

Way We Were

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Presidents and the Park

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In honor of President's Day next Monday, let's look at Park City's presidential connections.

Our local history with presidents goes back at least to Benjamin Harrison. In 1891, Harrison visited Salt Lake City while on a grand tour of the southern and western United States. The *Salt Lake Herald* originally noted that Harrison was the first "real president" to visit Utah, though the paper was later corrected by a reader recalling that Ulysses S. Grant had visited the territory in 1875, during his tenure as the Commander in Chief. During Harrison's 1891 visit, Park City's mayor Gilbert Gregor organized a delegation to travel from Park City to Salt Lake to meet and speak with the president.

Parkites reached out to several presidents over the course of the twentieth century, inviting many to stop by while on tours to discuss politics or to use the area as a vacation spot. The Commercial Club of Park City, an organization that promoted financial interests and social reform activities, invited President William Taft to town in 1909. Taft was in Utah on political business but had no plans to come through Park City. The Commercial Club noted that their last-minute decision to invite the president was "perhaps a little late," but that "the effort was worthwhile." They sent a letter on September 7. The very next day, Taft's secretary sent a politely worded response declining the invitation.

In the 1920s, when President Warren G. Harding was looking for a summer vacation home, Park City emphasized the natural beauty of the Wasatch Back in an effort to entice Harding here. The *Park Record* was not shy about noting the ulterior motive for the invitation: "we will do our best to convince him that tariff, or legislature, or co-operation, or something of a like nature, is absolutely essential for larger payrolls and increased prosperity in this particular neck of the woods." The amount of concern a president gave to metal prices, profitability of mines and the thousands of men mine companies employed was a long-running indicator of the amount of support Parkites gave to that president at any given time.

Though he never came to Park City, President Kennedy had a small role in our town's history. At the 1962 Utah Press Association luncheon hosted by the White House, the president was shown the application and plans for the development of Treasure Mountains Resort (now Park City). Turning to his press secretary, Kennedy reportedly said, "Pierre, take care of that," a directive that influenced the eventual recommendation that won the town the grant that funded the ski area.

Park City's most recent presidential association was Bill Clinton, who came to Deer Valley with his family in 1998 and 1999. The president treated both trips as proper vacations, avoiding politics and photo ops in favor of a good thriller novel by the fire and casual handshakes at the Main Street Deli.



Image ID: 1998.22.1

Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum

Caption: While Hillary and Chelsea skied the Deer Valley slopes, President Bill Clinton strolled Main Street, stopping at the Deli, Dolly's Bookstore, and the Park City Museum, pictured here.

Sources:

Park Record, May 2, 1891; Sept 11, 18, 1909; March 25, 1921; February 18, 1927; Sept 1, 1966; Apr 7, 1994; Aug 30, 2006

Chicago Tribune, March 1, 1999

Deseret News, Feb 26, March 1, 1999

Salt Lake Herald, April 22, 1891