

# [***New book on 'whistle-stop' campaign trains describes politics and adventure throughout history***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BBV-02X1-JC5B-G386-00000-00&context=1516831)

The Associated Press

February 17, 2024 Saturday 6:55 PM GMT

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**Section:** LIFESTYLE; DOMESTIC NEWS; ENTERTAINMENT NEWS; POLITICAL NEWS; STATE AND REGIONAL

**Length:** 918 words

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**Dateline:** CRESTLINE, Ohio

**Body**

CRESTLINE, Ohio — From its earliest days as a village, Crestline was synonymous with trains. A railroad station inspired this northern Ohio town, railroad workers populated it and the passengers who flocked here helped it grow.

So it seems only fitting that a politician’s stop in Crestline would go on to popularize the word “whistle-stop.”

The tale of underdog 1948 presidential candidate Harry S. Truman's decision to capitalize on the remark of an opponent — Ohio's own “Mr. Republican,” U.S. Sen. Robert Taft — to own the term, and win the election, is just one of dozens of colorful anecdotes in Edward Segal's new book, “Whistle-Stop ***Politics***: Campaign Trains and the Reporters Who Covered Them.”

Segal, a former press secretary and aide to both Democratic and Republican candidates, explains that whistle-stop was a railroad term at the time to describe small towns without regularly scheduled train service. The conductor would signal the engineer that passengers needed to disembark, and the engineer "would respond with two toots of the whistle,” he writes.

By 1948, though, the term had become shorthand for describing a community that was viewed as backward or undesirable. So when Taft accused Truman — not long after his “special” train had stopped in Crestline — of going around the country on this campaign train tour “blackguarding (attacking) Congress at every whistle-stop,” Truman embraced the opportunity.

The Democratic National Committee asked voters, “Was it nice of the Senator to call you a whistle-stop?” Seventy-three percent of respondents said they didn't approve. Truman began using the term himself, Segal writes, and it soon lost its pejorative meaning.

Altogether, Segal has cataloged at least 180 campaign train trips throughout U.S. history — from William Henry Harrison to Joe Biden, with dozens of presidents, vice presidents, first ladies, representatives, senators and governors in between. He continues to update the record on this uniquely “American invention” on the book's website: [*www.whistlestoppolitics.com*](https://www.whistlestoppolitics.com/.).

The project was inspired by Segal's personal experience organizing a whistle-stop campaign tour for Republican U.S. Rep. Mickey Edwards of Oklahoma, for whom he was serving as press secretary in 1984.

“He wanted press coverage, and I said, ‘Congressman, how are we going to generate press coverage for you?’ He said, ‘I don’t know. That’s your problem to figure out,’” Segal said in an interview.

Segal, a self-described “recovering political science major,” thought immediately of Truman’s famous underdog campaign of 1948. “And it turns out there was a set of workable train tracks in the congressman’s district,” he said.

The letters and interviews used to inform the book date back to that time. They include: George McGovern, Adlai Stevenson III, Jody Powell, other candidates and candidates' relatives and a host of journalists. Other details are drawn from books, news accounts, and historical documents, photographs and political cartoons.

Segal describes in some detail how campaigns organized these “traveling circuses.” Routes had to be determined, trains located and secured, and then they had to be outfitted for the candidate — oftentimes a sitting president — VIPs, security and railroad personnel, and the press. Technology was always state-of-the-art, from the early days of telegraphs to telephones and beyond, he writes.

The book also revisits whistle-stop speeches and the crowds that gathered to hear the likes of Robert Kennedy, Richard Nixon, George Bush or Barack Obama. It recounts, too, tales of hecklers, pranksters and protesters and describes the ordeal of the traveling press.

The stories are at times humorous, at times harrowing — as when one reporter nearly got left behind by President Theodore Roosevelt's campaign train in 1904 when he got off during a short stop to buy stationery. As the train pulled out, and the reporter “ran at top speed, puffing and huffing” to hop aboard. It was Roosevelt himself who pulled him up.

Sometimes campaign trains were used in creative ways, too, as when comedian Gracie Allen pretended to run for president in 1940, as the nation was recovering from the Great Depression.

“Gracie ran as a candidate of the Surprise Party,” Segal wrote. “The origin of the party's name was as much a joke as the rest of the campaign. She explained that her mother was a Democrat, her father was a Republican, and that she had been born a Surprise.”

Grabbing commercial attention has also been a motivator for some whistle-stop parodies. In 1972, Winnie the Pooh launched a bid for the White House from Disneyland's Main Street, U.S.A., then went on a two-week whistle-stop tour with his trusted advisers, Tigger and Eeyore.

Back in Crestline, Mayor Linda Horning Pitt is buoyed by the fresh attention on her town. Crestline — once “all about the railroad,” she said — has suffered since Amtrak pulled out in the 1990s, but its new train-themed logo and renovated historical museum with a railroad theme are holding space for the future.

On Thursday, All Aboard Ohio is coming to town to update residents on efforts to secure funding from the Federal Railroad Administration and state of Ohio for new passenger rail service across the state. Pitt has been rallying folks to show up and promote Crestline as one of the stops.

“I see it helping everybody,” she said.

The name of the event? The Whistle Stop Tour.

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This corrects to remove the wrong name of a reporter who was helped onto the train by Theodore Roosevelt.

**Load-Date:** February 17, 2024

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