



John F. Kennedy in Shullsburg

By Cory Ritterbusch

Shullsburg cannot claim visits by famous people like large cities can. But it can claim a visit by one of the most adored Presidents in history. John Fitzgerald Kennedy visited Shullsburg on April 1st, 1960.

In the spring of 1960 Kennedy, a junior senator from Massachusetts, was aiming to win the primary to become the democratic candidate for president. Kennedy emphasized Wisconsin as an important state to carry and visited often in 1959 and 1960.

It was questionable if an east coast elite could win Wisconsin farming communities. Kennedy often spoke on commodity and dairy industry issues as he efficiently moved through the cheese state. At 43 years old, Kennedy had aggressive daily schedules, a model that later became the standard for presidential campaigns.

On April 1st, his busy day began in Mt. Horeb then moved to Dodgeville, Mineral Point, Darlington, Shullsburg, Argyle, Blanchardville, New Glarus, Brodhead, Monroe and ended late at night in Beloit. He often touted the National Milk Control Plan which was a product of the University of Wisconsin.

Kennedy arrived in Shullsburg at The Burg Theatre on Water Street after noon. Shullsburg school allowed select classes to go downtown and experience the Friday afternoon scene. Kennedy gave a short speech and answered questions on national affairs from a large crowd. The Shullsburg newspaper reported that “he was introduced to and shook hands with practically everyone in attendance before departing.”

The following Tuesday, a total of 588 people came to the polls in Shullsburg to vote for a mayor and presidential nominees. Kennedy won Shullsburg by a landslide receiving 306 votes to opponent Hubert Humphrey’s 78. The republican primary candidate, Richard Nixon, received 184 votes. Kennedy likely rode the support of the prominent catholic population in Shullsburg. But his appearance the week before most certainly boosted his popularity. Kennedy won the state of Wisconsin with 56% of votes. Dr. Hanifan won the Shullsburg mayoral race by 26 votes.

Later in the year, Kennedy would face the republican nominee Richard Nixon and win the presidency, a colorful presidency that ended on a fateful November day in 1963.