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Bush's Birthplace? It's Deep in the Heart of . . . New Haven

By DICK AHLES
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IT'S taken 211 years, but Connecticut has finally produced a president of the United States.

True, George W. Bush pulled up stakes and moved to Texas at an early age -- the age of 2 to be precise -- but his birth in New Haven on July 6, 1946, makes him a Connecticut native and the only one ever elected president. Good luck getting him to acknowledge that.

Mr. Bush was born in Connecticut just as his father, who had delayed college to serve as a World War II Navy pilot, had completed his sophomore year at Yale. George W. was born to Barbara and George Bush in what was then Grace-New Haven Community Hospital and is now Yale-New Haven Hospital. The new baby's first home, according to Herbert Parmet, his father's biographer, was 37 Hillhouse Avenue, a one-family house that had been converted into apartments for veterans and their families.

"Not to make too much of the postwar housing shortage," the elder Bush has written, "but there were a dozen other veterans' families sharing the house with us -- each with one child, except for Bill and Sally Reeder, who had twins. That made 40 in all."

But the neighborhood was good. Charles Seymour, the president of Yale, lived next door at 43 Hillhouse Avenue, which is still home to Yale presidents. The Bush homestead stands and is presently occupied by the Yale Economics Department.

Christopher Collier, the state historian, said one reason Connecticut failed to produce a president in more than 200 years has been its small population and its few electoral votes, which now stand at eight and will be down to seven for the next presidential election in 2004. (Of course, Calvin Coolidge, a native of Vermont, with just three electoral votes, won the presidency in 1924.)

Bill Curry, a Democrat who was a former state comptroller and ran for governor of Connecticut in 1994, said the explanation had more to do with the state's traditional sensibilities.

"To become president, one must put oneself forward in a way Connecticut Yankee society has never smiled upon," he said. "And besides, we were too busy creating insurance."

When George and Barbara Bush later went to Texas with young George W., they were following a Connecticut tradition. There was a tendency in the past for some of the state's best and brightest residents to wander. In 1831, according to Albert Van Dusen's history, "Connecticut," a third of the members of the United States Senate and a fourth of the House of Representatives had been born in Connecticut, but elected to office elsewhere.

That same year, after his famous tour of America, Alexis de Tocqueville, attended a Fourth

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of July party in Paris where he noted how many people from Connecticut represented other states in Congress and toasted the state as "the home of the clock peddler, the schoolmaster and the senator. The first give you time, the second tell you what to do with it and the third make your law and your civilization."

Actually, Connecticut and Texas go way back. Among the Connecticut people who preceded the Bushes to Texas were the Austins -- Moses, a native of Durham, and his son Stephen, who grew up in Colchester. In 1822, Mexico's government gave Moses Austin, a lead miner and dry goods dealer, permission to establish the first American settlement in Texas. Moses Austin died before his 300 settlers arrived, but Stephen eventually established the settlement. The city of Austin is named for him. (Almost 200 years later, his fellow Nutmegger, Mr. Bush, installed his campaign headquarters there.) Stephen Austin also ran for president -- of the Republic of Texas -- but he lost to Sam Houston.

And there's more. The first governor of Texas to live in the governor's mansion that is now home to Mr. Bush was Elisha Pease, governor from 1853 to 1857, according to Eric Travis, librarian at the Austin History Center. Pease was born in Enfield.

Despite the rich history between Texas and Connecticut, Mr. Bush doesn't seem inclined to admit to his Connecticut roots. His official biography on his campaign's Web site says he "was born on July 6, 1946, and grew up in Midland and Houston, Texas." It tells us that Mr. Bush has a dog named Spot and cats named India, Cowboy and Ernie. There is no mention of Connecticut.

After Mr. Bush chose Dick Cheney as his running mate last summer, the two went to Mr. Cheney's hometown of Casper, Wyo., where they reveled in their westernness, with Mr. Bush telling the crowd "Dick was born in Nebraska and I grew up in Midland, Texas," again failing to mention that he was born somewhat to the east of Midland, a fact that especially surprises Texans.

"Are you kidding?" said Mr. Travis of the Austin History Center when told of Mr. Bush's past. "Was he really born in Connecticut?"

A spokesman for the Bush-Cheney campaign in Austin said he could not explain Mr. Bush's tendency to omit his birthplace.

Certainly, it could all be about politics. An archivist at the George Herbert Walker Bush Presidential Library in College Station, Tex., where George W.'s birth certificate is filed, said Texas politicians are proud of their Texas roots and unlikely to admit being born anywhere else.

As Mr. Travis said, "Not being born in Texas wouldn't help anyone running for office here."

Mark Effron of West Hartford, the vice president for news for the Post-Newsweek Stations, got to hear Mr. Bush's response about his birthplace first hand when they met at a convention in Seattle last year.

Mr. Effron told him that he understood that Mr. Bush was born in New Haven. Mr. Bush put his arm around Mr. Effron and in a quiet voice said, chuckling, "Let's keep that our little secret."

Of course, gratitude, or the lack of it, may have something to do with Mr. Bush's reluctance to boast about Connecticut.

He didn't pick the best year to run for president in the old, home state. Connecticut's Republicans preferred John McCain in the primary and Al Gore easily won in the general election.

With Senator Joseph I. Lieberman of Connecticut as Mr. Gore's running mate, the state had quite a representation in the presidential election this year.



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Taking third place nationally, of course, was the Green Party's Ralph Nader, who was born in Winsted.

This year, Connecticut was going to make the White House no matter what.

Photos: The office above, currently the office of Patrick Bayer, an assistant professor of economics at Yale, is said to have been part of the apartment where the Bushes lived. Below, an outside view of the building. (Photographs by C.M. Glover for The New York Times)(pg. 4); George W. Bush was born at what is now Yale-New Haven Hospital in 1946 and lived at 37 Hillhouse Avenue, top, in New Haven, when his father was a student at Yale University. Above, a copy of his birth certificate. (C. M. Glover for The New York Times)(pg. 1)

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