

Herbert Hoover Remarks to the People of Madison County, Virginia, at the Celebration of 'Hoover Day in Madison.' August 17, 1929

BOTH Mrs. Hoover and I feel greatly honored by the generous reception you have extended to us today. It is a welcome as one of your neighbors, and it is as a neighbor that I participate with you.

In the early years of our Republic, Virginia was the home of Presidents and it would seem appropriate that with the changing years the President should at least have a weekend camp in Virginia. There are other sound reasons why such a connection should be maintained between the Presidents and Virginia.

The fact is that those strong Virginians who selected the site for our National Capital were apparently impervious to heat and humidity or at least they were unaware of how much pavements and modern buildings can contribute to raise the temperature. But Virginia herself now offers the antidote in the wonderful mountains which you have dedicated to a national park and the access to it that you have provided by your newly improved roads.

It has become a habit and a necessity for our Government officials who have the major anxieties in national affairs, to seek some other place from which to conduct their work for prolonged periods in the summertime. But the press of public business and its execution in the National Capital is so necessary that we must face the fact that these periods must gradually be shortened.

Therefore, I have thought it appropriate to accept the hospitality of your citizens and your mountains for one or two days each week and thereby combine both relief and work without cost to either. And I have discovered that even the work of government can be improved by leisurely discussions of its problems out under the trees where no bells ring or callers jar one's thoughts from the channels of urbanity.

You have demonstrated yourselves good hosts and good neighbors with that fine courtesy for which Virginia is known to the whole Nation. I often think the test of good neighbors is whether one can always be sure when the family meets an emergency it can cheerfully borrow a half dozen eggs or a few extra dishes.

In this emergency you have proved this sentiment of neighborliness by lending me a part of your park, by improving a road, by securing the fishing rights on a beautiful mountain stream and even providing me with fishing tackle. I, on my side, am glad to lend my services as a good neighbor to you by acting as a sort of signpost to the country of the fine reality of your proposed new national park.

I fear that the summer camp we have established on the Rapidan has the reputation of being devoted solely to fishing. That is not the case, for the fishing season lasts but a short time in the spring. It is a place for weekend rest--but fishing is an excuse and a valid reason of the widest range of usefulness for temporary retreat from our busy world.

In this case it is the excuse for return to the woods and streams with their retouch of the simpler life of the frontier from which every American springs. Moreover, I have learned that fishing has an important implication and even sounder foundation of such an excuse from the Presidential point of view. I find that many Presidents have joined the ranks of fishermen only after their inauguration as President, although I can claim over 45 years of apprenticeship--that is, in fishing, not the Presidency.

I have discovered the reason why Presidents take to fishing--the silent sport. Apparently the only opportunity for refreshment of one's soul and clarification of one's thoughts by solitude to Presidents lies through fishing. As I have said in another place, it is generally realized and accepted that prayer is the most personal of all human relationships. On such occasions as that men and women are entitled to be alone and undisturbed.

Next to prayer, fishing is the most personal relationship of man and of more importance than the fact itself, everybody concedes that the fish will not bite in the presence of the public. Fishing seems to be the sole avenue left to Presidents through which they may escape to their own thoughts and may live in their own imaginings and find relief [p.257] from the pneumatic hammer of constant personal contacts, and refreshment of mind in the babble of rippling brooks.

Moreover, it is a constant reminder of the democracy of life, of humility, and of human frailty--for all men are equal before fishes. And it is desirable that the President of the United States should be periodically reminded of this fundamental fact--that the forces of nature discriminate for no man.

But to become more serious, I wish again to thank you on behalf of Mrs. Hoover and myself for your generous and cordial welcome to Madison County. We hope to be good neighbors and we know from experience already that you will be.

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