

## The Night Ride to the Presidency – Time Line Narrative

The who, what and where of the Ride are clearly defined. We know the participants and what their roles were, and where they executed their small part in history.

What is less well defined is the time line of the events that night. Even Eloise Cronin Murphy admits in her book “There are a number of discrepancies in contemporary accounts concerning the exact time of Roosevelt’s departure from the Tahawus Club and his arrival and departure from North Creek.”<sup>1</sup>

Edmund Morris in his book *Theodore Rex*, actually compiles a time line based on “an analysis of available data.”<sup>2</sup> As a firm believer in not reinventing the wheel, when a researcher who has spent twenty-two years of his life developing an answer, this is likely a good place to start. Working backwards from the arrival time in North Creek, this article will present Morris’ “Note on Timings.”

A brief history of time. Time, as we know it on a clock, is relative and a rather arbitrary human invention. The need for accurate local time became more critical as travel expanded. The railroads were the first organizations recognizing this since their schedules required coordinating the time along their routes. Until 1883, every railroad had its own time standards. The railroads would send time signals along the telegraph lines that connected their stations, so stations could synchronize clocks. Thus, there was the Pennsylvania Railroad “Allegheny Time”, rails roads running out of New York ran on New York time, railroads west from Chicago mostly used Chicago time, etc.

On October 11, 1883, the heads of the major railroads met in Chicago, and agreed to adopt a proposal by William F. Allen to have all North American railroads use a five-zone standard, similar to the one in use today. The members agreed that on Sunday, November 18, 1883, all United States and Canadian railroads would readjust their clocks and watches to reflect the new system on a signal from the Allegheny Observatory in Pittsburgh at exactly noon. Standard Time was born. Interestingly, standard time was not enacted into United States law until the 1918 Standard Time Act, which also created Daylight Savings Time, first observed March 31, 1918.

The sun rise on Saturday September 14, 1901 was 5:06 Eastern Standard Time (GMT -5). In other words, the sun rose over the Atlantic Ocean at West Quoddy Bay, Maine at this time. The sun rise in New York City was 5:34 local Eastern Standard Time. North Creek is only .02° longitude east of NYC, or less than a half second of clock time, so the sun rise would be essentially the same as NYC.

“Dawn was breaking as the Ride ended in North Creek... ‘It was just becoming daylight,’ said Lee Waddell. Mr. Loeb and I sat on the steps right by the scales of the old railroad station.

‘There comes Mike Cronin now!’ I said to Loeb.”<sup>3</sup> The press at the time reported the arrival as 5:21 AM.<sup>4</sup> Morris’ account of the arrival states the buckboard “wheels had hardly come to a rest at the depot when Roosevelt jumped down to discover... the neat, bespectacled figure of his secretary, William Loeb, Jr. A special train stood waiting. The time on the station clock read twenty-two minutes past five.”<sup>5</sup> Loeb handed Roosevelt a telegram from Washington sent by Secretary of State John Hay.

#### THE PRESIDENT DIED AT TWO-FIFTEEN THIS MORNING<sup>6</sup>

Theodore Roosevelt, at only 42 years of age, was the President of the United States.

Murphy in her book states that her father, Michael Cronin, made seven miles in the first hour on his 3rd leg of the Ride. Then the first light of day allowed him to see the road, and increase his pace, so that he covered the last nine miles in just forty-one minutes. “Twilight” by definition is when the sky starts to lighten up, and the highest clouds catch the first pink, orange, and red hues. It’s also when features on the ground start to become visible. It begins approximately 40 minutes before sun rise. Seven miles from Aiden Lair is the Baptist Cemetery in Minerva. Minerva is a high plain at 1,900 feet above sea level. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century this land was cleared for farming and was at the time one of the most productive locations in the Adirondacks. Cronin would have had a relatively clear view to the horizon, and daylight appears sooner at higher elevations. Cronin’s total time from Aiden Lair to North Creek was one hour and forty-one minutes. This time was consistent in all interviews with Cronin, and he stated it was a record never equaled for a surrey. Therefore, backing up this total time from the arrival time at North Creek, Morris uses 3:41 AM as the departure time from Aiden Lair.

At the other end of the Ride, the start from the Tahawus Club at Upper Works was most commonly published as 10:30 PM, Friday September 13, 1901. The earliest reference to this time I’ve found was in an interview with Noah LaCasse published In the *New York Masonic Outlook*, December 1938, Pages 63-64.<sup>7</sup> Roosevelt and LaCasse had the Masonic brotherhood in common. Watson B. Berry in his article “Late Noah LaCasse, Guide, Chronicled T.R.’s Gift,” referring to the clock frying pan, A North Country Chronicle, *Watertown Daily Times* May 19, 1958, stated the 10:30 PM start time, as did Dorothy Taylor in an *Adirondack Life* article “Noah LaCasse Presidential Hiking Mate,” Spring 1972 Pages 9-11. Eloise Cronin Murphy, in her 1977 book on Page 20, has an unreferenced quote by Mrs. Raymond, the Tahawus Club cook at Upper Works, “At just ten thirty, Theodore Roosevelt left us.”

On Page 29 of her book, Murphy has the following chart:

Relay	Driver	Route	Miles	Time
1 <sup>st</sup>	Hunter	Tahawus Club to	10	2 hrs.

		Tahawus Post Office		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Kellogg	Tahawus Post Office to Aiden Lair	9	2 hrs. 20 mins.
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Cronin	Aiden Lair to North Creek	16	1 hr. 41 mins.

This amounts to thirty-five miles in six hours and one minute. If we add this total time for the Ride to a start time of 10:30 PM on Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, the arrival time in North Creek would have been 4:31 AM the 14<sup>th</sup>, or a full hour before sunrise. It would have still been pitch black. Clearly, this start time is nearly an hour too early.

Edmund Morris in his notes from *Theodore Rex* on Page 573 states there had “been some confusion about the sequence of fifteen telegrams received by T.R.” at the Upper Works. “A comparison of the originals with medical bulletins issued by McKinley’s secretary, George Cortel<sup>8</sup>, makes it clear that he read the most urgent message – Elihu Root’s – last.”

THE PRESIDENT APPEARS TO BE DYING AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET IN BUFFALO THINK YOU SHOULD LOSE NO TIME COMING

This message arrived between 11:00 PM and midnight Friday September 13<sup>9</sup> while the Roosevelts were sleeping in the MacNaughton cottage. Morris found Roosevelt’s reply to Root in Elihu Root’s personal papers. It has the dateline Lower Tahawus, 14 Sept. 1:32 A.M.<sup>10</sup> This is a key piece of information relevant to the 1<sup>st</sup> leg of the Ride. It means Roosevelt had gotten dressed, packed his bag, boarded Hunter’s buckboard, made the ten mile trip from the Upper Works to the Lower Works, found the phone at the Lower Works club house, contacted North Creek and dictated his Root reply to the telegraph operator by 1:32 A.M. Morris places the arrival time at Tahawus, Lower Works at 1:31 A.M. He uses the conventional two hour time for this first leg of the Ride and, therefore, has the departure from the Upper Works as 11:31 P.M. September 13, 1901.

“Mr. Roosevelt stopped just long enough to use the telephone and have a cup of coffee. This took not over ten minutes.”<sup>11</sup> According to Orrin Kellogg the driver of the second leg of the Ride. Roosevelt threw his bag into the back, and climbed into the rear seat of the two seat buckboard. Morris has the time of departure from Tahawus at 1:35 A.M.

Mike Cronin, the driver of the 3<sup>rd</sup> leg, had been informed around noon the 13<sup>th</sup> to be prepared for the arrival of Roosevelt. He was ready, and had expected Roosevelt several hours earlier.<sup>12</sup> According to Morris, at about 3:30 A.M., the lights of Aiden Lair Lodge appeared in the mist as Kellogg and Roosevelt approached.<sup>13</sup> He has the arrival at Aiden Lair as 3:36 A.M. It was a quick change of rides with “only necessary words spoken and those in quiet tones” according to Lillan

Cronin, Mike's wife.<sup>14</sup> Roosevelt grabbed the lantern and climbed into the front seat. They were on the road by 3:41 A.M. An hour and forty-one minutes later, they arrived at the railroad depot.

In summary, the Edmund Morris timeline is:

Depart Tahawus Club, Upper Works: 11:31 AM September 13

Arrive Tahawus, Lower Works Club House: 1:31 AM September 14

Depart Tahawus: 1:35 AM September 14

Arrival Aiden Lair: 3:36 AM September 14

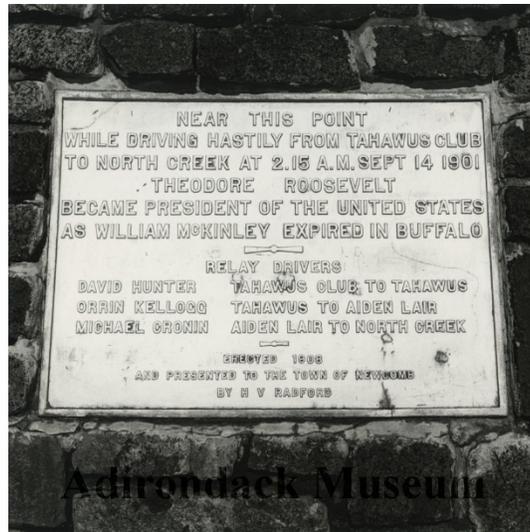
Departure Aiden Lair: 3:41 AM September 14

Arrival North Creek Depot: 5:22 AM September 14

Total travel time: 5 hours 51 minutes. This is only ten minutes less than Murphy's six hours one minute. The difference is all in the 2<sup>nd</sup> leg.

It should be noted that clocks and watches were likely not always synchronized in 1901 as closely as the present. The clocks at railroad stations were typically the standard for a town since these railroad clocks were synchronized regularly. The only time that can be stated with certainty is the 1:32 A.M. telegram from Roosevelt to Root that he dictated over the phone from the Lower Works Club House in Tahawus to North Creek.

Footnote to history: In 1908, Harry Radford presented a plaque to the Town of Newcomb. It is located on Route 28N at the point calculated to be where Roosevelt passed at 2:15 A.M. on September 14<sup>th</sup>.



A new duplicate of the plaque was installed by the town a couple years ago at the same location three miles from the Tahawus Club on Lower Works Road. I have been unable to locate any times used by Radford for his location calculation. However, using the Edmund Morris times, they left Tahawus at 1:35, meaning they had traveled 40 minutes when the President died at 2:15 A.M. By using the time traveled by Kellogg to cover the nine miles, they would have covered 2.975 miles in forty minutes. So, Edmund's times match what was used by Radford in 1908.

1. Murphy book, Endnotes, page 35
2. Morris, *Rex*, Notes on the Prologue, Page 574
3. Murphy book, page 25
4. Albany Evening Journal, September 14, 1901, from the Tahawus Club registry, ADKX
5. Morris, *Rex*, Page 7
6. Morris, *Rex*, Page 7
7. Adirondack Experience, "I Always Called Him Ted", report Call Number 2021.045.0464
8. Morris notes this was in GBC, or George B. Cortelyou Papers
9. Edith Roosevelt diaries September 13<sup>th</sup>.
10. Morris, *Rex*, Page 573
11. Murphy book Page 21
12. Murphy book Page 22
13. Morris, *Rex*, Page 4
14. Murphy book, Page 23