

Presidents & South Dakota

Teaching Tip

South Dakota: Visits by the Presidents

Visits by the Presidents

Many presidents have visited South Dakota, including Mount Rushmore. The article below from the South Dakota State Historical Society Press website documents the Presidential visits from 1899 – 1999. (View: ["Patriotic Pageantry: Presidential Visits to South Dakota" by Harold H. Schuler](#))

Video footage was used to document the Presidential visits.

The following film ([Watch PBS](#) (the film is silent)) was recorded on August 10, 1927, showing President Calvin Coolidge riding a horse to the dedication of the Mount Rushmore site. There are also views of Mount Rushmore as it looked before carving began (photo above). In the next clip, a narrator provides some detail about the events of the dedication. Coolidge addressed the assembly and presented sculptor Gutzon Borglum with steel drill bits, symbolically providing the tools to get the carving underway. ([Watch PBS/ Photos & Article](#))



Still from Film: Calvin Coolidge at Mt. Rushmore - 1927



Still from Film: FDR at Mount Rushmore - 1936

On August 30, 1936, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt visited the Black Hills to dedicate the Jefferson sculpture. Roosevelt was already in the region on a tour of Great Plains states hard-hit by the drought of the 1930s.

In the photo left, a flag is removed from Jefferson's face during the dedication.

The following clip ([Watch PBS](#)) contains two newsreel films. In the second, Roosevelt is shown speaking extemporaneously about the significance of Mount Rushmore and its place in history.

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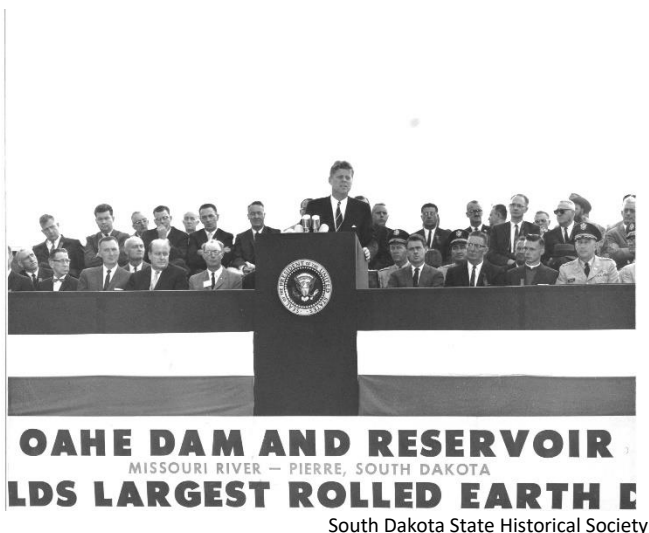
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On June 11, 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower became the first U.S. President to arrive in South Dakota by air. Eisenhower came to the state to address delegates attending a Young Republicans League convention in Rapid City.

President Eisenhower addressed the Delegates at a gathering at Mount Rushmore. In the following clip ([Watch PBS](#)), Eisenhower is seen speaking and mixing with a crowd. There are also shots of Eisenhower fishing, most likely in a stream in Custer State Park. The film is silent. A transcript of the speech is [available online here](#).



Still from Film: Dwight Eisenhower at Mt. Rushmore



President John F. Kennedy visited South Dakota on August 17, 1962. While Kennedy was here, he dedicated the recently completed Oahe Dam and the start of its full operation as an electric power plant.

The following film clip ([Watch PBS](#)) shows the arrival of Air Force One at the Pierre airport. Assembled dignitaries greet Kennedy, including Governor Archie Gubbrud and then-U.S. Senate candidate George McGovern. ([Listen to Kennedy's Speech](#))

Related Video

Cleaning Mount Rushmore: The following program features spectacular video showing National Parks Service workers using helicopters, ropes and harnesses to access every part of the sculpture. ([Watch](#))

[Mount Rushmore Models:](#) Danish-born sculptor Gutzon Borglum's original vision of the monumental Mount Rushmore figures was very different from the carving as it stands today. ([more](#))