

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S PASSAGE THROUGH WINCHESTER

By Ellen Knight¹

Celebrations of Presidents Day may recall the time in 1902 when President Theodore Roosevelt greeted thousands of cheering townspeople in downtown Winchester.

It was actually his second known visit to Winchester. On Oct. 28, 1884, when he was a 26-year-old assemblyman for New York just entering the national political scene, he made a speech at the Republican Rally in Winchester's Lyceum Hall to stump for the (unsuccessful) Republican ticket and for Henry Cabot Lodge.²

Seventeen years later, Roosevelt became Chief Executive. In 1902 he was barnstorming through New England for Republican congressmen. On Aug. 26, he was scheduled to travel from Boston to Lowell.

On the day before, Roosevelt was in Boston, where Winchester florist and former selectman Samuel Twombly, who had attended every inauguration from Grant to McKinley and presented each new president with an elaborate floral offering, sent him a gift of flowers.³

That same day, Frank Barr, assistant general manager of the B & M Railroad and a resident of Wedgemere Avenue, obtained the President's consent that his train would pass slowly through Winchester to offer townspeople an opportunity to see their President.

Barr then contacted *The Winchester Star* to circulate the news. That was at about 4 p.m. By 5 p.m. the *Star* had boys on the streets distributing a thousand or so circulars throughout town. The superintendent of the McKay factory (off McKay Avenue) was called and "entered heartily into the project of spreading the tidings."

Thus it was that "Winchester turned out nobly," as the *Star* put it, to greet President Roosevelt as he passed through town. By 8:51 a.m. when the special, flag-decorated train of four cars came into view, nearly 2,000 people had lined up alongside the tracks in the center. The entire police force was on hand to keep the tracks clear.

"It was the biggest crowd that was ever seen in the centre of the town or about the station." That crowd reportedly got an excellent view of the President.



Normal appearance of a train passing through Winchester center, 1899



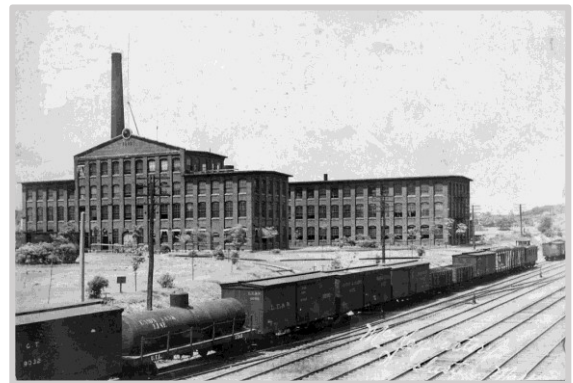
President Roosevelt speaking to the people of Lawrence from the observation platform upon which he stood, smiling and waving, while passing through Winchester.

The train slowed at Wedgemere and passed through the center at a snail's pace. "While dozens of school children waved old glory," the crowd cheered the President standing on the rear observation platform of the last car. He, in return, smiled and bowed again and again to the right and left. Reportedly, "his eyes glistened and his features relaxed as he caught sight of a hundred or more boys and girls who crowded close to the train and who cheered wildly as President Roosevelt cast an admiring glance at them."

Further, the *Star* reported that "The large, eager and orderly crowd must have left an impression on President Roosevelt, as he appeared to be much pleased."

At the McKay factory nearly 700 employees lined the tracks. Roosevelt, having retired into the car, rushed out again. "Indeed he hurried so that he almost fell off the train. A mighty shout went up as he reached the platform, where he saluted, swung his hat, and bowed to the men."

The overall tour proved exhausting for Roosevelt and came close to killing him in Pittsfield where an accident with a streetcar threw him from his carriage to the ground and proved fatal to his bodyguard. But the passage through Winchester certainly gave townspeople a lift. As the *Star* reported, "It was all over in a moment. As the cheers died away the train disappeared in the distance. The memory of the brief moment, however, will long be cherished."⁴



The McKay factory with freight cars on its railroad sidings

¹ This article © 2023 by the author Ellen Knight was first published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on Feb. 20, 2023.

² <https://www.winchester.us/DocumentCenter/View/3457/Teddy-Roosevelt?bidid=>

³ *The Boston Globe*, Aug. 26, 1902.

⁴ *The Winchester Star*, Aug. 29, 1902.