

Name _____

Date _____

President Calvin Coolidge

The 4th of July 1872 was to have more than its normal significance for the United States of America. On that day in Plymouth Notch, Vermont John Calvin Coolidge was born. His father was rather stern but highly respected merchant in the community while his mother was more calm and peaceful. Calvin did not stand out as a student in his youth. His early yearnings were to become a respected shop keeper just as his father was. His mother and sister both died when he was early in his teens. This made the young Calvin more somber when he was in social groups other than his closest friends. However, by diligent effort he did receive acceptance to Amherst College. While there he did start to come into his own both scholastically and socially. In 1895 he graduated with a grade point that was far superior to when he first started.

By 1897 Calvin had read the law with a respected law firm for two years. Passing the bar examination and with his law degree in hand the youthful Coolidge opened his own law office in Northampton, Massachusetts. After three years of practicing law John Calvin found himself becoming involved the local Republican Party. He was energetic in his work on the local city council and then won election to the office of county clerk in 1903. In fact only once in his life did Calvin Coolidge ever lose an election. After a string of successful posts, he served as mayor of Northampton and then served in the Senate of Massachusetts in 1912. In the early part of World War I, Coolidge was elected as the lieutenant governor of the state of Massachusetts and served in that position from 1916 to 1918.

By 1918 he was elected as governor of Massachusetts. The Republican Party was on the rise by this time. Governor Coolidge was prominently recognized for his breaking of a strike by the Boston police. Forcefully stating that the public could not be deserted by the police, he brought in the National Guard.

Coolidge won more admiration for his support of improved working conditions for women and children and even implemented a cost of living pay increase for public employees. Having reduced the work week to just 48 hours for children and women was considered very progressive at this time in history. Coolidge was now 36 years old and he had already been married to Grace Anna Goodhue since 1905.

President Calvin Coolidge (Cont'd)

It was 1920 when Calvin Coolidge went to Chicago for the Republican Convention. As his state's favorite son candidate but he had no real support for the presidency. It was Warren G. Harding who was to be the Republican Presidential nominee. Numerous rebellious delegates however forced the Party powers to put Coolidge onto the ticket as the Vice Presidential candidate.

The Republican Party handily won the election. As Vice President, Calvin – often called "Silent Cal" – sat quietly through many high level meetings. Harding was President but his first term was cut short by his death due to a stroke. Thus Vice-President Coolidge was sworn into office by his own father who was a Justice of the Peace. He finished Harding's first term which had been deeply stained with the infamous Teapot Dome scandal. Many of Harding's personnel went to prison for their deeds.

Coolidge was elected President on his own platform but his term was tarnished because he kept many of Harding's staff. Ultimately Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty was fired due to the tremendous amount of scandal surrounding him and, in spite of a congressional order, Daugherty refused to open and release Justice Department records. The President had no choice but to remove him from office.

President Coolidge had many significant political events occur during his administration. He held firm in his rejection of the Veteran's Bonus Act for World War I soldiers and the farm relief legislation which was backed by his own party. The former law was indeed passed by a congressional override vote. His support of reducing the taxes on the wealthiest people was considered to have a strong effect on these people making rash and unwise investments in the stock market. This rash buying was one of the four fundamental causes of the Great Depression that followed his term of office.

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President Calvin Coolidge (Cont'd)

America continued to increase investment in the Latin American countries by a factor of more than double the previous amount in just eight short years. These Latin countries were greatly angered by what they felt was nothing more than American imperialism. Only the "Good Neighbor Policy" initiated by a future president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, would ever lessen the tremendous tension between America and the collective sentiment of the Latin countries. The interests of sugar and fruit conglomerates as well as American oil magnates fueled the anger of the Central and South American countries.

Having U.S. forces permanently inserted into this area of the world only served to make relationships all the more volatile.

Women finally received the right to vote, but Native Americans were still treated very poorly. Voting rights for them came at the price of leaving their reservations and living on small parcels of land. Black people, while finding work in the cities in the North, would have to wait many decades for their suffering to be reduced by governmental actions. Meanwhile, wealthy Americans rose rapidly since their incomes had little or no taxation.

Although the nation appeared to be growing economically during President Coolidge's term in office, the seeds of the depression that was soon to come were already taking root. Calvin Coolidge told his party and the nation that he did not intend to run for a second term as President. This opened the door for Herbert Hoover to take office and in less than nine months he would have to deal with the infamous "Black Thursday" stock market crash, in October of 1929.

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President Calvin Coolidge (Cont'd)

Retired from public office, the former President set about writing his memoirs as an extended autobiography. He also wrote articles that were published in many large magazines. Calvin Coolidge held true to his opinion that there should be no interference by government unless or until there was really no alternative. His historical perspective is mixed. Some scholars think that Coolidge knew a great economic collapse was coming and this was the reason he did not run for a second term, while others believed that his failing health caused him to realize that he would not have the strength to carry on for another four years in the White House.

Whatever the reason may be for Calvin Coolidge's refusal to run again, his lifespan after the Presidency was barely four years. He passed away from massive heart failure on the 5th of January 1933 in Northampton, Massachusetts in the home he shared with his devoted wife, Grace Anna.

Grace Anna lived on until 1957. Always a vivacious lady, she was much sought after by the media. The Coolidge's youngest son, Calvin, died in 1924 at the age of 16. Their oldest son, John lived to be ninety-four, having lived through two World Wars, the Great Depression, and the Cold War. This John Coolidge bridged a historical period in the life of the United States of America, much of which had been influenced greatly by his father, the 30th President of the United States.

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President Calvin Coolidge Questions

1. Calvin Coolidge was born in
 - a. Plymouth, Massachusetts
 - b. Plymouth, England
 - c. Plymouth Notch, Vermont

2. Calvin Coolidge served as governor of
 - a. Massachusetts
 - b. Vermont
 - c. New Hampshire

3. As governor, Coolidge brought in the National Guard against striking
 - a. Police
 - b. Fire fighters
 - c. Teachers

4. Calvin Coolidge served as vice president under
 - a. Herbert Hoover
 - b. Warren Harding
 - c. Franklin Roosevelt

5. Calvin Coolidge first became president because
 - a. He was vice president
 - b. The president died during his term
 - c. Both a. and b. above

6. Coolidge opposed what bill that Congress passed by override?
 - a. Farm Bill
 - b. Veteran's Bonus Act
 - c. Good Neighbor Policy

7. Coolidge did not serve a second full term as president because
 - a. He was not re-elected
 - b. He did not want to run again
 - c. He died while president

8. Coolidge died because of
 - a. A heart attack
 - b. A stroke
 - c. Cancer

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President Calvin Coolidge Answers

1. c.
2. a.
3. b.
4. c.
5. b.
6. a.
7. b.
8. a.