



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

**Presidential Places
William Clinton: 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.

William Clinton: Museum/Library

If you are passing through Arkansas, take an exit off Interstate 40 near Little Rock and visit the William J. Clinton Presidential Library. Signs on the highway will guide you to the proper exit.

I took this photo (Figure 1) of the *library* as I made my way to the building...hoping to come across...yes *library* books. I was not optimistic, because I had visited several other presidential libraries, and had not come across a single book that could be read by the public. Still, a library traditionally contains books, so I did not entirely close out the possibility that the William J. Clinton Presidential Library would contain books that the public could examine and study.



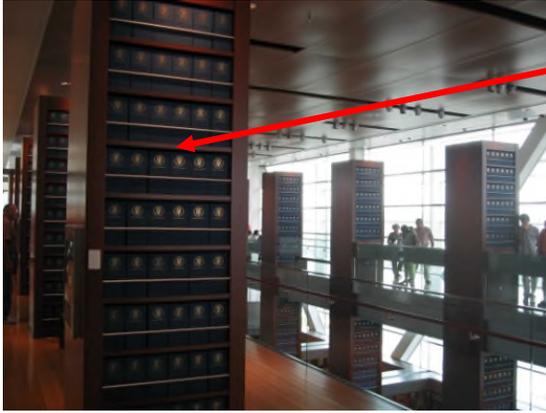
Figure 1. The Clinton library.

The building's architecture has received a lot of comment; one is that it resembles a giant mobile home. My family owned a number of trailer homes and trailer parks to house the oil-boom workers in southeastern New Mexico, so I found the building to my liking. It brought back pleasant memories. Besides, it is the contents of a Presidential Library that are important, not the bricks and mortar or aluminum siding on the outside of the building.

To my surprise, the Clinton Library contained hundreds of books, documents, and manuscripts, many laid out for the public. Of course, all Presidents' libraries do, but they are stored behind locked doors. This library was different. The hard copy was displayed in conventional bookcases, open to the masses. The public rabble could even place their grubby hands on the binders containing dinner menus and other world-altering parchments. But we could not open the binders to read their contents. There was a bar placed across each shelf. As shown in Figure 2 (the golden-colored line across the binders is the bar):

While the public viewed exhibits of Hillary's evening gowns and Monica Lewinsky's dresses, I approached a guide, "I'm doing research on President Clinton, and would like to take a look at the material in these binders," as I pointed to the library books.

The guide reacted as if I had asked to touch the holy grail, "The archives are open only to scholars."



One of the bars

Figure 2. Library books.

I was aware that only serious “researchers” could gain access to such books and other reference material. The library website had warned me beforehand:

The Clinton Library is a repository for the papers, records, and historical materials of President Clinton and his White House staff. The Presidential Libraries work to ensure that these irreplaceable items are preserved and made available for the widest possible use by researchers.¹

I assumed the guide thought I did not look like a scholar. True, as I had forgotten to pack anything for this trip except a beat-up pair of Levis. I had no reporter-like trench coat or shirts with epaulets on the shoulders and flaps on the pockets to certify my reporter status.

Reporter, “Yes, I assumed as much, and I suppose I must go elsewhere to find material on Clinton’s military career. Still, just look around you. Clinton’s library materials are placed in the middle of the tourist traffic. What’s the point of having them out here but not available? Seems to me the displays are phony.”

Guide, “Ha, I assume you are not referring to the President! And I never thought about it before. Anyway, you must go through channels to access those bookcases. Here’s a phone number. Have a good day.”

This brush-off would never have happened to Bob Woodward. I gave up and made my way down the corridor, while muttering to myself, “At least George Bush kept his dinner menus in the inner sanctums of his library.”

Holly and I continued our visit of the library. There were interesting and edifying exhibits, such as campaign buttons as seen in figure 3 and a replica of the Oval Office, as seen in Figure 4.²

¹ <https://www.clintonfoundation.org/clinton-presidential-center/about/archives>.

² Figure 3: Sourced from <https://www.clintonfoundation.org/clinton-presidential-center/exhibits/permanent>.



Figure 3. Library artifacts.



Figure 4. Oval office scenes.

A collection of Clinton's saxophones was on display, as seen in Figure 5. Heavy stuff for a library whose books cannot be examined.



Figure 5. Other displays.

In contrast, I preferred President Bush's library located at College Park, Texas. In addition to invitations to White House parties and several of Barbara's party clothes, the library had ample displays of Bush's military service during WWII. For Bill, maybe I could take a peek into his celebrated ROTC career. But I did not look like a reporter, and I had left my National Press Club

membership card at home, so I decided to visit again when I had sufficient clothes and credentials to gain entry into the back room reserved for scholars and researchers.

It is time to move to other venues and to other reports. Thanks for reading, and I look forward to your comments.