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Wind sweeps Obama to his family's roots in rural Indiana

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KEMPTON, Ind. -- White House hopeful Barack Obama reached out to his Midwestern farmland roots, visiting his great-uncle's home and giving a kiss and an autograph to his distant cousin Annette Noble, 67.

Obama's mother's family, the Dunhams, once lived here before moving to Kansas. The old Dunham farmhouse -- amid wide-open cornfields -- resembles Dorothy's house in "The Wizard of Oz." Unseasonably strong wind gusts also evoked the Wizard of Oz as they lifted loose shingles partially off the roof of the 120-year-old home.

Obama and 30 local residents who came out to meet him hunkered down behind the house to get away from the relentless winds that forced members of the national and international press to huddle together for warmth.

"It will be interesting to see if we can develop some kind of a friendship because he doesn't have much family," said Noble, a retired school-teacher who found out only two months ago she was a distant relative of Obama's. "He gave me a kiss. He autographed my book," she said, holding up a copy of one of Obama's books, which she started reading two months ago.

"The Dunham," Obama said as he walked off the bus into the winds, words falling him for a change. "...homestead," he finally said.

Obama made a series of stops around Indiana on Saturday, giving a new speech on the economy at an Indianapolis high school, and dropping in at a family picnic in Noblesville, where his daughters played in the playground while he and his wife spoke.

He wound up the day at a roller rink in Lafayette, shaking hands as "YMCA" blared from the speakers.

"I spared you the sight of me trying to roller skate," he said.

Many of his supporters who turned out at the events promised to get their friends and neighbors out to vote Tuesday, but they acknowledged the vote would likely be very close against rival Hillary Clinton, who returned to Indiana late Saturday from North Carolina to campaign.

"I think it's going to be very close," said Keith Cheney, 38, who said that like Obama, he is a very distant relative and non-fan of Vice President Dick Cheney. "I think those comments from his pastor are going to make the margin smaller than it would otherwise have been. But I think he'll win."

To Obama, it's Sweet Home Indiana
From Tales from the Trail: 2008

Obama Plays Up Family Story, Values in Indiana
From WSJ.com: Washington Wire

The views expressed in these blog posts are those of the author and not of the Chicago Sun-Times.