

**Your on the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Presidential Places  
George H.W. Bush: Museum/Library**

## Presidential Places

George Washington	Birthplace
Andrew Jackson	Home and Grave
Abraham Lincoln	Home, Museum, and Tomb
Herbert Hoover	Childhood Home, Museum, and Grave
Harry Truman	Birthplace, Home, and Museum/Library
Dwight D. Eisenhower	Childhood Home and Museum
Ronald Reagan	Museum and Grave
Richard Nixon	Childhood Home, Museum, and Grave
George H.W. Bush	Museum/Library
William Clinton	Childhood Home
William Clinton	Museum/Library
George W. Bush	Museum/Library

Reflections on Visits to Presidential Places: Government Graft

Pending:

George Washington	Mount Vernon
Thomas Jefferson	Monticello
James Madison	Montpelier

And others as I travel America

## Presidential Places

Hundreds of books, movies, and television programs are available about the homes, libraries, museums, birth, and burial places of America's Presidents. I cannot hope to replicate these works, nor do I wish to. My hope is that the essays in the *Presidential Places* series offer different and humorous perspectives about several of America's revered historical places.

Many of the places we visit in this series are called *libraries*. They are unique places containing historical information about America in general and specifically about an American president during his time in office.

Here is one definition of such a library: "A repository of historical information, where many books are kept."

Here is an alternate and more accurate definition: "A repository of historical information, where many books are kept away from the public."

Here is another definition of a presidential library, "A library, whose contents are forbidden to be examined by people who paid admission to enter the library and examine its contents in the first place. Therefore, Disneyland-like exhibits are created to placate the crowd."

A fourth definition: "Thinly disguised attempt to bolster the public image of a former President."

These definitions are acceptable to those who flock to presidential places. After all, presidential places are crowded places. The visitors must be curious about White House dinner menus, presidential pins, catchy campaign slogans, first-ladies' gowns, and other artifacts of American politics. Because these places vary in how they are named, I use the words *museum* and *library* interchangeably. It appears most of the places have buildings and rooms that serve both as museums and libraries.

In each of these places I visited, I had my fill of political drivel. But of more importance, I witnessed a deep sense of pride the site creators have about these places. And time and again, I beheld the thankfulness and patriotism of American citizens who were aware, while knowing America's faults, that the country offered a better way of life than many other nations. Even with tongue in cheek, I carried away a sense of American citizens' reverence for America and for America's Presidents' contributions to this legacy.

It is my goal in *Presidential Places* to provide you with some lesser-known and humorous aspects of Americana as well as a sense of the pride and patriotism of the sites' creators and visitors.

Unless otherwise noted, the cover page depicting the face of a U.S. President is sourced from Google.

## Presidential Places George H. W. Bush: Museum/Library

**April 13, 2005**

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter. My friend and cousin, Don Black, has taken me to visit the George H. W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, a repository of political memorabilia of the 41st President of the United States. The library and museum are located on a 90-acre site at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas.<sup>1</sup> The site is administered by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). This organization oversees 12 other Presidential places, several of which are included in this series.

My goal for the series Presidential Places is a bit ambitious for my later age: Before I am pushing up daisies, this series will contain at least one essay about each United States President's birth place, home, museum, curio store, library, or burial site. I've a long way to go, as I am engaged in other activities, such as writing my will. But as I travel around America, I will look for these sites, and make side trips to them to write these reports. As I will likely not just accidentally come onto over forty Presidential places, I intend to plan trips to see them. Wish me luck and stay tuned.



The main building on the Bush Library campus (shown in Figure 1) and exhibit rooms are attractive and appealing to walk through, with several large rooms set up to display presidential memorabilia. But no library is in sight. No shelves of books or manuscripts are available to examine. As with most presidential libraries I have visited, the library is open only to academics who are writing yet another redundant book on a president.

**Figure 1. Main entrance to the museum and library.**

Thus, the library is off-limits to the illiterate masses, even those who have a smattering of curiosity. It is a not-too-subtle form of discrimination. This writer liked to have walked though this library part of the building, to slide-open drawers and file cabinets to catch snapshot glimpses into the life of this man and especially the history of the times that surrounded him. But non-scholars have been stereotyped into bumpkins who are not sufficiently schooled to examine cerebral compositions. Perhaps their colleges do not have ivy-cloistered greens growing on the building walls. Placing this curious practice into the past, Abe Lincoln, as a youth, would not have been allowed to examine the archival records at Monticello of Thomas Jefferson.

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Facebook for several of the photos in this essay. My photographer was on another assignment. ...OK, I occasionally mis-set a control knob on my camera, As a historical footnote for my biographers, I was not very successful at using a Kodak Brownie either.

If you have read other essays in this series, you are aware that I have an egalitarian approach to the general public being able to examine the contents---more than artifacts in display cases---of a presidential library. Yet I do understand that Joe Citizen and Uyless Black cannot be allowed to prowl the innards of these institutions and perhaps rearrange the material on the bookcases and in the file cabinets as I (inadvertently) did in my undergraduate days at the University of New Mexico.

In those days, people could walk through a library's inner sanctum. We could enjoy traipsing between the book stacks, which took on the look of high friendly vales surrounding us. Pulling-out a book here and there, we could sit down at desks placed in the stacks for just this occasion. Once settled, we could read passages from these books while sitting in a silent and musty sanctuary, one that acted as a guardian of silence, one that fostered our privacy. As you may have noticed, I have a special place in my heart for libraries, and especially library stacks.

To lighten my criticism of rules against visiting the stacks, I have learned that this site has set up a library classroom. As stated in the literature about this presidential place: "The Bush library classroom is the first of its kind in the Presidential Libraries network. The classroom can be used by student groups as a computer learning lab or as a traditional classroom." Perhaps this part of the presidential libraries network can be thought of as my prowling the archives of the University of New Mexico library. It does allow students of history to get beyond the display cases in the library's visitor area.



Figure 2. Many displays.

To satisfy the curiosity of ordinary citizens, the museum has many examples of inter-office memos (under glass display cases), dinner menus, automobiles, and Bush's early business ventures, as seen in Figure 2.

I was particularly interested in his wildcatting experiences in the oil fields near my home (Southeast New Mexico). Bush built a profitable business around Midland, Texas, by engaging in "wildcatting," the speculation on land that might have oil underneath it.

However, the Bush family roots were in the east where they were patriarchs of an established blue-blood family. Bush himself was born in Milton, Massachusetts, to a Senator, Prescott Bush his wife, Dorothy Walker Bush. A silver spoon does not stray far from its mouth, and Yankee carpetbaggers that came west were not all that uncommon.

His son George, Jr. took on the persona of a rugged cowboy. Wearing boots, Levis, sporting large belt buckles and swinging his arms far away from this sides---John Wayne-like---he looked the part of the Marlboro Man. Had I been around Yale University when Jr. was a student there, I would have cautioned George that real cowboys did not become college cheerleaders for the football team. Their bowed legs got in the way of spreading their cheering legs. Although the swagger of George II did seem to be a bit contrived, his bravado was not: "Bring'um on!" as if

he were going to the trenches himself. Also, see Iraq War # II, which is still being fought under the ISIS assault.

Excuse this diversion to another U.S. President. To segue back to Bush Sr. both men were pilots. George H. W. flew in the Pacific during World War II. He was highly decorated and was shot down, but crash-landed safely in the ocean and was picked up by a rescue boat. The museum displays the type of plane Bush flew, a TB Avenger (an attack torpedo plane), shown in Figure 3, as well as a picture of the man as a young pilot.<sup>2</sup>

This was my favorite display: the President's service in the U.S. Navy during WWII. His war record was impressive. A current book, *Flyboys* tells the story of the President's pilot adventures, including his flying bombing missions against Japan.

Bush flew against the Japanese in the Bonin Islands. As mentioned, he was shot down by anti-aircraft fire. The man has been described as a wimp by detractors, which is a disrespectful and inaccurate representation of the man. While his plane was on fire Bush continued his attack and released bombs over his target, scoring several damaging hits.<sup>3</sup>

With his engine ablaze, Bush flew several miles from the island, where he and one other crew member on the TBM Avenger bailed out of the aircraft, the other man's parachute did not open. Bush floated in hostile waters for several hours in a small rubber raft. Lucky for him, and for America [I am an admirer of the man], he was covered by several fighters that circled overhead. He was rescued by the submarine USS *Finback*. He remained on this submarine for a few weeks helping the crew rescue other downed airmen.



Figure 3. Bush's air days.

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<sup>2</sup> During the re-writing of this essay (which was deleted by my website vendor a few months ago), and re-posting it to my blog, it occurred to me that Donald Trump would not think Bush was much of a hero. After all, his plane was shot down by anti-aircraft fire.

<sup>3</sup> Paraphrased from "Lieutenant Junior Grade George Bush, USNR". Naval Historical Center. April 6, 2001.

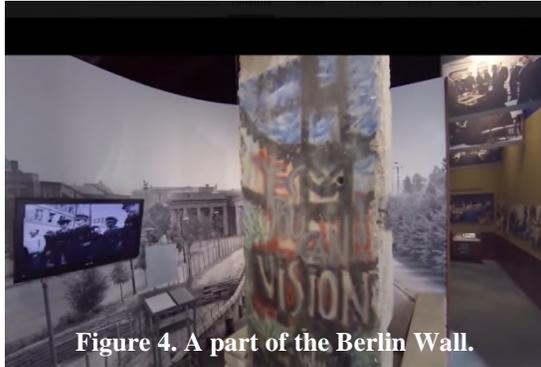


Figure 4. A part of the Berlin Wall.

**The Berlin Wall.** Like President Reagan's museum, this museum has a large piece of the Berlin wall, as shown in Figure 4. Unlike Bush, Reagan is credited by many Republicans for being the person who was responsible for the Soviet's dismantling the Wall. These folks seem to forget other U.S. Presidents had a hand in this event. As one example, the Marshall Plan, implemented during the time President Truman was in office, set the stage for blocking the Soviet's intrusions into Western Europe. NATO,

too, was key to the Wall's breakup. More than anyone or anything, the Soviet Union self-destructed from its own corruption and the inherent inefficiency of Communism.

It is sad state of affairs that so many people are ignorant of the contributions many leaders made leading to the dissolution of USSR and the Wall. It's as if President Regan uttering, "Mr. Gorbochev, tear down this wall!" led to its immediate destruction. A fragment of the Wall rests in the Bush Museum because George was in office November 9, 1989, when the Soviets open the gates to the Wall. Thus, some of George's fans tell us he had a hand in its demise.

So did I. I visited East Germany in the mid-1980s, I stopped at a curio store at Check Point Charlie. There, I purchased a piece of the Berlin Wall. Granted it was a small piece, one that was glued to back of a post card, but it is as legitimate as the souvenirs in Ronald's and George's museums. The truth is that Uyless, George, Ron, and millions of other Americans contributed to the defeat of the USSR and the opening of the Iron Curtain. However, if you by chance happen to be in North Idaho, come by the Uyless Black Museum of Worthless Artifacts. I'll dig around in my basement for my piece of the Berlin Wall. We'll have a toast to celebrate *our* destruction of the Berlin Wall.



Figure 5. The oval office of the White House.

**The Oval Office.** I will continue wearing my bragging hat to state I have sat in the Oval Office. But not one Oval Office, as I have sat in three Oval Offices located in the museums of both Bushes and that of Bill Clinton. Figure 5 depicts the Oval Office I visited while at the Bush Sr. museum. It had been cordoned off, so I was not allowed to sit at the President's desk. However, as

reported during my visit to Dallas and the museum of George Jr., I sat at the President's desk; even made a phone call from the desk.

Kidding aside, the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum is a pleasure to visit. As seen



**Figure 6. Stampeding the Berlin Wall!**

in Figure 6, its grounds are lovely and provocative, if not a bit too metaphorical: Western Quarterhorses did not jump over the Berlin Wall. Nonetheless, the museum is well-designed, informative, and entertaining. It rightly celebrates a fine president, a moderate politician (thank the political gods), a dedicated public servant, and a kind, decent man.

After seeing exciting exhibits about death defying rescues---not to mention tantalizing displays of the U.S. Budget, Bush's plans for the trimming the government, and an exhibition on "Expenditures as a Percentage of GNP."---I made my way to the library store. I bought several copies of Bush's 1993 budget....a copy of which I am sending to you.

Actually, my purchases were T-shirts, a coffee mug, a replica of a White House menu. During this brief visit, I recalled two examples of our former President's better known performances. Performance 1: "Read my lips, no new taxes." Performance 2: Checking his watch during his debate with Clinton.

These actions were lambasted by the liberal press. I thought they were pretty cool, but then I'm intrigued by witty remarks and self-defeating body movements. I recall the moment Al Gore lost the election to Bush Jr.: During a debate when he grimaced at one of George's remarks. Anyway, if you're in the area, visit this library and museum. I spent an enjoyable afternoon learning more about a fine public servant.

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