorates the impromptu 1934 visit of Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt to the town of Orange. Pulling from original newspaper stories, Society member Paul Slayton gives us a look back at that visit:

Eleanor Roosevelt visited Orange on January 2, 1934. Returning from a visit to the University of Virginia and Monticello, she and a friend, Mrs. Hickok stopped for a late lunch at the Robert E. Lee Tea Room on Main Street. [The Robert E. Lee Tea Room was located where today’s post office stands.]

Mrs. Roosevelt was immediately recognized by the proprietress, Mrs. Harlow, and customer Jim Green, editor of The Orange Review. Not wishing to intrude upon the ladies, neither made any move to acknowledge the First Lady’s presence.

However, the Harlow’s old English Bulldog, awakened from his somnolent reverie by the sounds of the ladies being served, had no such compunctions. Raised by the former Mayor of Orange, the dog was a practicing politician. Never one to

¹ Author unknown, “Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt Visits Orange,” *Orange County Historical Society Newsletter*, Volume 24, Number 3 (January 1999), 1.

miss a chance to greet friends or strangers, he stood up, stretched, then ambled toward the guests. Mrs. Harlow, not wanting her guest disturbed called out the dog's name in a strong admonitory tone, 'Hoover!'

Mrs. Roosevelt perked up at the sound of that name but seeing the retreating dog, she smiled demurely and continued her lunch.

Just as the ladies were finishing lunch, two prominent town citizens, J.W. Browning, Clerk of the Court, and businessman W.C. Williams entered the tea room.

As the distinguished ladies were obviously finishing their lunch, the gentlemen, both stalwart Democrats, approached Mrs. Roosevelt to welcome her to Orange.

After a bit of small talk, Mrs. Roosevelt announced that she must get underway if she was to reach Washington before nightfall.

In saying their goodbye's, Mr. Williams stated, 'Mrs. Roosevelt, please inform your husband that the people of Orange are behind him 100%. We voted for him and we trust him completely.'

Mr. Browning, feeling that perhaps Mr. Williams had overstated the case amended, 'Well, a few folks hereabouts did vote for Hoover.' But he added, 'we figure most of the malcontents thought they were voting for Mrs. Harlow's dog'. "²

² Paul Slayton, "A First Lady Visits Orange," *Orange County Historical Society Newsletter*, Volume 29, Number 4 (July/August 1993), 2.