

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library Profile

Rose Fanara

LIS 657: The Special Library

Professor Joyce Weaver

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Name and Background

The official name of this library is the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum. This specific Presidential library is located in Hyde Park, New York. The public can reach the Franklin D. Roosevelt library online at <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/home>. As a Presidential library, The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum is part of the National Archives.

History

In 1934, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed legislation that permitted the creation of the National Archives. An amateur historian, FDR had a specific interest in recordkeeping and preservation, arguing that the archives were important to both the government and scholars. On December 10, 1938, FDR expressed a need for a location to house his personal papers after his time in office. President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposed the idea of constructing a library to house official papers and memorabilia on his family's land in Hyde Park. In doing so, he aimed to keep his collection in one location and preserve each item in their original condition. FDR hoped to create a source material collection, reflecting a significant period in American and International history on a holistic scale. First, he hoped to build the library using private funding, later giving both the structure and collection to the federal government. Thus, the National Archives would become the curators of the library's materials, responsible for the upkeep of the collection and the management of open public access. As the first presidential library, the Franklin D. Roosevelt library served as an example for all future presidential libraries.

Despite the notion that he may be suggesting the construction of a monument to honor himself, FDR aimed to preserve and provide public access to the records of his presidency.

Furthermore, he believed that his papers should be preserved for the accessibility of future historians. Thus, his initial collection included personal and family papers, official manuscripts relating to his political career, photographs, sound and motion recordings, periodicals, books, paintings, state gifts, and other memorabilia. The library was officially dedicated on June 30, 1941 with a small group of the President's friends and family in attendance. President Roosevelt intended to spend time at the library following his years in office, taking a key role in the preparation of the collection. However, FDR died unexpectedly in April 1945 and was unable to play a hands-on role in the sorting of his materials.

The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum officially opened to the public on March 17, 1950. On its opening day, around 85% of the collection had been processed for public access. Throughout the next twenty-seven years, the library increased the number of available collections. The number of visitors grew simultaneously, as the library served as the center of study for the New Deal and American Government in World War II. Following Eleanor Roosevelt's death in 1962, her documents were added to the library's collection. By 1970, the library constructed the Eleanor Roosevelt Wings to accommodate her collection and the growing number of visitors. In 1976, around 99.5% of the library's materials were accessible to the public. The remaining .5% of the collection was intended to remain closed due to the sensitivity of the material (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, 2023). However, only a small number of documents remain closed today. The library continues to uphold the modern professional standards for preservation and storage of historical documents and artifacts. However, a renovation and expansion of the facility proved to be necessary. On March 11, 2009, the library received government funding to begin the necessary renovations, providing future visitors with

new amenities. The library was rededicated on June 30, 2013, exactly 72 years after the original dedication.

The Basics

The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library is open seven days a week from 9am to 5pm in November through March, with an extension to 6pm from April to October. Tickets are priced at \$10 for adults, and there is no charge for research in the FDR Library research room. Those wishing to conduct research must schedule an appointment and may contact a provided email for additional details. The research room is open from 9am to 4pm, Monday through Friday. Researchers are encouraged to access the facility through the courtyard entrance of the historic library building, and must bring government issued identification to access documents. Additionally, the FDR requires a signed form for access to the research facilities (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, 2023).

Archival reference staff are available to identify historical materials and facilitate access to documents in storage. Reference staff are available to instruct and supervise visitors on the handling and preservation of material. All researcher are subject to certain security measures, enacted to guarantee the longevity of materials.

Library Duties

The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library has a wide range of staff members, spanning from directors to technicians. Specifically, the archive department staffs one supervisory archivist, four archivists, and two archives technicians. All archives staff are listed to be available to answer general research questions and questions about the library's holdings. To reach the general archives department, one may email, fax, or postal mail inquiries. Specific staff

members are reachable by phone or email, as their contact information is listed on the library's website (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, 2023).

Beyond paid staff, the library offers both volunteer and internship opportunities. Currently, volunteer opportunities include museum docents, museum greeters, and archive aids. Specific to the archives, archive aids are able to assist with tasks related to collection maintenance, digitization, data entry, filing, and typing. Internship opportunities are available to students of varied backgrounds and interests. Specific to the archives, students may apply for an archival internship. This opportunity aims to provide students with hands-on experience while broadening their historical perspective.

The Collection

The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library houses a variety of documents, including print documents, photographs, audio and film, and digital collections. Following the Covid-19 outbreak, the library has worked to make the majority of their materials accessible from a remote location. To this end, the library has created a number of finding aids, accessible online, to guide researchers through the collection. A finding aid is a guide that is specific to a particular archival collection, created by archivists to help navigate a vast number of unique sources. Specifically, the Roosevelt Library's finding aids describe the collections to a box and folder level, making this a very specific resource. Researchers are able to locate these finding aids through the library's website, but are also welcome to contact the department with specific questions (Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library, 2023).

Additionally, the library has an ongoing digitization program aimed at making the collection of historical documents, photographs, film, sound recordings, and other artifacts

accessible to as many people as possible. Specifically, the online archival collections are housed in “Franklin,” a virtual research room that provides free and open access to the digital collection to the public. Researchers are able to search, browse, and access archival documents as they would during an in-person session in the archives. Given the nature of technology in the 21st century, the library will continue to digitize documents over the coming years.

Budget

The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library is closely connected to the Roosevelt Institute. As the library’s nonprofit partner, the Roosevelt Institute is able to raise and spend funds to support activities. As a member of the National Archives and Records Administration, the library is unable to raise and spend money on its own. Specific to 2022, the budget for the Roosevelt Institute’s FDR Library and Museum was about \$1,072,945. The total revenue was approximately \$966,900 and expenses cost around \$484,450 (Roosevelt Institute, 2022).

Challenges and Changes

The Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library is one of fourteen Presidential Libraries. Together, these libraries make up the Presidential Library system and are overseen by the Office of Presidential Libraries, found within the National Archives and Records Administration. Given the unusual nature of the Presidential Libraries, their holdings belong to the American people. They bring together documents and artifacts of a President and his administration, presenting them in a way without regard for political considerations and affiliations. While positive in nature, one of the library’s biggest challenges is its lack of ability to fund itself. As a member of the National Archives and Records Administration, the library must rely on outside sources for necessary funding. The Roosevelt Institute serves as an example of an outside nonprofit that is

able to support the activities of the library (Roosevelt Institute, 2022). Furthermore, President Roosevelt appointed a Board of Trustees to oversee operations and ensure the success of the library. The Board of Trustees still exists today.

Another challenge that the library faces is the growing demand for accessible resources in the wake of the age of the internet. Like many other libraries and museums, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library has been forced to find ways to reach the public in a remote manner. Both a challenge and a change, the library has prioritized the digitization of resources in order to make information accessible to anyone from any location. This has forced archival staff to reach beyond the scope of familiar, hands-on research. However, this challenge has resulted in a positive change as more people are able to reap the benefits of the collection. The library will continue to grow in this direction, as more resources are digitized for easy access.

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