Kennedy Was 5th President To Visit University's Campus At Chapel Hill

By W. D. WEEKS

When John F. Kennedy visited the University today, the occasion was far from any virgin exploration here by a U. S. President. Mr. Kennedy was the fifth President to visit UNC, which observed its 165th anniversary.

The last President to visit the University was Franklin D. Roosevelt, who gave a brief speech in Woollen Gymnasium in December 1933.

President James K. Polk, the only UNC alumnus to become President, spoke at the 1847 commencement. James Buchanan came in office, was an honored guest here in 1859, as was President Andrew Johnson who came to the commencement of 1867.

It was befitting that the first President to visit the University would be Polk, graduate of the UNC class of 1818. He brought with him another Carolina graduate, his Secretary of the Navy, John Young Mason, class of 1816.

In his book, "The Campus of the First State University," Archibald Henderson writes:

Polk Visit

"On learning of the coming visit of President Polk and his party to Chapel Hill, the Trustees were thrown into quite a dither on account of manifest unpreparedness to receive such distinguished guests —there being only two University buildings and residences.

As a result of this emergency, college buildings were rewashed, the four University dwelling houses—one to be occupied by the President —were repainted, and Gerrard Hall was extremely touching. Secretary Mason was as usual most happy in his answer to the cordial welcome extended."

Special Address

During his stay here Polk was accommodated in a special addition to the local hotel, the addition built expressly to house the President and his party. Miss Nancy Hilliard, the proprietor of the Eagle Hotel, installed a metal plate on the addition, denoting the fact that President Polk was the first occupant.

After his return to Washington President Polk wrote in his diary on June 5, 1847:

"[illegible] President Swain was 'distinguished by eminent courtesy of sentiment and chasteness of diction.' The answer of the President was most felicitous. His tribute to President Caldwell and welcomed me in the most cordial manner."

Twelve years after Polk returned to his alma mater, President Buchanan came to Chapel Hill [illegible] just prior to the Civil War—and gave a short talk on temperance and the preservation of the Union. He also presented an English prize.

Buchanan Received

President Buchanan did not arrive until two days after the Commencement ceremonies began. The Presidential party was received by President Swain and a dinner was given in his honor on the front yard of Dr. Hatter's home. Dr. Hatter [illegible] and the attentions paid me on the route going and returning, was all that I could have desired it to be. My visit was wholly unexpected with politics, and all parties greeted

gave the English prize to E. E. Wright of Tennessee. His speech dealt largely with temperance.

Just Johnson told how 41 years before he had left Raleigh, his native town, and journeyed on foot by way of Chapel Hill to his newly chosen home, how he walked over our main street weary and hungry and asked for food and a night's lodging from kindly James Craig, who not only complied with his request but gave the forlorn boy a bag full of bread and meat for his future needs. His next visit to Chapel Hill was as President of this great Republic of nearly forty million souls. The cabin which gave him shelter still stands."

It wasn't until 71 years later that [illegible] University here, a man who had his hands full with the nation's greatest depression. On a rainy December day in 1938, Roosevelt, in a half-hour speech before 10,000

who jammed Woollen Gymnasium, defended "liberalism" in some of the unfavorable New Deal Congressional elections the month before. Roosevelt received an overwhelming reception.

Other Presidents have visited Chapel Hill and the University, but not while in office. Woodrow Wilson came to the University in 1911 when he was Governor of New Jersey. Theodore Roosevelt made a public address here, and William Howard Taft delivered the Weil lectures in 1915, after he had retired as President.

Others who have visited in the [illegible] are George Washington, Herbert Hoover, Harry Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower. Eisenhower came to Chapel Hill to visit friends, after World War II and before he became President.

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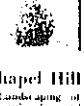

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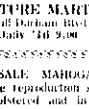

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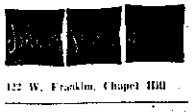

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