



Calvin Coolidge
CALVIN COOLIDGE PRESIDENTIAL FOUNDATION

Chairman's Report

Annual Meeting

July 3, 2017

Report of the Chairman to the Members, Annual Meeting 2017

“Men do what I tell them to do—why, is a great mystery to me.” –Calvin Coolidge

Almost a decade ago, under the leadership of Robert Kirby, the board and members of the Calvin Coolidge Foundation undertook to “go national.” That is, to task our Foundation, which had so long served the memory of President Coolidge in Vermont, with the additional work of elevating the name and values of President Coolidge across the nation.

Before one looks at the Foundation and its trajectory, it’s worthwhile, especially on the birthday of the president and our nation, to remind ourselves why this ambitious task is worth undertaking. The answer is: Coolidge himself. The native Vermonter started his political work in the city elections of Northampton, Massachusetts, and moved up the political ladder, holding nearly every job until he became governor. Next, Coolidge moved to the national stage as vice president and president. Though the final step up was the result of a sad event, the death of President Warren Harding, one still cannot but wonder at the progress of the New Englander. As Coolidge discovered, men followed him because he both followed the law and wrote quality law. Coolidge’s deliberate professionalism enthralled his peers. In other words, Coolidge is vastly underrated. If Coolidge were a stock, he’d be a “buy.” Hence, the ambitious goal of elevation.

We believe we are doing that and would like, as Coolidge might have, to put forward the evidence. One bit came in May when the legislature in Montpelier honored the Foundation with a commendation for the Coolidge Scholars Program. We thank Senators Alison Clarkson, Alice Nitka, and Dick McCormack along with Representative Charles Kimbell for sponsoring the concurrent resolution honoring the scholarship. Such support comes on top of the constant support the Foundation receives from the officers of the state of Vermont. Especially key to this partnership is Laura Trieschmann, Vermont’s State Historic Preservation Officer. Together with Ms. Trieschmann, the Foundation developed a holiday ornament produced by Vermont’s own Danforth Pewter, which went to hundreds last December. Year round the curator at the President Calvin Coolidge State Historic Site, William Jenney, collaborates with the Foundation in planning and executing complex events. Our vice-chair Jim Douglas, who served four terms as governor of Vermont, has proven an invaluable leader to the Foundation. We appreciate all Vermonters’ support and are eager to strengthen this already-substantial partnership.

As often as we can, we draw tourists and Vermonters to the Notch to celebrate Coolidge in appropriate fashion. Coolidge prized citizenship. As Coolidge said: “Whether one traces his Americanism back three centuries to the *Mayflower*, or three years of the steerage, is not half so important as whether his Americanism of to-day is real and genuine. No matter by what various crafts we came here, we are all now in the same boat.” This summer, therefore, for the fourth year in a row, the Foundation will host a naturalization ceremony on the grounds of Plymouth Notch. Judge J. Garvan Murtha will preside. Jennifer Sayles Harville, the great-granddaughter of President Coolidge will sing the National Anthem and Castleton University’s Bill Wiles will lead all in singing all the stanzas of “God Bless America.”

The Coolidge Scholarship is still a new venture, in its second year, so a brief summary may be helpful. The Coolidge Scholarship is a full-ride four-year scholarship for academic merit to any accredited American college or university a candidate chooses. The logic behind such a scholarship is twofold. The first goal is to introduce Coolidge to young people in a way they will remember. The scholarship honors

Coolidge values, especially an interest in debate, civil bipartisanship, and an appreciation for federalism and restrained government. The second intention of the Coolidge Scholars program is to highlight the importance of academic merit, a principle dear to the president. We aim for this scholarship, nicknamed “the Coolidge,” to be on par with Oxford’s Rhodes Scholarship when it comes to prestige. Sticklers will be pleased to note recipients of “the Coolidge” are selected based purely upon academics and a demonstrated interest in public policy. Coolidge himself held back when it came to athletic pursuits. “I held the stakes,” he said wryly once describing to someone how he participated in sports as a youngster. We pour what resources we have into the scholarship itself, rather than marketing or market research. The wager is that the sheer value of the scholarship will sell itself.

As it turns out, that is proving a good wager. Some 16,000 young people registered to apply for the 2017 Coolidge Scholarship, of which 2,494 completed the entirety of the application process. The application itself is rigorous: Candidates must read Coolidge’s autobiography (for sale in our gift shop), pen two Coolidge-related essays, elicit two recommendations and supply their transcripts and resumes.

Our early analysis suggests a high-quality pool of candidates in the prize’s second year. Around 20 percent of our applicants (for whom we have class-rank data) fall in the top one percent of their own high school classes, and 50 percent fall in the top five percent of their own high school classes. Coolidge applicants also perform very well on standardized tests. Among Coolidge applicants who have taken the ACT, some 20 percent fall in the top 99th percentile nationally. The same is true of 18 percent of our candidates on the SAT and 15.5 percent of our candidates on the PSAT. Furthermore, Coolidge applicants had collectively already earned 932 “fives” on AP exams by the time they submitted their applications. These numbers are all the more remarkable because Coolidge candidates are high school juniors, not seniors. The crop of candidates for the Coolidge is a crop any college would envy.

It has been clear both this year and last that not only the money but also the Coolidge connection attracts the students. As one candidate wrote in 2016: “My current teacher refers to Coolidge as an insignificant president, but, for me, a president willing to uphold America’s moral principles is unforgettable.” Wrote another: “Calling this opportunity the Coolidge ‘Scholarship’ is quite humble, as it carries not only the financing of college education but real world values that cannot be obtained anywhere else.”

Handling this many candidates well and respectfully takes incredible work. The Coolidge Foundation staff, led by executive director Matt Denhart, conducts a rigorous, multi-stage review process. After Matt and his staff reviewed the 2,494, they were able to bring the number down to 1,400 — then a hundred. Nine semifinals juries in Houston, Raleigh, New York, Boston, Woodstock, Palm Beach, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. met to evaluate the top 100 candidates. These juries and the Foundation then recommended one finalist each to the finals committee. That committee was led by former National Endowment for the Humanities chair Bruce Cole, former governors Jim Douglas and Mitch Daniels, professor Wilfred McClay of the University of Oklahoma, Judge Edith Jones of the Fifth Circuit, and Coolidge trustees Kurt Schmoke, Robert Luddy (founder of ten schools himself), J.W. Childs and Milt Valera. This year the winning Coolidge Scholars are Neha Seshadri of Michigan, Elissa Morgan of Georgia and Joshua Kim of California. Last year’s scholars are Regan Brady, Samuel Reddick and Joshua Moriarty. Regan and Josh will attend Harvard University and Sam will attend Rice University. For the Fourth of July, our winning Scholars will be at the Notch—please greet them when you see them.

Choosing among the Coolidge candidates proved so difficult that last year the Foundation developed another new program for our finalists, Senators' Weekend in Washington. In August, we bring as many of the top 100 finalists as we can fund to learn about our government in the nation's capital. Our students stay at the Willard Hotel, the Coolidges' home during the vice presidential period, visiting the U.S. Capitol, Supreme Court, Decatur House, and, of course, Mt. Vernon. Among their tour guides last year was former congressman Bob Carr. Please consider sponsoring a Senator (\$1,800 each) so he or she can join this memorable trip to Washington. The weekend is a way to connect youth to Coolidge – forever.

Calvin Coolidge loved debate. The shy boy found his footing through the sport. The formality of competition electrified the young man. "Perhaps my dress suit lent me inspiration as it was the first time I ever wore one," he wrote after a banquet at which he spoke while still in college. "There is nothing in the world gives me so much pleasure as to feel I have made a good speech." This year marks the fifth summer of Coolidge debate and the fourth of debate at the Notch solely under the auspices of this Foundation. For years now, we have hosted debaters from Dartmouth Debate Institutes. DDI is a highly competitive program, and we bring their varsity debaters to Coolidge at the Notch, where they train on debate topics from protectionism to income inequality. Increasingly, our debate projects are also our own. Our Coolidge Camp for debaters, under which the students are with us eight days, counts over 40 campers this year, an increase from earlier years. This year, for the second time, the Foundation hosts the annual Coolidge Cup, with a \$7,500 scholarship prize for the winner. We intentionally selected a topic related to this year's topic for a national league, school funding, in order that our debaters will use the information they garner here all year. School funding is also of particular concern to Vermont, whether the subject is the state's proto-voucher system at the academies or Vermont's funding for special needs. A good share of these debaters come to the Notch on scholarships provided by the Foundation via your gifts.

Team debaters are not the only debaters who debate under Coolidge auspices. The Coolidge Foundation hosts debate tournaments around the country. Last December, some 200 debaters participated in the Coolidge Cup qualifying tournament in New York City, and dozens turned out for the Coolidge tournament this April in Dallas. In addition, we run tournaments specific to schools that seek to introduce debate. One such school is St. Thomas More in Raleigh; another is Salisbury Academy in Salisbury, Connecticut. Coolidge plays host to the Manhood Initiative's Provision School, a school based in Houston. The young Texans come to the Notch in August.

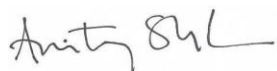
Debate inspires us all. Even if you haven't participated in a debate you may have noticed the hopeful white tents on the Notch hillside throughout the summer. Those are debate chambers for our teens. Over the winter we also continued our work, educating young Vermonters about their president. Educator Diane Kemble hosted more than 500 pupils and their teachers over the course of the school year. Our History Exploration program uses observation and stories to intrigue. Many thanks to volunteer docents Nick Cassone, Susan Foster, Pat Graves, Terry Gulick, Kathy Jacob, Kathy Lynds, as well as Rob Hammer and Ryan Kline who joined Diane in taking small groups around. An additional 110 students saw an Outreach Program in their schools, including Derby Line School for Diane's annual Coolidge visit. Docents open the Schoolhouse and its hands-on exhibits on summer and fall Thursdays and Saturdays from 1 to 3 p.m. Let Diane Kemble know if you'd like to join our terrific docent group.

One reason we are able to undertake so much is the work of executive director Mathew Denhart. Former intern Rob Hammer, an alumnus of Matt's own Ohio University, now serves as program associate. We recently bid a fond farewell to staffer Kelly Larson and program and editorial associate Rushad Thomas. We reluctantly part with both Kelly and Rushad, but are glad to know Kelly is helping her family on the West Coast and Rushad is serving capably in his new role at the American Council of Trustees and Alumni in Washington, D.C. In addition, Alexandra Salavitch and our new office administrator John William Ferrell are here to serve you and Coolidge. Please greet these Coolidge team members when you see them.

Representing Coolidge ourselves is also part of our work. In the past two years, on your behalf, I have spoken in many places across the nation on Coolidge, including Raleigh, Dallas, Grand Rapids, Hartford, Seattle and Geneva, Switzerland. Recently Oxford University Press published "When Life Strikes the President," a volume on presidents confronting personal crisis, to which I contributed a chapter on the loss of Calvin, Jr., the president's son, during the time at the White House. As a type this, I am preparing for a television panel on the presidency that will air July 4. Executive director Matt Denhart has spoken repeatedly on Coolidge around the country, most especially on Coolidge's policy in an area of Matt's expertise, Coolidge and immigration. The sense the staff gets on our forays is that the country is only waiting for this president and that many more Americans are beginning to consider trips to the Notch.

Many board members and supporters will be around for the weekend. We at the Foundation would like to thank not only members of this board, but also the town of Plymouth and the state of Vermont, for their tremendous support. The Coolidge family, including Jenny Sayles Harville, John Sayles, Christopher Coolidge Jeter and Edward Jeter, have been supportive at every turn. The Foundation is sad to learn of the passing of a dear friend and supporter, Thomas Amidon of Stowe, Vermont. Thanks to the work of many friends present and future, we are confident that the Coolidge Scholarship and Coolidge debate can raise the president's name to new heights.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Amity Shlaes".

Amity Shlaes, Chairman, Board of Trustees