



*Calvin Coolidge*  
CALVIN COOLIDGE PRESIDENTIAL FOUNDATION

# **Chairman's Report**

## **Annual Meeting**

**July 3, 2019**



## Report of the Chairman to the Members, Annual Meeting 2019

*“A new importance is attaching to the cause of education. A new realization of its urgent necessity is taking hold of the Nation...The economic and moral waste of ignorance will little longer be tolerated.”* – President Calvin Coolidge’s Speech to the National Education Association, July 4, 1924.

*“At his core, Silent Cal was a moral person who sought faithfully to do his duty to America using as few resources as possible.”*  
– Application essay by a candidate for the Coolidge Scholarship.

Coolidge prized education, whether it took place at home, at a grammar school, at high school, at a college, at a library, or in an office. Here in Plymouth Notch, Coolidge got his educational start in a small one-room school house. Both Coolidge’s grandmother and stepmother taught here in the village, and his sister Abbie qualified as a school teacher. In the town of Plymouth, Coolidge’s father, John Coolidge, collected tax for schools and helped arrange places to stay for teachers. The future president attended two Vermont boarding schools, Black River Academy in Ludlow (tuition, \$7 a term) and St. Johnsbury Academy in St. Johnsbury. Coolidge was graduated from Amherst College in Massachusetts. At Amherst’s commencement, the future president’s institutional education ended. But it is important to note that Coolidge continued to educate himself.

Coolidge debated both at college and at town meetings in Plymouth (one of the topics was bimetallism, a hot theme in the era of Grover Cleveland). The young Calvin competed in essay contests. After college, Coolidge read the law. Law schools existed at the time, and Coolidge’s Amherst acquaintances Harlan Fisk Stone and Dwight Morrow attended Columbia Law. Coolidge studied law as a clerk in the firm of Hammond and Field in Northampton, Massachusetts. Coolidge respected law schools, indeed, he later named Stone his attorney general, and Morrow to the post of ambassador to Mexico at a time when Mexico was riven by a civil war. But the Coolidge family, especially, one suspects, the future president’s father John, liked both the practicality of clerkship and the financial savings.

In his autobiography Coolidge recalls that the heavy law books on the shelves at Hammond and Field daunted him. The young man went out and bought his own books - textbooks which he selected and studied at night in the Forbes Library of Northampton. The library itself is a monument to the autodidact, having been funded, Andrew Carnegie style, by a local judge. Coolidge was especially proud that he managed to pass the Massachusetts Bar Exam after 20 months of such study, an accelerated rate. He later recalled that when he was admitted to practice before the Courts of Massachusetts: “I was just twenty-five years old and very happy.” Grace Coolidge for her part was the first First Lady to earn not only a college degree – Grace received a college diploma from the University of Vermont – but also professional qualification as a teacher. Mrs. Coolidge studied to become an instructor for the deaf at the Clarke School in Northampton. All his life Coolidge spoke of the necessity of education, and of the part governments, pupils, and teachers play in it. As President, Coolidge even signed off on the creation of a Bureau of Education, a forerunner to the Department of Education. He also however believed that education in general “is a state affair, rather than a national affair.”

We at the Coolidge Foundation prize education just as Coolidge did. Our board therefore seeks both to honor education as a Coolidge virtue and to educate others about Coolidge and Coolidge values. Whether alone or with our partner, the State of Vermont, we teach children and adults through classes, debate, scholarship competitions, and exhibits. The Coolidge core values of education, faith, respect for

business, thrift, bipartisanship, civility, federalism, trade policy and low taxes are at the core of all of our activities.

The oldest educational activity has been hosting Vermont school classes for a day at the Notch. The students, traditionally fourth graders, are hosted by two Coolidge Foundation educators, Jared Rhoads and John Ferrell, who lead a group of dedicated volunteer docents. The pupils visit the Coolidge birthplace, the Coolidge homestead, the school house and the cheese factory. They also see the Summer White House, visit the general store, look through the barns, and take in the beautiful church. Many members will recall Diane Kemble, who retired this past year as educator. A number of our projects were established by Diane. We so appreciate Diane's eleven years of service. Thanks to Diane's efforts, thousands of Vermonters have experienced Coolidge and the Notch.

Two newer Coolidge programs at the presidential birthplace emphasize Vermont learners and participants. The first is our Coolidge trivia contest, open to all ages, led by Jared Rhoads, and Coolidge intern Sam Williams. The contest will take place July 3 under the big tent and we welcome all to join.

In the autumn, on October 12, the second annual Calvin Coolidge 5k and "I do not Choose to Run" one-mile walk will be held in Plymouth Notch. In the inaugural effort last year this event attracted many Vermonters as well as visitors from around the country. In fact the 2018 winners joined us from another part of the country, making the Coolidge 5K a part of their honeymoon.

The Foundation also leads two major initiatives in Coolidge education. The first is our Coolidge debate League and Coolidge Cup tournament, overseen by debate director Jared Rhoads. Thanks to the support of the Luddy Schools of North Carolina, a string of independent, charter and parochial secondary schools founded by Robert Luddy and his family, we host Coolidge preliminaries throughout the year at these institutions. We also work with numerous other leagues around the country to identify qualifiers for the Coolidge Cup. One Coolidge Debate feature is that our debates always take up the policy topics Coolidge loved, especially the study of the Constitution and the study of economics.

In past school years students have debated a host of topics: the national debt, the carbon tax, school vouchers, immigration, trade, taxes, the cost of higher education, and many others. Another hallmark of Coolidge debate is that adult experts, often professors, teach the debaters and help them prepare for their tournaments. Among our teachers in the past year are Professor Mike Munger of Duke University and Professor Richard Vedder of Ohio University.

Winners of the Coolidge Debate League competitions qualify to travel to Plymouth Notch for the Coolidge Cup, an all-expenses paid five-day trip to learn and compete at the Notch. Dozens of other students from across the country may also qualify for the prestigious cup in other ways: in an online competition, or at tournaments that we sponsor in other high school debate leagues all across the United States. While at the Notch, debaters attend a naturalization of new Americans on July 4, they engage in debate, and they attend lectures on policy. Many of our Coolidge debate competitors go on to distinguished college careers. The 2018 overall champion, Devesh Kodnani, is now a freshman studying economics at the University of Chicago and competing with his school's debate society.

We supply many college scholarships to Cup competitors: the top four finishers in the Coolidge Cup receive \$7500, \$1500, \$500, and \$500 in scholarship prize money, respectively. This year, Mexican

commentator Dr. Roberto Salinas-Leon of Mexico City and Dr. Douglas Irwin of Dartmouth will teach the 2019 Coolidge Cup debate topic, tariffs and trade. If you would like to sponsor our debate programs to help underwrite the cost of a student's participation, please speak with Jared Rhoads. Finally, we should mention that debate happens at the Notch all year: a number of schools bring classes for a day or days of debate, among them Salisbury School and ProVision Academy of Houston.

Foundation members may participate in debate by judging. Over the past five years, many members of the Vermont community have honored us by serving as citizen judges at our tourneys. Coolidge debate programs have acquainted more than 2,000 youngsters from across the nation with New England and Calvin Coolidge, as well as Coolidge principles. In the past half-decade the Coolidge Foundation has provided more than \$500,000 in debate sponsorships, debate prizes, or scholarships to Coolidge Camp or for attendance at the Coolidge Cup.

The Foundation's second major initiative is the Coolidge Scholarship. The Coolidge Scholarship is a four-year full ride college scholarship for academic merit. The competitors enter the contest in the fall of their junior years of high school and receive word of the outcome in spring of their junior year. Coolidge scholarship candidates may attend any U.S. college to which they are admitted. Each student candidate must write two essays on Calvin Coolidge, one on Coolidge values and one on a special topic. (They also write a third essay, a personal statement.) The 2019 application included an essay prompt asking students to describe how Coolidge would solve contemporary U.S. budget problems. Our candidates made many points about Coolidge: some noticed the value of restraint in leadership, one candidate commented that "many criticized Coolidge for his silence...but in a nation where the people have the right to be listened to by their elected officials, it would be a virtue to lead through deliberation." Another applicant summarized Coolidge's view on becoming an adult: "he believed that the task of the government was to guarantee opportunity, and he trusted his constituents to exploit that opportunity fully by themselves."

Nine semifinalist juries led the selection of the Coolidge Scholarship finalists. Thank you to the many Coolidge Foundation members and friends who assisted in application review. All finalists come to the Notch to learn more about Coolidge and to interview with our finalist selection committee, led by Governor Jim Douglas. This year the Foundation awarded four scholarships. The 2019 winners are: Nico Brayton of Vermont, Mitchell Robson of Massachusetts, Julianna Lee of New Jersey, and Katherine McPhie of California. Since the Scholarship program began four years ago, the Foundation has awarded fourteen such full ride scholarships.

The Foundation also names 96 Coolidge Senators, the balance of the hundred top candidates for the Coolidge Scholarship. The Foundation hosts the Senators for a weekend in Washington, where they learn about Coolidge values, as well as the private sector and businesses that pay the taxes that support the government. Each year Governor Douglas, Coolidge vice-chair, joins us in Washington to share his experience of the Vermont Way with the students.

Over the years the Foundation has come to see that our nation's capital is a valuable perch for educating Americans about President Coolidge. We are therefore proud to announce that we recently occupied Coolidge House in Georgetown in the District of Columbia. Coolidge House, when complete, will feature a library, exhibits about Coolidge, and seminars and lectures on Coolidge related topics. One of the purposes of Coolidge House will be to introduce Americans who have never travelled to New

England to Coolidge. The hope is that Coolidge House in Washington will draw tourists to Plymouth Notch. It is also key that Coolidge have a presence in Washington in order to participate and lead in the quickly approaching centennial celebrations of the Coolidge presidency. We are especially grateful to the many Foundation members and new supporters from across the country who participated in our “endow a chair” campaign. This campaign enabled families to sponsor one of the audience chairs in our Coolidge seminar room. We look forward to welcoming you to Coolidge House.

Our staff members are key to high-quality work. President Matt Denhart leads a tremendous team. We employ staff with a record of demonstrated excellence in program and policy. Jared Rhoads is typical of the high caliber of talent that honors the Foundation by joining us. Mr. Rhoads, who joined us in 2018 as debate director, also serves as lecturer at the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice. Mr. Rhoads serves as director and capstone project advisor at the MPH graduate program. Experts also join us for many of our Coolidge programs. We’d especially like to single out Professor Ben Voth of Southern Methodist University, who has traveled to the Notch for the past six summers to instruct students and judges in the art of debate. Rob Hammer, program manager, continues to perform excellent work, including managing our scholarship program. We are grateful to the dedication of John Ferrell who assists all programs and has taken a lead in organizing education visits to the Notch. We are pleased to welcome a new member to the team, C.C. Borzilleri. C.C. grew up in Connecticut and recently graduated as a history major from Georgetown University.

Many exciting programs are upcoming.

We hope you will join us and the State of Vermont for our extensive Fourth of July programming, which begins the evening of July 3 with our annual summer dinner and fireworks display. Jenny Sayles Harville, Coolidge great-granddaughter and Foundation trustee, will lead us in patriotic songs. The Fourth itself includes begins with a reading of the Declaration of Independence and Coolidge’s own speech “The Inspiration of the Declaration. Celebrations also include a naturalization ceremony, a procession and wreath-laying ceremony at the president’s gravesite with the Vermont National Guard, and the championship round of the Coolidge Cup. Historical interpreter Tracy Messer will share a presentation in character related to the 1919 Boston Police Strike to close the day on July 4.

On August 3 we will celebrate the centennial of Coolidge’s 1923 “Homestead Inauguration,” reenacting the famous event on the porch of the Homestead at the Notch. August 3 will also be Plymouth’s Old Home Day.

The Coolidge Senators will join us for our fourth-annual Coolidge Senators Summit in Washington, DC. Due to the expansion of the Senators program, this year we will hold two such events. Those take place August 8-11 and August 22-25. Coolidge Foundation members and friends are encouraged to join us meet these students.

The Notch will again host the Plymouth Folk and Blues concerts over Labor Day weekend. This event is organized annually by the Ottaway family and by the State of Vermont. The Foundation is pleased to play a small role in the event by making the church available in the event of inclement weather.

In early October the 2020 application for the Coolidge Scholarship will go live. Please help us spread the word about the scholarship to potentially interested students. The application process itself is a wonderful mechanism for teaching Coolidge to thousands of America's brightest young people.

The second annual Coolidge 5K and "I Do Not Choose to Run" 1-mile walk takes place on October 12. This history foot race also educates on Coolidge. Signage the Foundation has produced for along the course includes a timeline of Coolidge's life and major accomplishments as well as markers for the various historic buildings around the Notch. October 12 is also the annual Plymouth Notch Antique Apple Fest, organized by the Division for Historic Preservation.

The Coolidge Debate League at Luddy Schools will host two tournaments during the second half of this year in Raleigh, NC. We are pleased by the continued growth of the League. Tournaments now draw nearly 100 competitors and debaters have even started coming from other states to compete at our events. We look forward to the continued growth of this program and invite North Carolina based members to consider volunteering as a debate judge.

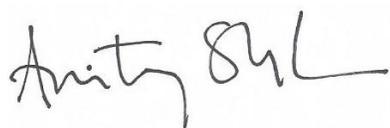
The 2019 Holiday Open House at the Notch, organized by the Division for Historic Preservation will take place on December 7. We hope you'll join us for a festive day that includes the singing of Christmas carols in the church.

We will close out the year with our annual New York Gala, which takes place this year on December 10 at the Union League Club in New York City. Please consider joining us.

As our programs continue to grow around the country, Plymouth Notch remains the heart of our Coolidge education efforts. The state of Vermont maintains this historic site beautifully, enabling our guests, and thousands of others, to learn about Coolidge. We deeply value our strong relationship with the State of Vermont, and thank especially site administrator Bill Jenney along with State Historic Preservation Officer Laura Trieschmann, and Historic Sites Section Chief Tracy Martin.

Thank you, most especially, to our members who sustain our work and make it all possible.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amity Shlaes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Amity Shlaes  
Chairman

