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Recording Summary:

Transcription of a press conference given by former President Calvin Coolidge; the exact date and place are unknown. Coolidge discusses at length his family, growing up in Vermont, and his early political career in Massachusetts including the Boston Police Strike of 1919 – his handling of which catapulted him into national politics. He later discusses his presidency, aspects of Herbert Hoover’s presidency and life after the White House.

Transcript Begins

INTRODUCER: Ladies and gentlemen, the 30th President of the United States. [applause]

CALVIN COOLIDGE: Thank you, Mr. Stewart. Is everyone in now? I am reminded that I once did a good deal of wondering whether I would be able to be helpful to you members of the press in these conferences that we have, and especially as to whether I wouldn't find it more or less of a bore on my part and not particularly pleasant. Well, I haven't found it that way at all. In fact, I have come to rather look forward to having you come in here twice a week in order that I may talk to you and give you something of an idea of what it is I think the government is trying to do, and to satisfy you, insofar as I can, on the questions that you ask. I have a great many questions here today. I have found in the course of a long public life that the things I did not say ever hurt me. [laughter]

Maybe I'll talk about patriotism. Everybody seems to be for it.

Am I related to the Boston Coolidge's? They say no. [laughter]

[00:01:51]

Everybody that has a cause wants me to make a speech. Political strategy. You know, there is only one form of political strategy in which I have any faith, and that is to try to do the right thing, and sometimes to be able to succeed.

[00:02:12]

Now, there is one report going around about what I intend to do when I finish being President, and all these reports have been made entirely without any consultation with me. But there is this one report, and I hesitate to spoil anything like a good newspaper story, but I am having sent to me quite a number of jackknives. Now, I don't recall that I ever said I plan to devote myself to the occupation of whittling when I finish being President. I did some when I was a boy, but I haven't devoted myself to that for a considerable number of years now. I hesitate to spoil

anything like a good newspaper story, but, as I say, I don't want to be accused of acquiring property under false pretenses.

[00:03:10]

What did my father think when I became President? Well, I'll tell you what he thought; when I became Vice President he said, "I think you'll do fairly well. [laughter] He did fairly well as governor of Massachusetts; I think he'll do fairly well as Vice President. And he probably thought the same thing when I became President; he didn't tend to change his mind too much on matters of that sort. [laughter]

My father always said that I could get more sap out of a maple tree than any other boy around. He said that was my gift. [laughter] [mic problems]

[00:04:23]

I recall the very first time that I ever heard anyone speak using one of those [mic problems] and they caused as much trouble on that occasion as they do at present. [laughter/applause] On that occasion it was at President Harding's inauguration. I remember somebody in the crowd said to me, "Isn't that amplifier that Harding is using a marvelous thing?" I said, "Oh, yes, indeed it is. But what he most needs is a condenser." [laughter/applause]

[00:05:08]

I have an inquiry here about the real Calvin Coolidge, the man behind the myth. Well, I don't know. Maybe there isn't anybody. [laughter] I was born on the 4th day of July, 1872, in the town of Plymouth, Vermont, in a five-room, story-and-a-half cottage attached to the post office and the general store, which my father was proprietor of. Now, our house was well shaded with maple trees and had a yard in front enclosed with a picket fence, in which grew a mountain ash, a plum tree, and the customary purple lilac bushes. In the summertime, my mother planted her flower bed there.

My sister Abbie was born in the same house in April of 1875, and we lived there until the place was bought across the road, which had a few acres of land with a house, a number of barns and a

blacksmith shop. And some very fine apple trees. I think the price paid was \$375. Almost at once, the principal barn was sold for \$300, to be moved away. My father was a good trader [laughter] like his father and his father before him.

[00:06:56]

My grandfather, Calvin Galusha Coolidge, was a spare man, over six feet tall, of a nature that caused people to confide in him, and of a character which made him a constant choice for public office. His mother, her family, showed a marked trace of Indian blood. I never saw her, but he took me one time to see her sister, his very aged aunt, whom we found sitting in the chimney corner, smoking a clay pipe. Well, you know, that was so uncommon that I always remembered it. I thought tobacco was only for men. Of course, I had seen old ladies outside our neighborhood buy snuff at the store.

My grandfather was a man who delighted in practical jokes. He would lead a man into a nest of bees and make him think that he went there of his own accord. [laughter] He was never much of one for hunting for fishing, but loved to raise colts and puppies. He kept peacocks; had a yard and a garden filled with scarlet flowers. Never cared, as I say, to hunt or fish, but he did raise some very, very fine horses. He taught me to ride standing up behind him when I was five years old.

[00:08:33]

Well, my grandmother Coolidge, she spun woolen yarn from the sheep that we raised, and she knitted stockings and mittens. I have seen her weave cloth. My grandfather Coolidge had a blue woolen frock that came from her loom, and it was a most convenient garment for that region. It was cut like a shirt going on over the head with these flaps that reached down to the knees. In later years, I liked to wear the one that he left, but when news pictures began to be taken of me there, it was generally assumed among the public that this was supposed to be a makeup costume. [laughter] Which it was not. So I have since been obliged to forego the comfort of wearing it. In public life, in order to appear really natural, it is sometimes necessary to be actually artificial. [laughter]

[00:09:49]

It seems to me impossible that any man could adequately describe his mother. I cannot describe mine. She bore the name of two empresses, Victoria Josephine. There was a touch of mysticism and poetry in her nature that made her love to gaze at the purple sunsets and watch the evening stars. Whatever was grand or beautiful in form and color attracted her. It seemed to me as though the rich green tints of the foliage and the blossoms of the flowers came for her in the springtime. And in the autumn it was for her that the mountainsides were struck with crimson and with gold.

She was of a very light and fair complexion with a rich growth of brown hair that had a glint of gold in it. Her hands and features were regular and finely modeled. The older people always told me how beautiful she had been in her youth, but she was practically an invalid ever after I could remember her, but used what strengths she had in lavish care upon me and my sister Abbie, who was three years younger.

[00:11:13]

When she knew that her end was near, she called us children to her bedside and we knelt down to receive her final parting blessing. In an hour, she was gone. It was her 39th birthday. I was 12 years old. We laid her away in the blustering snows of March. The greatest grief that can come to a boy came to me. Life was never to seem the same again.

Five years later, and 41 years later, almost to the day, my sister Abby and my father followed her. It always seemed to me that the boy I lost was her image. They all rest together on the sheltered hillside among five generations of the Coolidge family.

[00:12:31]

You know, they always intended to name me John Coolidge for my father, but they always called me Calvin, so the John became discarded. If there was any physical requirement of country life that my father could not perform, I do not know what it is. From watching him and assisting him, I gained an intimate knowledge of all that kind of work. The best buggy he had for 20 years was one he built himself. The lines he laid out were true and straight, and the curves

regular. The work he did endured. You know, a lot of people in Plymouth can't understand how I ever got to be President. [laughter] Least of all my father. [laughter]

[00:13:34]

He opened the old blacksmith shop which stood on the farm, and he hired a large-framed powerful man with a black beard, said to be sometimes quarrelsome. But he was always kind to me, letting me fuss around the shop, and in hoeing time leaving his own row to do two or three hills for me, or favoring me in some way in the hayfield as he helped out there in the busy times. He always pitched the hay up on to the ox cart and I raked after. If I was getting behind, he slowed up a little. He was a big-hearted man. I wish I could see that blacksmith again.

[00:14:33]

I started to school when I was five years old. The little stone school house had unpainted benches and desks and was attended by about 25 scholars. Few, if any, of my teachers reached the standards now required by all public schools. They qualified by examination before the town superintendent. I first took this examination and passed it when I was 13. [laughter] My sister Abbie passed it and she taught a term of school in a neighboring town when she was 12 years old.

The common school subjects were taught, with grammar and United States history, so that, as I say, when I was 13 I had mastered them all and I went to Black River Academy, at Ludlow. And that is about 12 miles from Plymouth. You know, that was one of the greatest events of my life.

[00:15:42]

The packing for it required more time and attention than preparation for leaving the White House. [laughter] I counted the hours until it was time to go. My whole outfit went easily into these two small handbags that lay on the straw in the sleigh beside the fatted calf that was starting to market. The winter snow lay on the ground. The weather was well below freezing. In my eagerness these counted for nothing. I had on my best clothes and wore shoes with rubbers, because in Ludlow, they had sidewalks. Nobody could have made me believe that I should never be so innocent or so happy again.

[00:16:40]

I remember my father said to me, he said, "Calvin, if you're a good boy and study hard, some day, maybe, you'll get to Boston." [laughter] "But this calf here is going to get there before you." [laughter]

As we rounded the brow of the hill – goodbye, Abbie! – and the first rays of the morning sun streamed over our backs and lighted up the glistening snow ahead, I was perfectly certain that I was traveling out of the darkness into the light.

[00:17:36]

Going to Black River Academy was my first great adventure in life. I shall never forget the impression it made on me. You know, it was the same when I left for college, and when I went to Boston to begin a public career there, and when I was called to Washington to become Vice President, and finally when I was called to the White House. Going to the Black River Academy meant a complete break with the past among unknown scenes and unknown people.

[00:18:25]

Well, Abbie died while we were students together at Black River Academy. Appendicitis was not well understood in 1890. I stayed beside her until she passed to join our mother. The memory of her presence and her dignified devotion to the right shall always abide with me.

It was at Black River Academy that I had my first acquaintance with the Constitution of the United States and the study of it, which I then began. It has never ceased, and the more I have studied it, the more I am convinced that no other document devised by the hand of man has ever brought so much happiness to people. Well, my class at Black River was such a small one that we could all take part in the graduation ceremonies.

[00:19:30]

And I wrote to my father, "I hope you are feeling better. And when I heard from you last, my oration is all done and about then the subject is, Oratory in History. Mr. Sherman said it is the

best one that he has seen, but I suppose he was flattering me. I am having a very good time here this spring, but will be glad when I can go home and be with you. It is lonesome here. The 19th century is slipping away. We are to live in the scientific age of the 20th century and must prepare for it now. I am from the country and am glad of it, but I do not always want to remain a rustic in my ideas and in my appearance. I have improved some and I know the untiring self-denial of those who have given me the opportunity for culture and education. I hope I may always remember it, to make the most of it. With love, Calvin Coolidge"

[00:20:45]

In accordance with custom at Amherst College, three members of the graduating class were chosen by popular vote to speak at the commencement. To me was assigned the Grove oration which according to immemorial practice always dealt with the class record in a humorous way:

Gentlemen of the Class of '95: It may not be such a misfortune to be out of college. It is not proof positive that a diploma is a wolf because it comes to you in sheep's clothing. [laughter] But whatever we are, wherever we go, degreed or disagreed [laughter], we are going to be Amherst men.

Well, my effort was not without some success. I went home that summer and it was my last summer of work on the farm. And I learned that there was an opening in the law office of Hammond and Field in Northampton, and I applied, and I was accepted.

My first Christmas in Northampton was made more merry for me by the knowledge that I had won the first prize in a contest sponsored by the Sons of the American Revolution. And the subject of this essay-writing contest was "The Principles Fought for in the American Revolution." And the prize was a gold medal worth about \$150. Well, Mr. Field, Judge Field of the law office of Hammond and Field, he saw the item in the newspaper about that, and he said, "Is this you?" And I said yes. And I opened up the drawer of my desk and I said, "Here is the medal, here." And he looked at it and he said, "Well, have you told your father yet?" I said, "No. Do you think I ought to?" [laughter] See, my father had made some speculation as to whether or not I was making anything of myself with my education, and I wanted to give him some concrete

proof that in fact I was. I was a little bit flattered to have him read it in the newspapers for himself. Which he did.

[00:23:44]

It was expected that my studies for the law would take a couple of years, but I managed to complete my studies in less than that, and in 1897, just before my birthday, on the 4th of July, I made application to be admitted to practice before the courts of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and I was duly admitted. Only after I was in possession of my certificate had I notified my father. I was very happy and very pleased with the results.

I worked hard for those first several years in Northampton and didn't take the time to visit my old home in Plymouth, but when I did go but when I did go, I was City Solicitor. I had been able to make some small savings, and I suppose after a time I began to want a home of my own.

[00:24:54]

After she had finished her course at the University of Vermont, Miss Grace Goodhue came to Northampton to take the training at the Clarke School to enable her to teach the deaf. After she had been there for a time, I met her and often took her to places of entertainment. From our being together, we naturally seemed to come to care for one another.

In 1904, I had my first ride in an automobile. And of course, I thought it was marvelous thing to ride in a horseless carriage, but of course I knew that they wouldn't amount to anything.

[laughter] I have never been gifted with intuition. [laughter]

[00:25:53]

In 1904, Northampton celebrated its 250th anniversary and one evening was devoted to a reception for the governor and his council, sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution. Well, Miss Goodhue accompanied me to the City Hall and after we had strolled around for a time, we sat down in two very comfortable vacant chairs. Soon a charming lady approached us and she said that those chairs were for the Governor and Mrs. Bates and that we should have to relinquish them, which we did. Well, Miss Goodhue accompanied me to my

home in Plymouth, Vermont, that summer. And my Aunt Meade met her and she said to me, "Calvin that seems like a likely gal." [laughter] "Why don't you marry her?" I said, "Maybe I will, Grandma." Maybe I will, Grandma! [laughter]

[00:27:22]

Miss Goodhue took the rest of her vacation at her home in Burlington, Vermont. I was not expected there, but one day I paid a visit. Mr. Goodhue enquired, Did I have some business in Burlington. [laughter] "No." [laughter] "I've come up to marry Grace." [laughter] He enquired, Had I spoken to her yet? [laughter] "No." [laughter] "I can't wait a few days if it's any convenience to you."]

[00:28:23]

Well, I have seen so much fiction written on this subject that I suppose I shall be pardoned for stating the plain facts. We thought we were made for each other. For almost a quarter of a century she has borne with my infirmities and I have rejoiced in her graces.

Mrs. Goodhue was not in favor of our union, and in fact she put many, many obstacles in my path. In fact, she said that her daughter had been attending all these institutions of learning and she was not properly skilled in the domestic arts, so didn't I think that it would perhaps be best if we would delay our wedding for a year because, if we did, she would undertake to teach Grace how to bake bread. [laughter] I told her that we could buy bread. [laughter] We were married at her parents' home in Burlington in October of 1905. It rained on our wedding day. I didn't care. [laughter] So long as I got the girl. Oh, yes.

[00:30:03]

Years later when I had received sufficient of the electoral returns to show that I had been chosen governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I turned to Mrs. Coolidge and I said, "Well, Mother, the Daughters of the American Revolution cannot put us out of the Governor's chair now." [laughter] She has kept me running for office ever since. [laughter]

There was perhaps some foundation to Mrs. Goodhue's contention that her daughter was not skilled in the domestic arts. [laughter] I am reminded that perhaps on more than one occasion I might have remarked that perhaps the road commissioner would be interested to know the recipe for my wife's pie crust. [laughter]

[00:31:08]

We spent a week in Montreal and then we returned to Northampton and began housekeeping. The days passed quietly with us until the next autumn, when we moved into the house in Massasoit Street that was to be our home for so long. It was a duplex, a two-family house, and I attended to the furnishing of it myself. And when it was we walked over to it on a September evening. And in about a week's time, our first boy came to us. The fragrance of the clematis which covered the bay where the mother lay with her baby window filled the room like a benediction. It all seemed very wonderful to us. We named him John in honor of my father.

[00:32:08]

That winter, I was nominated for school committeeman. It was the only election I ever lost. [laughter] My neighbor said that he had voted for my Democratic opponent, a fellow named Kennedy. [laughter] John Kennedy. My neighbor had voted for my Democratic opponent John Kennedy because he felt that school committeemen should have children in the public schools. He might have given me a little time. [laughter] Of course, in a town the size of Northampton, I knew John Kennedy. John Kennedy was a friend of mine. John J. Kennedy, duly elected member of the Northampton school committee.

[00:33:23]

Soon, I continued with my law practice. And I had an opportunity, since I was not serving on the school committee, there was an opening in the House, Massachusetts House, and I ran, and I was elected. And I took with me to Boston in 1907 a letter from a Senator in my district to the Speaker of the House. And the note said: "This will introduce the new man from my district, Calvin Coolidge. Like a singed cat, he is better than he looks." [laughter]

With me as a freshman legislator in that body of the House was a very interesting gentleman I came to know quite well, James Michael Curley. I stayed at the Adams House on Washington Street, took a room, it was a dollar a room, that faced on an inner air shaft. I returned to that room many times over the years ahead.

[00:34:46]

In a letter to my father, May 13, 1908 – I had served two terms in the House and there seemed to be an opportunity to run for mayor of the city of Northampton, and I took that opportunity – "Dear Father, John and Grace and our new baby are in fine shape. Grace is up and caring for the babies now herself. John is very fond of the baby and he keeps saying, 'baby, baby, baby.' He pats him on the head and tries to give him some cookies. We have not named him yet. Running as mayor, the nearer I got to my home and office the better I ran, and it was the opposite with the other fellow. At least 400 Democrats voted for me. Their leaders can't see why they did it. [laughter] I know why. They knew I had done things for them, bless their honest Irish hearts. [laughter] Your son, Calvin Coolidge"

You know, without in any way being aware of what I was doing, I then became committed to a course that was to make me the second officer of the Commonwealth and of the nation and the chief executive of a city, a state and the country. I did not plan for it, but it came. I was ready from the time the justices named me clerk of courts until my party nominated me for President.

[00:36:44]

I was not transported on any bed of roses. This was all the result of many a hard political struggle in which I made many mistakes and was to go on making them up through the present hour, and expect to continue to make them as long as I shall live. We are all fallible, but experience ought to teach us not to repeat our errors.

[00:37:15]

I had been a member of the House of Representatives, mayor of Northampton, and I was state Senator, president of the Massachusetts Senate. In 1914, there was a spirit of radicalism that prevailed, which, unless checked, it looked to me like it was going to prove to be very

destructive. In taking my chair as president of the Massachusetts State Senate, I therefore made a short address. I argued that the government could not free us from toil, that large concerns are necessary for the progress in which labor and capital all have a common interest. And I defended representative government. This speech has since been known as "Have Faith in Massachusetts."

[00:38:20]

After serving as president of the Senate, I became lieutenant governor, and then in 1919 governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Now, the trouble arose over the proposal of the police to affiliate and form a union. Now, that was contrary to a long-standing rule of the department that was agreed to by each member before he came on the force and had the effect of law. When the policemen's union persisted in its course, I was urged by a committee appointed by the mayor to intervene and attempt to make Commissioner Curtis settle this dispute through arbitration.

Now, I did not see how it was possible to arbitrate the question of the authority of the law, or of the necessity of obedience to the rules of the department. I had no general responsibility for police matters in Boston; yet, as chief executive it was my general duty to require the laws to be enforced.

[00:39:45]

When it became apparent that the policemen's union was acting in violation of the rules of the department, its leaders were brought before the commissioner on charges, tried and removed from office, whereat about three-quarters of the force left the department in a body on the evening of Tuesday, September 9, 1919. This number was much larger than had been anticipated. Around midnight, bands of men appeared on the street, who broke shop windows and carried away quantities of the goods that were on display. I knew nothing of this until morning.

[00:40:33]

The disorder of Tuesday night was most reprehensible, but it was only an incident. I have always felt that I should have called out the State Guard as soon as the police left their posts. The

commissioner did not feel this was necessary. You know, the mayor of Boston had the same authority to call out all the Guard in the city of Boston. It would be rather unusual for a Governor to act except on the request of the local authorities. If no disorder existed, it would have been rather a violent assumption that one was threatened. But it could have been made. Probably would have saved some property, but would have not have settled any issue. The issue was not where the disorder of Tuesday night focused public attention on it, and showed just what it meant to have a police force that did not obey orders.

[00:41:45]

In the morning, I learned that the Mayor had called out the State Guard to report that afternoon. And he requested me to furnish more troops. I called out the entire State Guard and ordered them to report at once. In a few hours, they were patrolling the streets with bayonets fixed. There was little more trouble from disorder.

[00:42:11]

I soon learned that the mayor had placed a Guard officer in command and had virtually superseded, displaced Commissioner Curtis, who came to me in great distress. Now, if he was to be superseded, I thought the men that he had discharged might be taken back and the cause lost. I consulted the law as is my custom. And I soon found a general statute that gives the governor the authority to call on any police officer to assist him. I knew what to do.

You know, they tell me I have a poker face. [laughter] I think I know what they mean. The strike occurred on Tuesday night, the Guard were called Wednesday, and on Thursday I issued a General Order restoring Mr. Curtis to his place as commissioner and made a general proclamation calling on all citizens to assist me in preserving order.

[00:43:24]

I cannot replace Commissioner Curtis; I did not appoint him. You ask that I reemploy these same men while they persist in disobedience to the rules of Massachusetts. Nineteen men have been discharged. Others, having abandoned their duty, have, under the law, been declared vacant. There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anytime, anywhere.

No doubt it was the police strike of Boston that brought me to national prominence. That furnished the occasion and I took advantage of it.

[00:44:18]

Well, I, of course, thought that was the end of my political career in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, but it was not the case, for I was reelected to the office of governor of the Commonwealth. In 1920, there came to be some consideration of me for President in 1919, but of course, I would not use the office of the governor to run for another [laughter]

At the convention in Chicago in 1920, the senior Senator from Massachusetts, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, at one point he had looked with some favor on my being nominated for President, but on this occasion, for his own reasons, he said that he would not nominate me for President. He said, "Nominate a man who lives in a two-family house? No." [laughter] "Massachusetts is not for him." It may be that Senator Henry Cabot Lodge was or was not gifted with intuition.

[00:45:43]

In 1920, that Republican convention was largely under the domination of a coterie of United States Senators, who maneuvered it into adopting a platform and nominating a President in ways that were not satisfactory to a majority of the delegates. So when the same forces undertook for a third time to dictate the action of the convention in naming a Vice President, the delegates broke away and literally stampeded to me. Now, I did not wish to be Vice President, but my name was placed in nomination.

[00:46:27]

I was at the Adams House in Boston when I received the telephone call informing me I had been nominated. Grace was there visiting me that weekend, and she said, "Well, you're not going to take it, are you?" I said, "Well, I suppose I'll have to." [laughter] I was pleased to accept. It was especially agreeable to me to be associated with Senator Warren G. Harding, whom I knew well and liked.

[00:47:03]

Well, I campaigned in the South, campaigned in Maine and throughout New England. And in November, of course, I returned to Northampton to cast my vote. In a letter to my father, I told him, "The campaign is over. Some mistakes are made, always are, I suppose. But the ones this year were so foolish I do not see how they could have been made by men trying to elect the ticket. I am home today. Came home yesterday. Grace and the boys are well. Your dog is well. She has been the ice man, the milk man and the grocer man. It is good to have some way to get even with them for the highest prices. [laughter] I wonder if anyone sent you the *Boston Globe*. They are running the life of me just now. Most of it is fiction, of course. [laughter] So you might like to read it."

Well, the time soon came for us to go to Washington. When I became Vice President, it was my intention to attend to the affairs of my office and to avoid speaking. But the pressure to speak is constant and intolerable. However, I resisted most of it.

[00:48:48]

Grace was wonderfully popular there. I don't know what I would have done without her. Of course, there is no residence provided for the Vice President, so we took up accommodations in the Willard Hotel. Which were very adequate for our uses. I recall on one occasion there was a fire at the Willard, and all the guests were required to go down to the street. And it soon became apparent to everyone that there was no great danger, and I wanted to go back up to my room. And I started on my way, and one of the firemen called out and said, "Wait a minute, you come back here! Who are you anyway?" [laughter] I said, "Well, I am the Vice President." And he said, "Oh, all right." [laughter] And I started on up to my room and he called out yet again and said, "Wait a minute! Vice President of what?" [laughter] I told him, I was Vice President of the United States. He said, "Well, you come right back down here. I thought you were vice president of the hotel." [laughter]

[00:50:17]

The amount of dining out that the Vice President does is greatly exaggerated. And like everything else that's sent out of Washington for public consumption, reports are vastly exaggerated. And besides, you have to eat somewhere. [laughter]

[00:50:45]

Presiding over the Senate was fascinating to me. I was informed and instructed by the debate. And I soon learned that the Senate has but one fixed rule, which is that the Senate will do whatever it wants to do whenever it wants to do it.

[00:51:20]

In the spring of 1923, [OMISSION] was a very heavy grief to him, perhaps it was more than he could bear. I never saw him again. In June, he started on a journey to Alaska, and eternity.

I was at the home of my father in Plymouth, Vermont, on the night of August 2, 1923. I was awakened by my father coming up the stairs calling my name. His voice trembled. I knew that something of the greatest nature had occurred. He placed in my hands an official report. He had been the first to address me as President for President Harding had passed away.

[00:52:21]

The oath of office was taken in what we always called the sitting room by the light of the kerosene lamp. The Bible that had belonged to my mother lay on the table at hand. I know of no other case in history where succession comes by election where the qualifying oath of office is administered by a father to his son. Father was, as you know, a notary public, and it seemed a simple and natural thing to do at the time. I can now understand something of the dramatic force of the event.

People will often ask me, what was my first thought when I became President. Well, I thought I could swing it. [laughter] Mrs. Coolidge and I did, we got down on our knees and we asked God to bless the American people and to give me the strength to serve them.

[00:53:30]

That morning, when we started for Washington, I turned aside from the main road and I paid a short visit to the grave of my mother. It had always been a comfort to me to be near her final resting place when I was a boy, sometimes even in the dead of night. Somehow that morning, she seemed very near to me.

[00:54:03]

I think what we might do at this point is take maybe a few minutes just to stretch and change positions. But we're not going to take a great deal of time at all. In fact, they have instructed me that we should take more than five minutes at the most. So we will at this point have a very short interval. [applause]

END OF PART ONE (Item ms113.0001)

BEGINNING OF PART TWO (Item ms113.002)

CALVIN COOLIDGE: You know, there are quite a few members of the press that just can't seem to comprehend what these conferences are for. They simply furnish a background so that if a reporter desires to write on a subject, they may have the proper information with which to write their story. I suggest that you exercise more care; remember that these are not interviews and they are not statements from the White House, but simply information that I give to the press in order that it may intelligently write reports about the subjects I dwelt on.

[00:01:15]

It has been called to my attention that members of the press are beginning to get a little careless about quoting the President as a result of these conferences. Of course, it is also a violation of our understanding to say the White House spokesman said so-and-so and put in quotations on that. The only thing I am suggesting is that you observe the rule about not quoting the President.

[00:01:51]

Well, after the death of President Harding, the opposing party that it would be a good project to encourage my party to nominate me, thinking that it would be easy to accomplish my defeat.

[laughter] Well, I do not know if they were wrong in their assessment or if they overdid the operation because I think they found that they started a groundswell of opinion that they could not change for in 1924 I was nominated by a vote that was practically unanimous.

However, with the exception of the occasion of my notification, I did not make any duly political speeches during the campaign. And on the 4th of July in 1924, I wrote to my father: "My dear Father, this is not a happy day for me. Calvin blistered his toe playing lawn tennis and infection got into his foot. He seems a little better now at one p.m., but he had a bad night. Of course, he has all that medical science can give him, but he may have a long sickness. Then again, he may be better in a day or two. I hope that this is the last time that I shall ever be a candidate for office. We all send our love. Your son, Calvin Coolidge"

[00:03:50]

He was a boy of much promise, proficient in his studies, with a scholarly mind. He seemed to have a remarkable insight into things. The day I was made President, he was working in a tobacco field. One of his friends said, "If my father was President, I wouldn't be working in a tobacco field." Calvin replied, "If your father was my father, you would." [laughter]

If I had not been President, he wouldn't have been playing tennis on the south grounds. In his sickness, he asked me to make him better, and I could not. When he went, the power and the glory of the presidency went with him. I do not know why such a price was exacted for occupying the White House.

[00:05:14]

My inaugural address in 1925 was the first to be broadcast on radio. I am very fortunate that I came in with the radio. I can't make an engaging oratorical speech to a crowd as others can. All I can do is stand up in front of them and talk in a matter-of-fact way about the issues. But I have a good radio voice and so now I am able to get my messages across to the people without making any rhetorical flourish in their presence or displaying my lack of oratorical ability.

[00:06:00]

In my second term, there was considerable speculation as to whether I was likely to change or not. I did not anticipate to change very much. Now, there were two or three others that served with me in the conduct of the affairs of the United States, and I should have been pleased if they had changed a little. [laughter] Then I could have changed from saying no to saying yes to them.

[00:06:41]

In August of 1925, I again wrote to my father: "It is two years ago tonight since you woke me to bring me the news that I was President. It seems a very short time ago. I trust it has been a satisfaction to you. I think only two or three other fathers have lived to see their sons made President of the United States. I am sure I came to it very largely by your training and your example. If that was what you wanted, you have much to be thankful for, that you have lived to so great an age to see it. Your son, Calvin Coolidge"

1925, in Omaha, Nebraska, I delivered a speech to the American Legion, and I will share a portion of that with you this evening:

[00:07:51]

The generally expressed desire of "America first" cannot be criticized. It is a perfectly correct aspiration for our people to cherish. But the problem we have to solve is how to make America first. It cannot be done by the cultivation of national bigotry, arrogance, or selfishness. Hatreds, jealousies, and suspicions will not be productive of any benefits in this direction. Here again, we must apply the rule of toleration. By toleration I do not mean indifference to evil. I mean respect for different kinds of good. 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 is real and genuine. No matter by what various crafts we came here, we are all now in the same boat.

[00:09:38]

We must all realize that there are true Americans who did not happen to be born in our section of the country, who do not attend our place of worship, who are not of our racial stock, or who are not proficient in our language. We can make little contribution to the welfare of humanity on the

theory that we are a superior people and all others are an inferior people. We do not need to be too loud in the assertion of our own righteousness. It is true that we live under most favorable circumstances. But before we come to the final and irrevocable decision that we are better than everybody else, we need to consider what we might do if we had their provocations or their difficulties.

[00:10:42]

We are not likely to improve our own condition or help humanity very much until we come to the sympathetic understanding that human nature is about the same everywhere, that it is rather evenly distributed over the surface of the earth, and that we are all united in a common brotherhood.

When you are President, you have to stand every day three or four hours of visitors. Nine-tenths of them want something they ought not to have. [laughter] I found that if you would just keep still, after a time they would start to wind down. [laughter] But if you would even cough or smile, they would start up all over again. [laughter] So as I say, I have found in the course of a long public career the things I did not say never hurt me. [laughter]

[00:12:19]

In the first day of January in 1926, one of the [OMISSION] I suppose I am the most powerful man in the world, yet great power does not mean much except great limitations. I cannot have any freedom, even to go or come. I am only in the clutch of forces that are greater than I am. Thousands of people are waiting to shake my hand today.

[00:12:58]

"Forty-one years ago, mother lay ill in the same room where you now are. Great changes have come to us, but I do not think we are any happier, and I am certain not much better. Everybody tells me how cheerful you are. I can well imagine that you may be. So many loved ones are waiting for you, so many loving ones are anxious to know about you and eager to hear how you are. With love, your son, Calvin Coolidge"

It costs a great deal to be President. In my statement to the press, I was careful in my choice of words – I do not choose to run for President in 1928. There were many who were mystified as to my meaning. [laughter] The office of the President takes a heavy toll on those who occupy it and those who are dear to them. I am confident my decision was correct. Even after passing through the presidential office, it still remains a great mystery to me. We draw our Presidents from the people. I came from them and I wish to be one of them again.

It has been suggested to me that I have been a candidate in a great many previous elections and have constantly been elected to something, and that now the only thing I am a candidate for is retirement. And apparently, I am going to be successful in that.

[00:15:31]

Will I make a speech? I suppose no one knows how I hate making speeches. I would like to report that there is no foundation to the rumor that I have been offered an opportunity to teach a course in thrift. [laughter] Yes, a course in thrift at Scotland University of Aberdeen. [laughter] That would seem to be another false rumor. Which reminds me of an occasion when Governor Sproul of Pennsylvania came to Northampton when I was nominated as Vice President. And he told the story about a fellow in Pennsylvania who went out to make a speech in an unfamiliar part of the city and went down the road. And he was supposed to speak to the spaghetti factory and he asked this fellow if he knew where the spaghetti factory was. And the man said, no, he didn't. So Governor Sproul continued on down the street and then the fellow came after him and he said, "Maybe you mean the noodle factory." And Governor Sproul said, "Well, yes, maybe it was the noodle factory." And the fellow said, "Well, I don't know where that is either." [laughter]

[00:17:08]

Why did I choose to not run for President in 1928? It seems a pretty good idea to get out while they still want you. [laughter] Even if I had taken another term, I would have been in Washington until 1933 – a Vice President for two years; ten years in the White House is longer than any other man's ever had. Too long.

About the Depression. Well, the most that we can say is that there has been a general lack of judgment so widespread as to involve practically the whole country. We have learned that we were not so big as we thought we were. We shall keep nearer to the ground. We shall not feel so elated, but we shall be so much safer.

[00:18:51]

You know, I've never really grown up. It's a hard thing for me to play this game. When I was a little fellow, long ago as I can remember, in Plymouth, every time I had to go into the kitchen to meet strangers, whenever I would hear strange voices in the kitchen, I would have to go through the door and I'd have to give them a greeting, because that's where the visitors would sit with Father and Mother. And I must have been five years old or so before I realized I couldn't go on like that. So now I am all right every time I am around old friends, but every time I meet a stranger, I've got to go through that old kitchen door back home. And it's not easy.

[00:19:46]

I am reminded of a fellow I knew from Plymouth, Vermont, who went down to, I think it was Texas, to visit for a time. And while he was down there, he went to a political gathering. And during the course of the evening, the speaker at this gathering asked for all the Democrats to raise their hands. And of course, almost everybody put up their hand. Except this fellow from Plymouth, Vermont.

[00:20:25]

Then the speaker said, "Well, would all the Republicans in this room please stand up?" And of course, this fellow from Plymouth, Vermont, stood up. And the speaker looked at him and he said, "Why are you a Republican?" And the fellow from Plymouth said, "Well, you know, my father was a Republican and my grandfather before him; I suppose that's why I am a Republican." And the speaker said, "Why, that is no reason at all. If your father or your grandfather was a horse thief, would that make you one?" And the fellow from Plymouth said, "No, I suppose in that case I would have been a Democrat." [laughter]

[00:21:30]

My last public speech was at Madison Square Garden in New York City in October of 1933. We were trying to get this great engineer, Herbert Hoover, another term in office. After my address, which was broadcast on radio, a lady rushed up to me and she said, "Oh, Mr. Coolidge, what a marvelous address; I stood up all the way through it." I told her, "So did I." [laughter] She said that if she could only vote for me, it would be the end of our horrible Depression. I told her it would be the beginning of mine. [laughter]

[00:22:24]

We were trying to cheer up Hoover because he was feeling very, very depressed because it seemed that he never got any credit at all for all his tireless efforts to halt the Depression. And he said he was tired of his ceaseless critics. And I said, "Well, you know, Hoover, they can't expect to see calves running in the field the morning after you put the bull to the cow." [laughter] "No," Hoover said, "but you would expect to see contented cows." [laughter]

He always wondered how I was able to see so many people and to transact so much business when I was in office. I told him, "The trouble with you, Hoover, is you talk back to them." [laughter]

[00:23:37]

When they elected that superman, Hoover, I knew he was going to have trouble. He was going to have to spend money, but he wouldn't spend enough. And then, the Democrats would get in and they would spend money like water. But the Democrats don't know anything about money. And they'll want me to come back and save money for them. But I won't do it. No, I won't.

I feel I no longer fit with these times. When I was in office, tax reduction, tariff stability, peace and the economy were the things for which I gave attention, and we succeeded along those lines. I read of the newfangled things that are now so popular and I realize that my time has passed. These new ideas call for new men to develop them. The task is not for men who understand the only kind of government that I know anything about. Of course, no one can tell these days what a few years may bring forth. But of course, I know my time is done.

[00:25:17]

And I think on this note, I will acknowledge that my time is done this evening. Thank you all.

[applause]

END OF RECORDING