



Engineer, Dad, Uncle to Millions

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He Worked With Eight Presidents

Last June the 1898 Engineering Class returned to the University to celebrate its Golden Anniversary Reunion. One of the features of the Class Dinner at which these old friends gathered was the narration by each member of his personal experiences.

Francis Fair Gillen, '98e, had a particularly interesting story to tell—inasmuch as his life's work brought him in close contact with many famed occupants of the White House during eight presidential administrations.

Recently, Sutton Van Pelt, untiring Class Secretary of the '98 Engineers who has edited their Class News-Letter for the past half-century, prevailed upon Mr. Gillen to reminisce some more.

Here are some excerpts from the contribution made by Mr. Gillen to the Class Letter, and which he graciously has permitted "The Michigan Alumnus" to use.

I THINK maybe the relating of these incidents should cover all the administrations that I had contact with during my active years with the government, starting with McKinley and ending with the Franklin D. Roosevelt regime, eight in all.

First, relative to my connections with the White House, I want to say that our office was responsible for all the park system of the National Capitol and the erection of all memorials and statues in the Park System. My White House office was just a "Sons of Martha" job to see that the wheels ran smoothly for our Presidents and their families.

During the McKinley administration the first thing that left a lasting impression on me, relative to my duties at the White House, was the installation of a porcelain bath tub that cost \$500.00 f.o.b. Mrs. McKinley was a semi-invalid and the President was very considerate of her every wish. So he ordered the tub purchased and installed. The tub was a very heavy affair and was decorated with garlands of pink rose buds on the room face of the tub. Up to that time the only bath tubs I was acquainted with were the copper-lined ones, encased in a wooden wainscoting. Mrs. McKinley was quite fussy about the toilet waters used in the bath waters and the first patented stoppers to hold the water in the tub were not as foolproof as they might have been, and many is the time the water disappeared from the tub, due to leakage, by the time Mrs. McKinley was ready to use it. On these occasions the White House plumber took the brunt of the going over. Due to an

office man, we had been assigned inefficient employees to care for the bathing facilities of the First Lady.

President Theodore Roosevelt selected some of the sons, grandsons and nephews of the Civil War generals as his aides for social duties at the White House. These included Lieu-



IN 1939 FRANCIS FAIR GILLEN, '98e, TOOK OVER THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE PARK POLICE FORCE IN WASHINGTON, D. C., IN ADDITION TO HIS OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES WITH THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE.

Here, Mr. Gillen (in civilian dress) accompanies the Captain of the U. S. Park Police Force in an inspection tour of its members. Now retired, Mr. Gillen lives in Langley McLean, Virginia.

tenant U. S. Grant 3rd, Lieutenant Phil Sheridan, Captain Gary V. Hersey and Captain Fitzhugh Lee. Three of these young officers had desk room in my office and I had a firsthand account of many interesting episodes. On one cold snowy February morning the White House called to say that the three aides would ride with the President that morning. They left about eleven o'clock but did not get back until after dark. The next day they told me that they thought they encountered every disagreeable condition a cavalry man would encounter in the field short of actual combat duty. On part of the ride the President led them across the Potomac just above "little falls" where the water was dead, a depth just short of making the horses swim. When they got back to the White House the President told them to take a shower and get into dry clothes and then meet him in the Library.

They followed instructions and when reassembled in the Library, the President went over to a cabinet and took

out a bottle of liquor and glasses and told the young officers to take a drink, but he did not take one himself. I mention this for the reason that there were some ugly stories floating around at that time that the President drank very heavily, which was not so. On many other occasions that I knew of personally he refused a drink.

President Roosevelt and Mrs. Roosevelt usually strolled out through the south grounds of the White House before breakfast, rain or shine. When the President was away, Mrs. Roosevelt did not do this.

On the morning of March 5th after President Taft had been inaugurated, he came down to breakfast from his second floor living quarters wearing his hat, and going into the private dining room he took off his hat and looked around for a place to hang it. There was no such place. An order was issued to put up two hat hooks just outside the dining room door. These two hooks developed into a built-in mahogany closet at that location and remained as such until the major repairs were made to the White House during the Coolidge administration.

An effort was made at that time to remove the fire hydrant that is being talked about in the papers but the President said "No." In fact, the attention of all Presidents was called to the condition but they all turned thumbs down because they did not want the cost charged to their administration.

Before Jessie Wilson was married in the White House I saw a great deal of the first Mrs. Wilson and during the preparations for the wedding acted as escort aide to her in many of the preliminary arrangements. On one occasion Mrs. Wilson wanted to know how many steps she would have to take in going from one portion of the house to the seat she would occupy at the wedding. She took my arm and said "you will be my escort." That night I related the incident to Mrs. Gillen as it occurred and Mrs. Gillen's first remark was:

"I hope you didn't have on that old gray sweater?" and my answer was: "Yes, and it just matched one worn by Mrs. Wilson."

Both of our sweaters had holes in the elbows but mine did not show because I wore my coat. After Mr. Wilson married the second Mrs. Wil-







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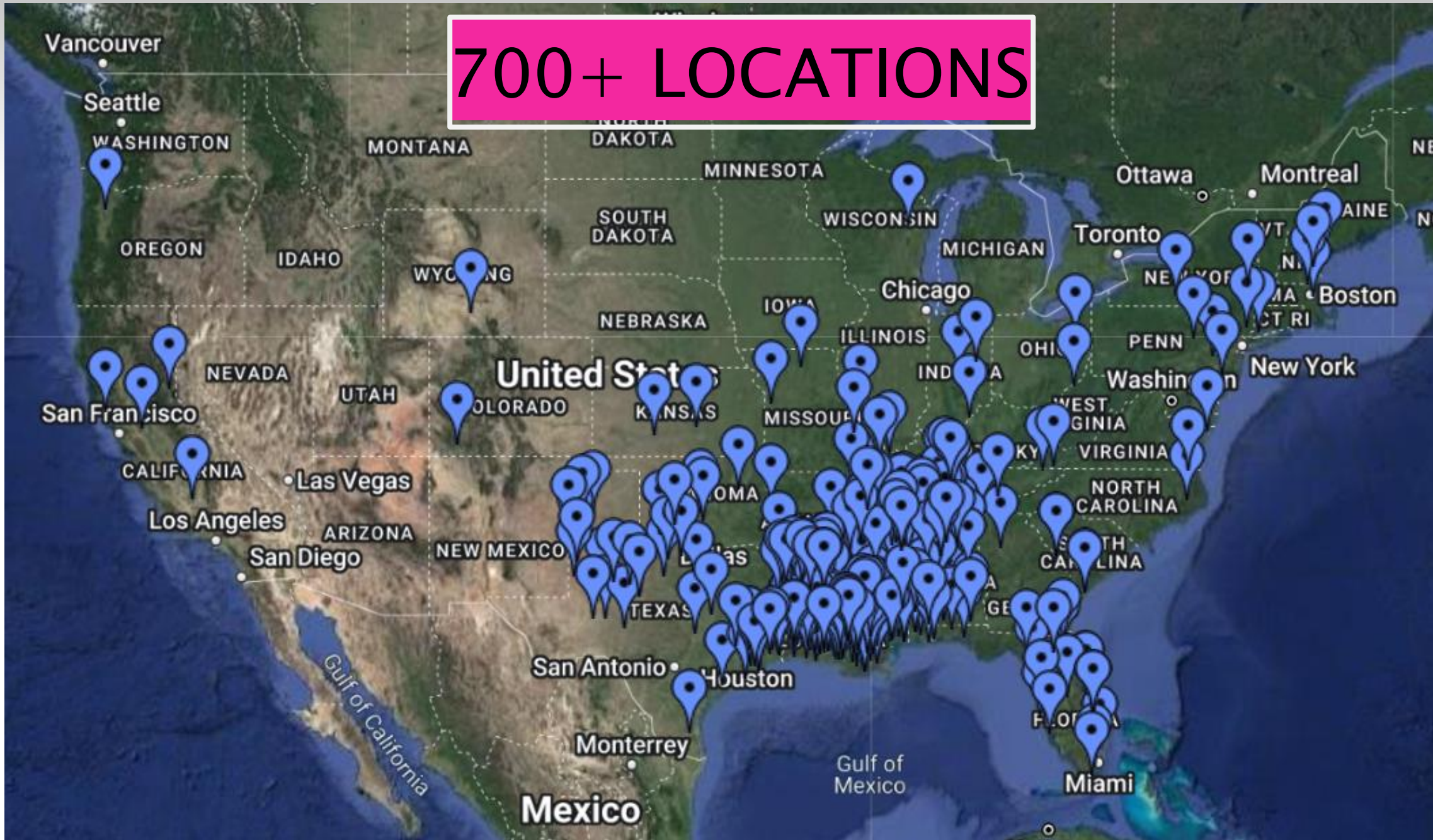
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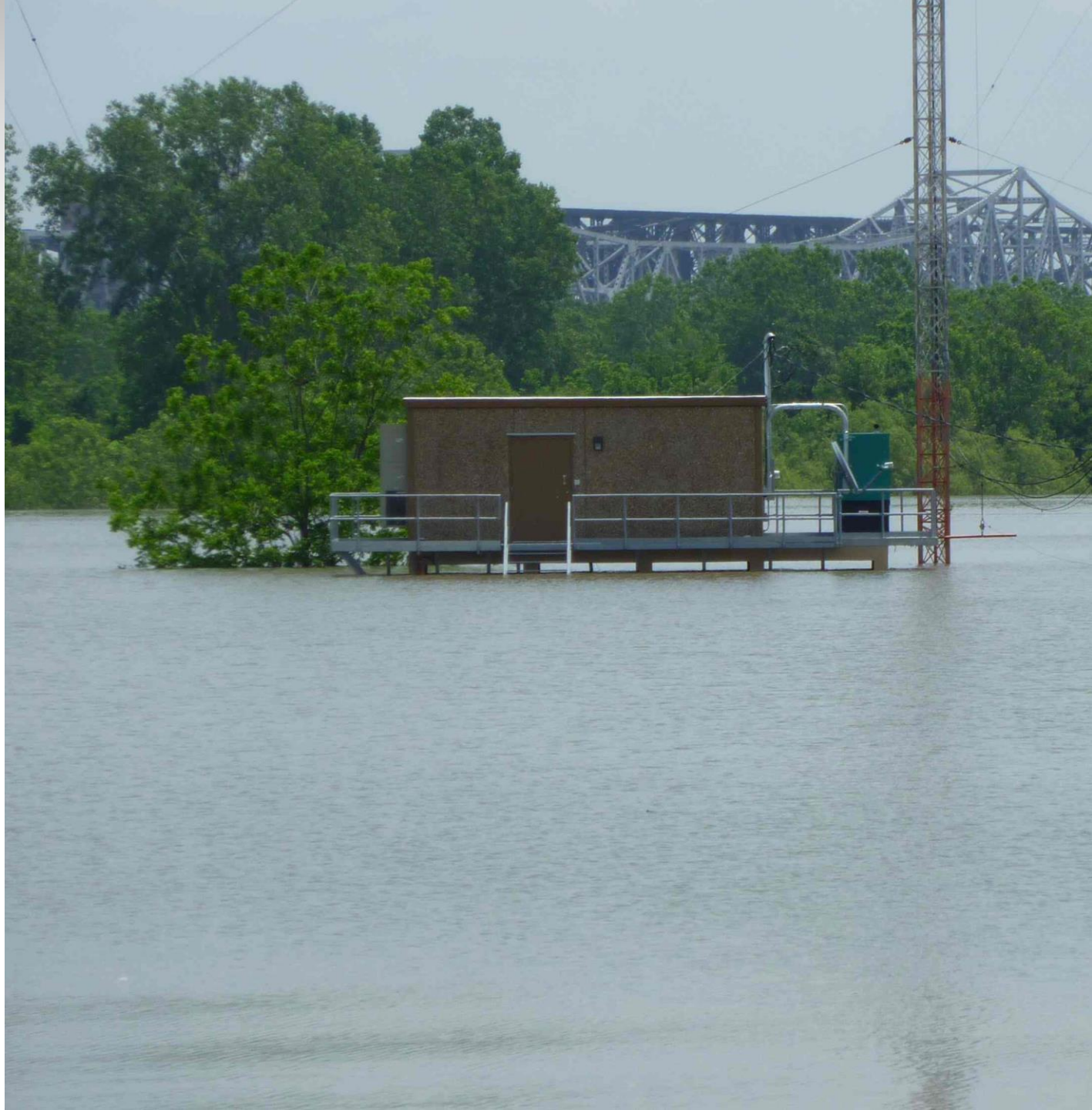


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