

PRESIDENTIAL GRAVESITES ARE RARELY  
ELABORATE TOMBS  
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But visiting can flesh out a life: By Gene Sloan, USA Today

When Ronald Reagan is buried today on a hilltop in Simi Valley, CA, the serene spot will join a list of often obscure places that serve as final homes for presidents.

Like Reagan, many of the nation's former chief executives chose to be buried far from the corridors of power in Washington. Indeed, only Woodrow Wilson, the nation's 28<sup>th</sup> president, remains in death in the city he once dominated in life. His tomb is in the National Cathedral, where Reagan will be eulogized today.

By contrast, many of the past presidents lie near where they were born or, as with Reagan, in a place they long called home. In some cases, they are buried on their estates, a tradition that dates back to the nation's first president, George Washington.

Washington's home, Mount Vernon, which is in Virginia just outside Washington, D.C., is a major tourist attraction, drawing around 1 million visitors a year – “nearly all of whom go to the tomb,” spokeswoman Rebecca Ryser says.

Still, Washington's burial site is an exception.

“Most of these presidential sites don't have very many visitors at all,” says Brian Lamb, author of *Who's Buried in Grant's Tomb? A Tour of Presidential Gravesites*.

Lamb, better known as the head of C-SPAN, the cable station that broadcasts U.S. legislative sessions and other political events, has visited the gravesite of every president. Some are so sparsely visited, he notes, that he couldn't find another person to take his picture.

Even at Arlington National Cemetery, where thousands still come each year to view the eternal flame at the grave of John F. Kennedy, an earlier president lies nearby almost unnoticed, he says. “You walk a few paces from Kennedy and there is William Howard Taft. Almost nobody goes there.”

More than 100,000 people came to the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library this week to view the 40<sup>th</sup> president's flag-draped coffin. Tens of thousands more paid their respects when it was on view in Washington.

But if history is a guide, the outpouring of interest won't last long. Consider the case of another larger-than-life president, Ulysses S. Grant, who's famously buried in “Grant's Tomb” in New York City. Today the tomb is sparsely visited.

“He was enormously popular when he died. There were something like a million people on the parade route,” Lamb notes. “but you wouldn’t know from the number of people there today.”

Lamb says there’s plenty of reason to make a detour to a presidential burial site. The sites, which often are near boyhood homes or family estates, offer a glimpse into the making and mind-set of the men who would become president. They also offer a powerful reminder of the limitations of seeking power and fame.

“One of the lessons you learn is that no matter how powerful you are, you will die, and there’s nothing that power can do to stop it,” Lamb says.

Lamb says the most intriguing presidential burial sites are the ones that are located near the homes or onetime workplaces of the presidents, where there’s “a total package” for visitors. Springfield, IL, site of Abraham Lincoln’s home, office and gravesite, is one.

Lamb’s favorite? Plymouth, VT, home to the gravesite of Calvin Coolidge. The Coolidge family home, the community church, cheese factory, one-room schoolhouse and general store have been carefully preserved, and the area appears almost unchanged from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

“It’s an incredibly beautiful site, and the gravestone is so simple. It’s like a tablet on the ground. There’s nothing to it at all,” he says. The whole experience of visiting “gives you a feel for what his life was like.”

#### WHERE ARE LEADERS ARE LAID TO REST

Of the 42 men who have held the post of  
President of the United States

Five are still living.

The final resting place of the 37 others:

George Washington  
Mount Vernon Estate, Mount Vernon, VA

John Adams  
United First Parish Church,  
Quincy, MA

James Madison  
Montpelier Estate,  
Montpelier Station, VA

James Monroe  
Hollywood Cemetery,  
Richmond, VA

John Quincy Adams  
United First Parish Church,  
Quincy, MA

Andrew Jackson  
The Hermitage,  
Hermitage, TN

Martin Van Buren  
Kinderhook Reformed Cemetery,  
Kinderhook, NY

William Harrison  
Harrison Tomb,  
North Bend, OH

John Tyler  
Hollywood Cemetery,  
Richmond, VA

James Polk  
State Capitol,  
Nashville, TN

Zachary Taylor  
Zachary Taylor National Cemetery,  
Louisville, KY

Millard Fillmore  
Forest Lawn Cemetery,  
Buffalo, NY

Franklin Pierce  
Old North Cemetery,  
Concord, NH

James Buchanan  
Woodward Hill Cemetery,  
Lancaster, PA

Abraham Lincoln  
Oak Ridge Cemetery,  
Springfield, IL

Andrew Johnson  
Andrew Johnson National Cemetery,  
Greenville, TN

Ulysses Grant  
General Grant National Memorial,  
New York City, NY

Rutherford B. Hayes  
Hayes Presidential Center,  
Fremont, OH

James A. Garfield  
Lake View Cemetery,  
Cleveland, OH

Chester Arthur  
Albany Rural Cemetery,  
Menards, NY

Grover Cleveland  
Princeton Cemetery,  
Princeton, NJ

Benjamin Harrison  
Crown Hill Cemetery,  
Indianapolis, IN

William McKinley  
McKinley National Memorial and Museum,  
Canton, OH

Theodore Roosevelt  
Young's Memorial Cemetery,  
Oyster Bay, NY

William H. Taft  
Arlington National Cemetery,  
Arlington, VA

Woodrow Wilson  
National Cathedral,  
Washington, D.C.

Warren Harding  
Harding Tomb,  
Marion, OH

Calvin Coolidge  
Plymouth Notch Cemetery,  
Plymouth, VT

Herbert Hoover  
Herbert Hoover Library and Birthplace  
West Branch, IA

Franklin D. Roosevelt  
Franklin Roosevelt Library and Museum,  
Hyde Park, NY

Harry S. Truman  
Harry S. Truman Library,  
Independence, MO

Dwight D. Eisenhower  
Dwight D. Eisenhower Library and Museum,  
Abilene, KS

John F. Kennedy  
Arlington National Cemetery,  
Arlington, VA

Lyndon B. Johnson  
Johnson Ranch,  
Johnson City, TX

Richard M. Nixon  
Richard Nixon Library and Birthplace,  
Yorba Linda, CA

Ronald Reagan  
Ronald Reagan Presidential Library,  
Simi Valley, CA  
(Scheduled burial today)