

## FDR PHOTOS IN OUR ARCHIVES.....

By Hank Laney, Curator

Our archives contain hundred's of photos from the early 1930's to the end of FDR's life. Where these photos came from is a mystery to me, but it's quite likely they were donated to us some time ago from the files of a local newspaper.

The photos themselves are not originals but copies sent by wirephoto, a process essentially the same as sending by fax. Although the process traces back to 1895, the first wirephoto systems were slow and did not reproduce well. The technology was more or less perfected in 1921 when Western Union transmitted the first halftone photograph, but it was not until 1924 that the methods used - and the results produced - became comparable to those used today.



A 1930's Wirephoto Machine

The underlying process is amazingly simple. A photo transparency is mounted on a spinning drum and scanned line by line. This produces electrical signals which vary corresponding to the variation in the shades and tones of the original image and which can then be sent out over telephone lines. A device at the other end immediately inverts the process to form a duplicate pictorial image, unlike a Morse telegraph transmission of dots and dashes that requires an intermediate translation step. The first "fax" images took seven minutes each to transmit. Technological improvements have reduced the time considerably.

In the early 1930's this technology merged with what was known as the "wire services", such as the Associated Press or United Press International. At that time most of America got its news from newspapers, not from radio, TV or the internet. Although newspapers of the era had their own journalists and photographers they mostly covered local events

because they could only cover a fraction of the nation's news. The wire services, however, could cover most of the country - and later the world. Stories were sent on to their subscribers who paid a fee for this service. Soon a newspaper in San Francisco could receive a story or photo within hours of its being covered by a wire service. Newspaper offices in widely remote cities were connected to the wire service offices in New York, and when all was ready, simultaneously received the story and photos.



The photos in our archives came from this process. A wirephoto was usually accompanied by a separate hard-copy teletype that provided a caption and brief explanation of the event and/or people in the photo. Each teletype had an admonition from the wire service that proper credit be given to the wire service! That still holds true today.



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO FROM NEW YORK  
CAUTION WATCH CREDIT

NEW YORK GOVERNOR ON VACATION *Individual*

GOVERNOR FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT OF NEW YORK PHOTOGRAPHED ON THE PORCH OF HIS COTTAGE AT WARM SPRINGS, GA., ON THE LAST DAY OF HIS SUMMER VACATION MAY 24. HE WAS TO LEAVE THE NEXT DAY FOR NEW YORK CITY, LATER PROCEEDING TO ALBANY. THIS CLOSE-UP PHOTOGRAPH SHOWS THAT THE VACATION HAS BENEFITED THE GOVERNOR.

ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO  
LAH 5/25/32 NVC NR PX WX BA BX PROV CD  
DT CX WISC PG

FDR was a photogenic and charismatic president. Everywhere he went he was covered by the wire services. Stories were written, photos taken, and in the hands of the network of local newspapers within hours of the event. Whoever donated these historic photos to us is deserving of many thanks.