

Q&A on Presidential Libraries

Written by Sen. Charles Grassley
Thursday, 29 August 2013 15:24

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by U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley

Q: What is the purpose of presidential libraries?

A: Building on an idea conceived by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Congress passed legislation in 1955 that established a system to preserve the artifacts and documents of the presidency. The network of libraries starts with the 31st president, Iowa's own Herbert Hoover. The law has worked to secure the official papers, documents and materials collected throughout a president's years in office. It also helps prevent these records that bear tremendous value to the American public from being lost, destroyed or sold. The *Presidential Libraries Act of 1955* set a precedent in which private dollars are used to establish and build the libraries after which the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) would operate and maintain them. Until 1978, presidents were encouraged to donate their records and materials after leaving office. The *Presidential Records Act of 1978* established that all materials documenting the constitutional, statutory and ceremonial duties of the president are the property of the American public. Through museums, archives and public programs, the 13 presidential libraries offer current and future generations a unique opportunity to understand and appreciate how history unfolded within the White House.

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Technology has changed dramatically from the audio recordings of FDR's "fireside chats" to the video and social media platforms that today capture every breath a 21st

century president takes. No matter the medium, the carefully archived material offers researchers, scholars, historians and the American people a profound look back at each presidency. From the millions of pages of letters and documents to the hours and hours of audio and video footage, visitors get to take a look behind the scenes and gain a deeper understanding of each president's policies, priorities, pressures, politics and place in history. Congress passed a major funding update in 1986 that requires private endowments to be established for each facility to help offset the cost of maintenance.

Q: Where are the 13 presidential libraries?

A: Barbara and I took a road trip in August to visit the presidential libraries of the 33rd and 34th presidents, two Midwestern-raised men who made it all the way to the White House. We spent five hours at President Harry S. Truman's presidential library and museum in Independence, Missouri, and the next day drove to Abilene, Kansas, to learn more about President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Both of these men came from humble beginnings, chose to serve his country in the military, and then served two terms as leader of the Free World. Both of their stories, one a Democrat and the other a Republican, illustrates the enduring American values of hard work, sacrifice, public service, and love of country. Just like our visits to Hoover's library in West Branch, Barbara and I enjoyed visiting the presidential libraries in Missouri and Kansas. Planning a visit to one or all of the 13 presidential libraries makes for a great family trip. Visitors will soak in bits of history and come away with an even stronger appreciation for our American heritage.

Here's a list of each presidential library and location:

- Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum, West Branch, Iowa

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- Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, Hyde Park, New York
- Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, Independence, Missouri
- Dwight D. Eisenhower, Presidential Library and Museum and Boyhood Home, Abilene, Kansas
- John F. Kennedy, Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, Massachusetts
- Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas
- Richard M. Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California
- Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan and Museum, Grand Rapids, Michigan
- Jimmy Carter Library and Museum, Atlanta, Georgia
- Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, Simi Valley, California
- George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, College Station, Texas
- William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum, Little Rock, Arkansas

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- George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, Dallas, Texas.

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