

## ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: U.S. PRESIDENTS IN ELMHURST

Warren G. Harding, the 29th president of the United States, has a somber connection to city of Elmhurst. In the summer of 1923, Harding took a "Voyage of Understanding," a seven-week train tour of the Midwest, the West, and Alaska. Throughout the trip Harding made speeches and met with local

politicians in an attempt to establish contact with the people. He died unexpectedly on August 2, 1923 in San Francisco towards the end of the tour. When his body was transported by train back to Washington D.C., citizens lined up across the country to pay their last respects. Harding's funeral train passed through Elmhurst.



*People pay their last respects to President Warren G. Harding as his funeral train passes through Elmhurst on August 6, 1923. M2015.1.55*



*President Jimmy Carter greets people in Elmhurst, 1978. M2012.37.2*

The Elmhurst City Council held a special meeting and resolved that the citizens of Elmhurst would observe one minute of silence when the funeral train passed through Elmhurst on August 6th. Arrangements were made for officials of the Chicago and North Western Railroad to inform Elmhurst's mayor forty-five minutes before the train was due to arrive, then the fire department blew its alarm whistle to notify the residents. The Scoutmaster of an Elmhurst Boy Scout troop received a telegram from the Boy Scouts of America

headquarters in New York requesting that a uniformed honor guard be provided as the train passed through Elmhurst.

On a more positive note, Senator John F. Kennedy spoke at a Democratic rally at York Community High School on October 25, 1960 just weeks before his November 8th election as the 35th president of the United States. The Elmhurst Press reported that it was the first major political speech by a presidential candidate in DuPage County. The rally was scheduled to start at 8:00 p.m. However, due to Senator Kennedy's full schedule and heavy traffic, he was hours late arriving in Elmhurst. The long wait did not diminish the enthusiasm of the estimated 6,000 people that were in the school gym with an overflow crowd on the lawn. Elmhurst police officers were involved with crowd management, traffic control, and providing an escort for Senator Kennedy.

On another occasion, the 39th president of the United States, Jimmy Carter, was an overnight guest of Elmhurst residents the Rev. Mr. James and Mary Eleanor Wall. James Wall had served as the Illinois chairperson of Carter's 1976 presidential campaign. He and his wife had developed a friendship with the Carters, so when Carter was in Chicago to attend a Cook County Democratic fund-raiser in May 1978, the Walls invited him to their home. Thousands lined the route of the presidential motorcade into Elmhurst and others stood behind the barriers erected across from the Wall's home. Members of the Elmhurst Police Department worked with federal agents and White House staff members to provide security, while members of Elmhurst's Public Works Department cleaned the streets and parkways in the area and erected an area for the press.

*By Nancy Wilson, Elmhurst History Museum Staff*

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