

Benjamin C. West

Meeting President Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Description of a chance encounter with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1945.
Interview recorded May 23, 2007

As part of the President's presence in a Joint Session, the White House would dispatch 500 copies for the House Floor and 100 copies to the Press Gallery, but on this particular occasion, the 100 for the Press Gallery did not appear. So my superintendent, Mr. William Donaldson, dispatched me down to the second floor to see if, mistakenly, our quantity had found its way into the House portion, and his parting remark was, he says, "And I don't want to see you walking." So, I went charging through the Press Gallery rooms out to the East Corridor, got on the Press Members' elevator down to the second floor. As the door on the elevator is starting to part, I'm ready to charge forward, and immediately to the right of that elevator is the door leading to the Speaker's Office, and the door opened, unknown to me, and then one Secret Service man accompanying Mr. Roosevelt pushed the chair out in front of that elevator. Well, I now have one foot out of the elevator at full force, and I was able to, and agile enough at that time, to swing left and avoid him, but on the wall is this huge, old cast-iron mailbox. I believe it's still there. and I kind of took a pretty good blow, there, and Mr. Roosevelt said, "Are you all right, son?" And I, kind of well-shaken, I said, "I think so," and by this time, I realized it's the President, and I said, "I think so, Mr. President," and he extended his hand, and so I shook the hand of Mr. Roosevelt prior to his report to Congress on the Yalta Conference.