



Looking back at previous presidential visits to Syracuse

by [Alex Dunbar](#)

Posted: 08.21.2013 at 6:31 PM

SYRACUSE -- On the eve of President Obama's visit to Syracuse, the [Onondaga Historical Association](#) went through their files to see photos and rare materials from past presidential visits.

Syracuse was an especially popular stop for presidents when railways ran through downtown. Abraham Lincoln stopped on the way to his inauguration and spoke to a massive crowd on what is now Washington Street near Salina Street. One hundred and fifty years ago it was Syracuse's first train station.

"It was easy for crowds to gather round, the trains literally came right down the street," said OHA curator Dennis Connors.

The OHA files have pictures from numerous presidential visits including a 1911 stop by President Taft. By 1915, Theodore Roosevelt had left office but when a downstate political rival sued him for libel, Roosevelt successfully defended himself in the Onondaga County Courthouse

"Here you've got a former president on trial and they needed to find a more neutral location so they moved it away from Albany or New York City and they moved it to Syracuse," said Connors.

The files also show several Central New York presidential photo opportunities. Franklin Delano Roosevelt at SUNY Medical Center in 1936 and a campaign stop by John F. Kennedy at Syracuse's Clinton Square in 1960. Syracuse University was also the site of Lyndon Johnson's noted Gulf of Tonkin speech in 1964.

"Which of course led to the great escalation in the Vietnam war - and so that moment in American history and presidential history is associated with Syracuse," said Connors.

Most recently, massive crowds followed then President Bill Clinton everywhere he went during a Skaneateles vacation in 1999.

"Great promotion certainly for the finger lakes and Skaneateles and Central New York," said Connors. "I think it's really its one of the things that's really helped tourism in this part of the state."

