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Joseph M. McInerney,
“As I Remember”
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When appointed as the official chauffeur to the Vice President of the United States, who was then Calvin Coolidge, on April 1, 1923, both Mr. and Mrs. Coolidge were at their home in Northampton, Massachusetts. Congress had just adjourned after a very long session, therefore, the Vice President had several months to be away from Washington, D.C. I drove the government owned Pierce Arrow Limousine which was assigned to the Vice President of the United States from Washington, D.C., to Northampton, Mass., where I reported to the Vice President and Mrs. Coolidge. The Coolidges stayed in and around Northampton except for a trip to Burlington, Vermont., and through the state of Maine.

On or about July 15, 1923, I drove them to Plymouth, Vermont., where Calvin Coolidge was born, and they were to spend a month or so at the Coolidge homestead. On or about July 31, I drove their two sons, John, went to Camp Devens in Massachusetts to spend a thirty day period in military, and young Calvin to Northampton, where he was to work in the tobacco fields at three dollars per day.

I arrived back in Plymouth around 5:00 P.M. on August 2, 1923, and stopped by Ludow, Vermont to pick up the daily report in telegram form which was sent by Mr. George B. Christian, then secretary to President Warren G. Harding, who was at that time very ill in a hotel in San Francisco, California. The report which I picked up on this day, August 2, was the most encouraging one which had been received during the President's illness. I delivered same to the Vice President.

While Mr. & Mrs. Coolidge were staying at the Coolidge homestead in Plymouth, Erwin C. Geiser, who was a clerk stenographer in the Vice President's office in Washington, D.C., and who was along on the different trips during the entire summer to act as secretary to Mr. Coolidge, while the regular secretary, Mr. Edward T. Clark, remained in Washington to look after the Vice President's affairs. Mr. Geiser and I each had a room at the Furman House in Bridgewater, Vermont., which is about eight miles north of Plymouth.
At about 11:30 P.M. that evening, August 2, the phone outside of my room at the Furman House began ringing, so I answered. It was Mrs. W.A. Perkins, who was calling; she was the telephone operator, also handled all Western Union Telegraph messages as well. She was calling to state that she was trying to reach either Mr. Geiser, the Vice President's acting secretary, or his chauffeur as she had a very important telegram for Vice President Coolidge. Mrs. Perkins also stated that she had tried many times to reach Miss Florence Cilley, who lived and owned the general store across the road from the Coolidge homestead, but was unable to get Miss Cilley to answer her phone. The general store in question was at one time owned by Col. John Coolidge, and in a room in back of this store, Calvin Coolidge was born on July 4, 1872. When Calvin was about four years old, Col. John Coolidge sold the store and purchased which is now known as the Coolidge homestead just across the road. The general store also served as the Plymouth post office, and Col. John Coolidge was the postmaster when he owned same. Miss Cilley became the postmistress after buying said store.

I advised Mrs. Perkins, that I was the Vice President's chauffeur, and that I would write down the contents of the telegram and deliver same to the Vice President. I would like to state here that the telephone service in and around Plymouth and Bridgewater was a very small affair, and the switchboard was in the home of Mr. & Mrs. Perkins of Bridgewater, Vermont. Most all the families (which were few) who had telephones in their homes were all on the same line. There was no phone service after 9:00 P.M. each evening, so if the phone did ring after the above time, it was either for a fire or some other emergency. On this particular evening, Mrs. Perkins woke up her husband to tell him of President Harding's death before she tried to reach Miss Cilley, Mr. Geiser or myself so that either of us could deliver the telegram to the Vice President.

The contents of the telegram which I wrote down on a piece of paper as given to me by Mrs. Perkins, stated that President Harding had passed away at 7:30 P.M. Pacific time, and it was suggested that Vice President Coolidge take the oath of office as President of the United States as soon as possible. This telegram was from Mr. George B. Christain, secretary to the late President Harding.
A Mr. Crawford, who was staying at the Furman House in Bridgewater, and was getting material for a story for Collier's Weekly as to how Vice President Calvin Coolidge was spending his long summer vacation in Plymouth. I aroused Mr. Crawford as well as Mr. Geiser, after taking down the telegram about President Harding's death. I got the Pierce Arrow Limousine out of the barn next to the Furman House, we then drove over the narrow dirt and winding road from Bridgewater to Plymouth in ten minutes. (This trip was timed by Mr. Crawford in a story which he wrote several weeks later for Collier's Weekly.) Mr. Perkins had arrived at the Coolidge homestead about ten minutes or so before Mr. Crawford, Mr. Geiser and myself because he had been advised by his wife. Mr. Perkins had awakened Col. John Coolidge, and told him of President Harding's death. Col. John Coolidge in turn awoke his son Calvin to advise him of same.

When we arrived at the Coolidge homestead, both Mr. and Mrs. Coolidge were just coming down the stairs, and Mrs. Coolidge seemed to be crying. I handed Mr. Coolidge the copy of the telegram which had been given to me over the telephone by Mrs. Perkins. The very first assignment given me by the Vice President, was to go over to the general store and wake up Miss Cilley. The telephone in her store was the only one near the Coolidge homestead, therefore, it had to be used for very important calls. I almost had to break the door down before Miss Cilley was awakened.

The very first call to be made over the general store phone was to Mr. Harry M. Daughtery, who was then the Attorney General of the United States as Mr. Coolidge had to get his opinion as to whether or not Col. John Coolidge, who being a notary public would have the power to administer the oath of office to his son making him the 30th President of the United States. After Mr. Daughtery was reached by long distance telephone, I went over to the homestead to inform the Vice President that the Attorney General was ready to talk. Both Mr. Geiser and I escorted the Vice President over to the general store. It was learned that the Attorney General advised the Vice President that his father, Col. John Coolidge did have the power to administer the oath. Mr. Geiser stood very close to the Vice President during his conservation with the Attorney General as Mr. Geiser wanted to get as much as
he possibility could down in shorthand. After the Vice President finished this conversation, he had me to stand by the phone to answer all calls, and I would relay these incoming calls to him.

About 1:30 A.M., a short while before the Vice President was sworn in as President of the United States, several men from the Telephone Company in Rutland, were on their way to lay rolls of telephone wire along side of the road leading up to Plymouth, and in a very short time had a direct private line to Rutland. The phones used up in that section of the country at that time were the large kind which had to be attached, or placed on the walls. In order to get the telephone operator from one of these phones, there was a crank which had to be spun around. As the Coolidge family, especially Col. John Coolidge, were very old fashioned, never had a phone in the homestead, therefore, the phone was placed standing up on a chair in the kitchen. Orders were also given that this particular phone had to be removed later on. There was also no electricity in the Coolidge homestead either so oil lamps were used when it became dark.

It was sometime around 1:40 A.M. the Vice President dictated a message to Mr. Geiser, who in turn after typing many copies, he passed these around to the newsmen who were present in the homestead. In part, the said message stated that the reports which he (The Vice President) had been receiving that the President of the United States, Warren G. Harding had passed away, and that this country as well as the entire world had lost a great man. It also stated it would be my purpose to carry out the policies and duties of the late President. When the newsmen got their copy of this message, they all left in order to get their story to their paper. Some of these reporters had to travel thirty or more miles before reaching a through telephone. The only reporter to stay at the homestead was young Joe Fountain. He happened to be in Congressman Porter H. Dale's party who all were in Springfield, Vermont, where Congressman Dale was campaigning at the time for the United States Senate. They had heard about President Harding's death over a crystal radio, therefore, they all came to Plymouth. In this party besides Congressman Dale and Joe Fountain, was L.L. Lane and another man whose name I just can't recall.
Vice President Coolidge, Col. John Coolidge and Congressman Dale all got together in drawing up the proper oath which would be administered by Col. John Coolidge. After the oath was arranged, Mr. Geiser, typed three copies of same, and at 2:47 A.M. August 3, 1923, Vice President Calvin Coolidge became the 30th President of the United States. The oath was read by Col. John Coolidge, and was repeated by his son. It read as follows: "I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and I will to the best of my ability preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States, so help me God." In the room at the time the oath was administered to Vice President Coolidge by his father, Col. John Coolidge, were Mrs. Grace Coolidge, Congressman Porter H. Dale, Joe F. Fountain, and L. L. Lane. The above named persons were standing like in a circle around the small table. Both Mr. Geiser and myself were in the room and both of us standing together near the kitchen door. This was the first time in the history of the United States that a father had administered the oath of office to his son, making him the President of the United States, and it has never happened since. Little did I think at the time of this great historic event which took place by a light from a kerosene oil lamp, and that it would go down in history as an outstanding event. It was my very good fortunate as being one of the persons in that room that night. On the small table at the time, was the family bible, the kerosene oil lamp and the pen which was used to sign the oath.

The three copies of the oath which was used for the swearing in, and typed by Mr. Geiser, were lost or taken by someone. The persons who signed these three documents were: President Calvin Coolidge, Mrs. Grace G. Coolidge, Col. John Coolidge, Porter H. Dale, L. L. Lane, Joseph H. Fountain, Erwin C. Geiser, and myself, Joseph M. McInerney. As I have mentioned above that all of these documents have disappeared. A thorough search was made through the Collection of all papers of the Coolidges, and at the Library of Congress, and they were not in the papers left by Mrs. Coolidge after her death in 1957. As far as I know these documents have never been found.
There have been many stories, both written and spoken about who was present in the room at the time the oath was administered, and just what really happened that early morning of August 3, 1923, at the Coolidge homestead in Plymouth, Vermont. It was fortunate that I made notes and collected many newspaper articles written at the time. All these have helped me in keeping my memory refreshed all through these years. I have a large scrapbook which I have kept every written articles I have come across, and letters from both President and Mrs. Coolidge. The National Archives and the Library of Congress have photographed each page of my scrapbook for a permanent record. Many books have been written about this historical night, and my name is mentioned in most every one of them. President Calvin Coolidge in his own autobiography mentioned about me as his chauffeur being present in the room at the time the oath was administered. There are only two persons alive today, (June 17, 1967) who were present in the room that night. They are Joe Fountain and myself. The other witnesses have all passed on.

While receiving messages over the telephone in the general store, one was from the President of the Rutland Railroad offering Mr. Coolidge the use of his private railroad car, and have a special train made up for a through run from Rutland to Washington, D.C. I went over to the homestead and advised the Vice President of the offer which was made about the private car and the special run. Mr. Coolidge advise me to tell the President of the Rutland Railroad that he would use his private car, but to attach it to regular 9:30 A.M. train leaving Rutland that morning, August 3, 1923.

Shortly after the oath was administered, the new President said that I should get a few hours sleep as I had to be up early, have the Pierce Arrow in order and to drive that thirty four miles from Plymouth to Rutland. In those days all the roads in that part of Vermont were narrow, winding and like riding over a washboard. A thirty or more mile trip was considered a long one. Col. John Coolidge showed me to the room and the bed I was to sleep in, and he told me that it was in this bed, President Calvin Coolidge was born in on July 4, 1872. Col. John Coolidge woke me up around 6:00 A.M., and about 7:00 A.M. we had
breakfast. I had the honor of sitting on right of our new President. The Coolidge's housekeeper, Miss Aurora Pierce, who had been at the homestead many years, was up early and prepared the breakfast. She did not know that Calvin Coolidge was now the President of the United States until after coming down stairs to prepare the breakfast, just before the oath was administered I heard Mrs. Coolidge ask the Vice President if Aurora should be awaken, to which Mr. Coolidge said not to call her as she had so much to do early that morning. There were no news reporters or photographers present when the breakfast was served.

When we left the homestead for our trip to Rutland, the President had me to stop the car near the cemetery which is just a short distance away. In this cemetery, there are about eight generations of the Coolidge family who are buried there. After they got out of the car, the President advised me not to let anyone follow him. Both President and Mrs. Coolidge bowed their heads in prayer over his mother's grave. It certainly was a very impressive sight.

It was stated in news articles about me hitting a couple of pigs that were loose on the roadway to Rutland, and killing one. It is true that there were several pigs on the road, but I was able to chase them away, therefore, I did not hit or kill any of them. Mrs. Coolidge and I often mentioned in our letters about the pigs, she said what a nice job I did by miss hitting them.

As we drove along further, a car behind us was blowing his horn like anything, and it seemed that this car wanted to pass us. Finally the President said: "Slow down Joseph, and let this crazy man get passed." It developed that the car in question contained two United States Secret Service Agents who were assigned in Springfield, Mass. and were ordered to catch up with the new President and accompany him all the way to Washington, D.C. These two agents had been driving all night in order to catch up with us. When we arrived at the railroad station in Rutland, there was a very large crowd to see and greet their native son, President and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge.
I placed all the baggage belonging to President and Mrs. Coolidge in the private railroad car. Both Mr. and Mrs. Coolidge shook hands with me, and he gave me the following orders: I was to go back to the homestead in Plymouth, pick up all the material, such as letters, books and etc., there, and then Mr. Geiser and myself were to drive to Northampton, Mass., where we were to pick up other things belonging to both President and Mrs. Coolidge, then drive to Washington, D.C. and report to the President, personally. He also advised me to take my time in getting back to Washington.

Upon our arrival in Washington, D.C. with all the belongings and material, the President and Mrs. Coolidge were living at the Willard Hotel there. After getting everything out of the Pierce Arrow and placed in their suite at the Willard, the President ordered me to report to U.S. Senator Cummings, and remain with him until after the late President Harding's funeral. At this time, the body of the late President Harding had not arrived in Washington from the west coast. Senator Cummings was at that time the President Pro-tem of the United States Senate, therefore, he became the acting Vice President. At the very minute Vice President Coolidge became the 30th President of the United States, and there was no Vice President, my pay from the U.S. Senate ceased, but I was well taken care of financially from the time my pay stopped on August 3, 1923 to my appointment in another government position.

When things were settled after the funeral of the late President Harding, and the Coolidges had moved into the White House, I was sent for by the President and he wanted to know if I would like to continue driving at the White House. I advised him that I had another job in mind which of course was a government one. I was appointed to this job within the hour, so I spent about thirty one years in different positions within the government.

It was a most wonderful experience anyone could ever have of being assigned to President and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge, also to their two sons, John and young Calvin. It was through Mr. Coolidge, who was
then Vice President, I had the great honor of being introduced and shaking hands with some of the greatest men of our country at the time. Four of these great men whom I met was: Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone and the great inventor Mr. Steinmetz. These men use to go on camping trips each summer, and it was while they were up to Plymouth, Vermont, I had the honor of shaking their hands.

As there were no photographs taken at the time Col. John Coolidge administered the oath of office making his son, Calvin Coolidge the 30th President of the United States, therefore, the Curtis Publishing Company engaged one of the leading artist at the time to paint the scene of the swearing in, also all the witnesses in the room at the time. The Ladies Home Journal was about to publish a story entitled: "The Midnight Oath" so the picture was needed for this story. The artist obtained photographs of all the ones present at the time, then he went up to the Coolidge homestead. It was a wonderful picture which the artist painted, and had all the witnesses standing just as it happened that night. President Coolidge sent a letter to the Curtis Publishing Company in which he praised the picture very highly because it was so exact. A copy of the President's letter relative to the picture was also published with the story.

The Curtis Publishing Company was kind enough to send me a copy of this picture which I wanted to have framed. Upon receiving the picture, both President and Mrs. Coolidge, Col. Joseph Geiser and myself autographed same. For some unknown reason, Con- gressman Dale, Joe Fountain nor L. Lane would even sign it. This picture is the only one with the original signatures mentioned above. I have had large amounts of money at every one of these books which have been written, and in every book I am mentioned many times.

Joseph M. McInerney
Former chauffeur to Calvin Coolidge, 30th President of the United States.
The government owned 1921 Pierce Arrow Limousine was assigned to the Vice President of the United States, and I, Joseph M. McInerney, was the official chauffeur.

This snapshot was taken in front of the Furman House, Bridgewater, Vermont on August 3, 1923, the same day when Vice President, Calvin Coolidge, became the 30th President of the United States.