

# FROM VERMONT FARM



If you were asked to name several Vermonters who are known nationally, Calvin Coolidge would surely be on your list. However, few of us know too much about the life that shaped our 30th president.

Calvin Coolidge was born on Independence Day, 1872, in the small building attached to the rear of the Plymouth Notch General Store. The Notch community was small. Besides the Coolidge store and post office, there were only four farms, three houses, a blacksmith shop, a church, and a one-room school. A shoemaker and a butter tub maker lived nearby.

Calvin was a shy boy. He had a sister, Abigail, who was four years younger than he. Both she and Calvin's mother died when Calvin was still a young boy. Today modern medicine could have saved both of their lives.

This is also true of Calvin's son, Calvin, who died when a teenager from blood poisoning as a result of an infected blister.

Besides working on the family farm, Calvin attended the local one-room school through the eighth grade. Calvin worked very hard, but was never the top student in his class. He continued his education at the Black River Academy in Ludlow and at St. Johnsbury Academy in St. Johnsbury. He went on to Amherst College in Massachusetts and practiced law in that same state when he graduated.

He met a Burlington, Vermont, woman, Grace Goodhue, and married her in 1905. They had two sons.

Calvin soon became involved in politics and held numerous

offices, including state representative and senator. He was elected Governor of Massachusetts and became famous across the nation for his settlement of the Boston police strike in 1919. Shortly thereafter, he was elected Vice-President as Harding's running mate.



Calvin Coolidge as a young boy

The year was 1923. Calvin Coolidge was serving his term as Vice-President of the United States under President Warren Harding. In August Calvin and his wife Grace visited his boyhood home in Plymouth Notch, Vermont.

The night of August 2 was hot and **humid**. The Coolidges had all gone to bed. They were unaware that President Harding, who had been ill, had died. Getting word to Vice-President Coolidge was not easy. The only telephone in Plymouth Notch was in the general store which had closed for the night, so no one answered it when it rang. The telephone operator in the nearby town of Bridgewater had her husband drive to Plymouth to deliver the news to Mr. Coolidge when she was unable to reach him on the phone. It was almost midnight when a knock was heard at the door, awakening Calvin's father. He was handed the telegram with the news of President Harding's death. Colonel John Coolidge immediately woke his son with the news and gave him the official report that had just been delivered. He was

# TO THE WHITE HOUSE

the first to address Calvin as the President of the United States.

Soon several reporters and local politicians arrived. One of the visitors, Congressman Dale, reminded Calvin Coolidge that the country was without a President and suggested that he waste no time in taking the oath of office. They phoned the Attorney General in Washington, D.C. (by this time they had awakened the **proprietor** of the store and were able to use the telephone), to check the exact wording of the oath.

At 2:47 on the morning of August 3, 1923, in the **modest** Coolidge home in **rural** Vermont, history was made. By the dim light cast by the family's old kerosene lamp in the Coolidge's sitting room, Calvin Coolidge was sworn in as the thirtieth President of the United States by his father, a **notary public**, who acted in place of the Chief Justice of the United States. Not before or since has a father administered the oath of office to his son qualifying him to

become chief executive of the United States of America.

In 1924 after completing Warren Harding's term as President of the United States, Coolidge was elected to serve another four years in the White House. He chose not to run for another term and was succeeded by Herbert Hoover.

Calvin Coolidge died at 60 years of age on January 5, 1933, in Northampton, Massachusetts. He is buried with the rest of his family in the Plymouth Notch cemetery. Calvin Coolidge was the only native Vermonter to be elected President.\*

Calvin Coolidge is remembered for his Vermont humor, honesty, and willingness to fight for what he believed. What stories do you know about "Silent Cal"?

\*Vice-President Chester Arthur of North Fairfield, Vermont, became President on July 2, 1881, when President James Garfield died. He was not elected for a term of his own.



OATH OF OFFICE ROOM, PLYMOUTH, VT



## VOCABULARY

**humid** - moist and hot temperature

**proprietor** - owner

**modest** - humble or simple

**rural** - country

**notary public** - a public officer authorized by law to certify documents and administer oaths

## WHAT ELSE WAS GOING ON IN AMERICA?

Many events of importance or interest occurred in America during Calvin Coolidge's years in the White House. Here are several that you may be familiar with. What other events from this period do you know about?

- Mickey Mouse becomes a star
- Charles Lindbergh flies solo across the Atlantic Ocean nonstop from New York to Paris
- Jazz music becomes the rage
- Gangster Al Capone terrorizes Chicago
- Baseball player Babe Ruth hits 60 home runs
- The first movies with sound tracks are produced
- Congress approves a law to make all Indians citizens
- First woman elected Governor - Nellie Ross of Wyoming
- First liquid fuel rocket launched
- The 1927 flood strikes Vermont
- First electric neon advertising sign installed in New York City
- First ice cream cone machine patented
- The eight hour day, five day work week is introduced by Henry Ford
- First potato chips are manufactured in Albany, New York
- First household electric toaster is marketed



# VISIT CALVIN COOLIDGE'S BOYHOOD HOME

Many years have passed since Calvin Coolidge left his farm home in Vermont to become the thirtieth President of the United States. However, you can still visit his boyhood home today.



Calvin Coolidge Homestead

Plymouth Notch contains not only the President's place of birth, but also the home where he grew up and was inaugurated, his father's general store and post office, the family church, and the old farmhouse lived in by his grandparents. Many of the buildings contain the original tools and furnishings used by the Coolidges.

During your visit, try to find the answers to these questions:

1. How did the Coolidge family make a living?
2. How was the Coolidge homestead heated?
3. What did they use to light their home?
4. Name and describe four machines on display that helped to make life easier for the Coolidges. Do we use any of these today?
5. Compare the Coolidge birthplace and homestead. How are they different? How are they similar?
6. What can you learn about Cal Coolidge's political life? Who was his running mate? What was his campaign slogan? What were his nicknames? What political offices did he hold?

7. What type of transportation did the Coolidges use? Can you find any examples in the barn?



8. What did the Coolidges do for entertainment?



Plymouth Notch Historic District