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UNH Museum Gets Into Politics With New Exhibit

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DURHAM, N. H. - New Hampshire held its first primary in 1916 but it wasn't until 1952, when voters chose retired Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower over Ohio Sen. Robert A. Taft, that the rest of the country started looking to the Granite State as an early barometer for how candidates would fare in the presidential election.

An exhibit now open at the University of New Hampshire museum in the Dimond Library chronicles New Hampshire primaries since that surprising upset, which also marked the first time residents voted directly for a candidate rather than a delegate.

"Up Close and Personal: A Look at the N.H. Primaries" presents a local collection of political memorabilia and offers a look at the unique access to candidates that New Hampshire people enjoy. The majority of the objects belong to Susan Roman ('74) and her husband, Chris Regan, both Durham attorneys.

One display case has a ribbon from 1840 bearing the names of President William H. Harrison, the first Whig elected to the office, and his vice president, John Tyler.

A campaign button reads, "Eleanor start packing. The Willkies are coming." Wendell Lewis Willkie was nominated for president by the Republican Party in 1940 to run against Franklin D. Roosevelt.

George McGovern paid a visit to New Hampshire before the 1972 election which he lost by a landslide to Richard M. Nixon. A poster on display in the UNH museum carries his well-known statement made before the Senate Armed Services Committee: "I'm fed up with old men dreaming up wars for young men to die in."

Shirley Chisholm, the first African American to seek the presidency, also visited the Granite State during the 1972 primary. Her campaign poster included in the museum collection says, "The Unbossed and the Unbought."

The exhibit has several pages from the UNH student newspaper, The New Hampshire, highlighting various candidates whose campaign trail included the university. There's a front page story on California's Jerry Brown. A young Jack Nicholson was photographed wearing a McGovern pin.

In the cycle of candidates, current presidential candidate and television actor Fred Thompson is shown on a 1996 poster with then-presidential contender Lamar Alexander.

Throughout the display there are postings of written history that explain what was going on

during different primaries. One shares the infamous line uttered by President Ronald Reagan during a debate sponsored by the Nashua Telegraph. The newspaper wanted to close the debate to other candidates and have Reagan square off just against George H.W. Bush. Reagan strongly disagreed. When the producer attempted to silence him, Reagan said, "I paid for this mike, Mr. Green."

The UNH museum, which features two exhibitions per year highlighting different aspects of the university's history, is open during the fall and spring semesters, Monday-Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Saturday from noon to 4 p.m. only when school is in session.

Exhibits include a variety of artifacts, photographs, documents and memorabilia drawn from both the museum and from the university archive collections. For more information go to <http://www.izaak.unh.edu/Museum> or phone 603-862-1081.

Editors: a photo is available at <http://www.unh.edu/news/img/musuem006.jpg>

