CSPAN/FIRST LADIES GRACE COOLIDGE
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SUSAN SWAIN, HOST: Grace Coolidge was enormously popular as First Lady, and influenced the taste of American women by becoming a style icon. Married to a man known as "Silent Cal," she never spoke to the press, but she did use her office to bring attention to issues she cared about.

Good evening, and welcome to C-SPAN Series, First Ladies' Influence and Image. Tonight, we'll be telling you the story of First Lady Grace Coolidge who came into office with her husband, the President, in 1923 after the sudden death of President Harding.

Here to set the stage for us as we learn about the five-plus years of their time in the White House is Amity Shlaes, who is a Coolidge biographer, syndicated columnist, author of other books on that period. Welcome to the program.

Let's have you just tell us about of the arrival of Calvin Coolidge into the White House. How prepare was he for the job?

AMITY SHLAES, AUTHOR "COOLIDGE": Actually, quite prepared because he'd been a politician all his life. President Coolidge was one of those men who started small in city council, a city solicitor in Massachusetts where the Coolidges lived, and went all the way up the ladder of the state of Massachusetts, and then to Vice-President. So, one could never be prepared for a shock like the death of a president, but he was quite prepared professionally.

SWAIN: And Grace Coolidge was at his side all along that way in public life. How ready was she for the White House?

SHLAES: Well, she didn't think she was. She wrote to her sorority sisters and said, you know, "Pray for me, friends." But she was, too, because she's been a politician's wife, and she had quite a realistic view of politics and that particular job.

She called this kind of marriage "a double harness." Can you imagine that kind of phrase we would use about marriage in a positive, but she'd pulled her load along with the President when they were little politicians.

And you know what? Even when they were courting, they were thinking about this sitting in the governor's chair. It was clear even when they were courting that Calvin, her future husband, was ambitious in politics, and that was part of her deal in the marriage.

SWAIN: 1920s were a period of enormous change for this country societally. Just a couple of things that we pulled out as an example of it. Women had voted for the first time in Harding's election.

So in 1925, the first woman governor in the country was elected in Wyoming, Nellie Ross. In 1926, the National Broadcasting Company was founded. The first talking movie came out in 1927, the Jazz Singer. In 1928, Amelia Earhart made her famous flight across the Atlantic Ocean, so just a couple of the enormous changes going on. What kind of country did Calvin Coolidge inherit?

SHLAES: He inherited a country in rough water -- interesting but rough water.

When we came out of World War I, remember that was 1918, we owed quite a bit of money. So that's sort of like now, we had far more debt than we'd ever imagined. Taxes were very high. There were revolutions overseas, and people wondered if there would be revolutions here if the workers would take over the street as they had done in Europe.

You know, when we look at what happened in World War I, some of us have forgotten this, it was quite progressive and interesting and unexpected. For example, the government nationalized our big industry, the railroad, and then de-nationalized it. The stock market was shut down at one point during World War I.

So nobody knew how we'd come out of it. And then you want to add to that, there was an inflation no one acknowledged. So workers, especially, public sector workers were very angry and justifiably so -- and you know, that was a factor as well. Plus, one-third of the returning vets -- and remember, there was general conscription in World War I, had some form of disability, and we had no penicillin.

SWAIN: Wow. That's a lot.

SHLAES: That's a lot, right?

SWAIN: So, how did President Harding view his vice-president? In other words, what was the relationship like between the first and second couple? How much was he clued in to what was happening in the national government?

SHLAES: Well, you want to separate the first and second ladies and the couples. I think the couples got along quite well. And the famous thing that Harding did was invite his Vice-President, Calvin Coolidge, to sit in on the cabinet. And vice-presidents hadn't always done that, so that was a form of welcome.

And very useful for Coolidge I think, though he never did hear all of the dirty details of the Harding Administration. So he didn't hear it all, but he had heard some. And as being the President of the Senate, of course, he got to know the Senate, which he recalled as quite an experience.

Between the ladies, it was a little bit rougher. Mrs. Harding was much older. She was a bit envious, in my analysis, of young Grace Coolidge who had -- was sort of -- had a beautiful complexion, and that was much treasured in that time and still had the bloom of youth upon her.

And Mrs. Harding defined one color as her own, a certain blue called Harding Blue. Well, every color looks good on Grace, and she knew it, and she could be snippy with Grace. And she -- we have some letters that suggest she was indeed thinking about the next election, and maybe President Coolidge wouldn't be the candidate the next time.

When the issue came up that maybe the Coolidges should have a vice-presidential house, there was none. They lived in the Willard. Mrs. Harding said she didn't think so. The Willard, the hotel was just fine for the Coolidges. This was a tension between women.

SWAIN: They also were very different in just what we have learned about the two women. Last week was Florence Harding, we learned that she was, he was -- really had a very bold personality, the issues that she cared about was, in fact, the person who encouraged her husband into politics.

They seemed to have quite the opposite in the relationship between the Coolidges. Can you talk about the differences and how the women approached public life and their temperament?

SHLAES: Well, Cyndy Bittinger, who is coming on tonight, Grace's biographer, said, "Well, the Harding marriage is more like a business. And they had a deal that Warren got to do this and Mrs.

Harding got to do that." And she referred to him as "Warren Harding" like that. It was an older marriage as well.

In the Coolidge case, I wouldn't say that Mrs. Coolidge was always so deferential. It was just that her -- she was differential in public. And in private, maybe there were some fireworks. But in public, she didn't talk about politics. Her husband didn't want her to talk about politics.

He kept her, you know, in quite the proscribed area. One time when Mrs. Coolidge tried on a riding habit and went riding, she looks very good in the riding habit, he said he didn't want her to do that, you know. I advise you not to try anything new while we're in the presidency. So, Mrs. Coolidge in some ways was a very old-fashioned wife, but it's complicated.

SWAIN: Well, we're going to be visiting a number of sites associated with the Coolidges as we do throughout these programs. And the first one of those is Vermont, which is the birthplace of Calvin Coolidge, and there's a little town called Plymouth Notch. We're going to learn what happened there on the night he took office. But what's' Plymouth Notch like?

SHLAES: Well, I'm just newly the Chairman of the Board of our foundation there, and it is beautiful. And we, the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation, want to invite all Americans to come to visit this place. It's clabbered, it's small, it's one of the most beautiful villages in the world. And you can see Coolidge's birthplace. He wasn't born over the store like Margaret Thatcher, but he was born kind of behind it. And get a feel for how very hard, beautiful but hard, the life of people in a town like that was.

SWAIN: We're seeing some scenes of Plymouth Notch, Vermont. And in just a minute, we're going to be telling you the dramatic story of the night Calvin Coolidge got the news that he was about to become the President of the United States.

Before we do that, let me tell you about how you can involved in our program tonight. One of the things that's been very special about this series is learning from your questions, and we encourage them in three different ways.

You can call us. The phone numbers will be on the screen throughout the program – 202-5853880, if you live in the eastern or central time zones; 202-5853881, if you live in the mountain or Pacific Time zones.

You can also tweet us. Our Twitter address is @FirstLadies. And you can also join the conversation on our Facebook page, on C-SPAN. You can find the beautiful photograph of the Coolidge Administration. There's already a conversation underway. And send us a question there. We'll try to mix those all in throughout the program.

Now, to Vermont, Plymouth Notch and the night that Calvin Coolidge and Grace Coolidge learned that they're coming to the White House.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

WILLIAM JENNEY, REGIONAL HISTORIC SITE DIRECTOR – PRESIDENT CALVIN COOLIDGE STATE HISTORIC SITE: Plymouth Notch is the birthplace and boyhood home of Calvin Coolidge. He was born in a little house attached to the back of the store that his father operated. And then when he was four, he moved across the road to the building we now know as the Coolidge homestead. This was an old-fashioned town for most Americans of the sophisticated roaring 20s. This is quaint even back then.

Grace, of course, spent some of the time just walking around. That was one of her great passions. She loved to walk, and so she would go down to the cemetery, especially after her son, Calvin Jr. died, to visit the gravesite there. She did a lot of knitting and other types of handwork while she was here and just enjoying the country air.

She was a Burlington girl, grew up in the biggest town in Vermont. And when she was growing up, her house had electricity and plumbing. When she came here, this was very much a country home still, and so no electricity or plumbing in the house where she stayed with her husband.

This is the kitchen of the Coolidge homestead. And so, this is where they would have had breakfast and lunch, and some suppers, too, I'm sure. There was no real dining room in the house. It's very, very simple, a Vermont rural home.

And in here, there was one running faucet, here in the kitchen, and that was the only plumbing in the entire house. And so, this was quite a contrast in what Grace had been experiencing not only as a child growing up in Burlington, which was kind of sophisticated at the time, as well as , of course, in the White House years when she had all the modern luxuries.

This is a two-hole privy, and it was the only sanitary facility in the house. Of course, coming here with Calvin was very much a throwback to the previous century. And so this not what she was used to , but hearing all reports about Grace, she probably took this in good stride , and regard this as just part of her experience with her husband.

The furniture in here is the bedroom set that Grace and Calvin used when they were here at the Coolidge homestead, here at Plymouth Notch, Vermont. And as you can see, it's a very simple set of furniture. It's very typical of circa 1870s or so. It's a country style. Rooms were small in this house and not the spacious rooms that they were accustomed to at the White House, certainly.

She was also present, of course, in 1923 when the word came that Harding had died. So she was among the select group in the family sitting room that was witness to the swearing in. This is the sitting room of the Coolidge homestead, and we now know it as the Oath of Office room. This is where the room gathered when President Coolidge was administered the Oath of Office.

And so, all the furnishings in here are original. The group gathered around the center table. The original lamp that lit the scene; the pen that was used to sign the documents; and the Bible that was here but not officially used in the swearing in because that was not required by Vermont State law.

Grace would have stood right about where I am now. And there is a famous painting by Arthur Keller of the homestead inaugural, and shows the group gathered around, and she is right next to Calvin's side.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: I want to introduce you to our second guest at the table, Cyndy Bittinger, who knows the Plymouth Notch very well, a former director of the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation there. And also, as we learned earlier, biographer of Grace Coolidge. Her book is called "Sudden Star." Thanks for being with us.

Well, set the tone for us about her personality and what she brought to this job, being thrust into the office as suddenly as she was in 1923?

CYNDY BITTINGER, AUTHOR "GRACE COOLIDGE: SUDDEN STAR": It was sudden but she had been second lady for a little while, and she was new to Washington. And she also had not had a major role when her husband was governor of Massachusetts. She was very much in the background.

So, as the wife of the vice-president, they were invited out quite a bit to dinner and she got to know the personages, she said, in Washington D.C. So that was very good.

And as Calvin used to say, "We have to eat somewhere, Grace." So they would go out a lot and they were staying at the Hotel Willard. So it was obvious that they would need to go out to dinner quite a bit.

But she was set the tone in that she was very joyous, very vivacious. Some people said she was the fun one, she was the front door greeter; whereas, her husband was the thoughtful one behind her. So, it's an interesting dynamic, because we often don't see that with first ladies and presidents.

SWAIN: Well, you have to solve this question for me, because everything I've been reading about Calvin Coolidge over the years he's not just the thoughtful one. He earns his moniker "Silent Cal," but he seems to be an anti-politician in a lot of ways. What was that about this man? We see politics as a contact sport today. What was it about this man that brought him to politics? His personality doesn't seem so suited for it.

BITTINGER: The principles, but also the politics. He wasn't a glad-hander in that way, but he did shake a lot of hands. The one reason he was able to climb up in Massachusetts was because he went to the constituencies.

Very famous stories about what he would say when he met someone, if he's asked for something, he'd say, "Well, maybe." And "well maybe" meant you would get it. More than, he under-promised and over-delivered, that's a political tactic and a likeable one, because it makes you trust the politician, and therefore, also government. So, he was a principled and thoughtful politician, more modern than we'd like to pretend now.

SWAIN: So on Facebook, David Welch asked a series of questions, but here's one that fits to where we are right now with the story. "What aspect of her personality or experience," he asked, "helped Mrs. Coolidge be such an effective counterbalance for her husband?" And, "Do you think he could have had the political career he had without her?"

BITTINGER: Now, that's an interesting one. Because when he was vice-president, she thought she could get back to North Hampton Boise quite a bit. He said, "No. I need you here to help me navigate these political waters and these social waters."

So, yes, I think she was key in giving him a social stability and reaching out to others. She remembered people's names and faces, so she could be very engaging with people. And he could sit back and think, as I said before. And also they both had a great sense of humor that they had all these jokes with each other. And of course, he played a few jokes on some of the people at the White House as well.

SWAIN: So as they were coming into office, as Warren Harding died, the number of very big scandals we all learned about in school, the Teapot Dome and others, were beginning to come to light. How did Calvin Coolidge handled these scandals?

SHLAES: Well, this was one of the tests because it was his own party, you know, maybe we blame them. And what he did was he appointed a bipartisan group, the equivalent of a modern investigative group, both sides. And he stood back from it.

And also, interestingly, when he came in as president, nowadays, one might say make a clean sweep. Let's get rid of the suspect ones and use the excuse of the turnover for that. He didn't do that, because the continuity was important to him. Continuity was a big part of Harding-Coolidge policy -- don't change a lot, reduce uncertainty.

So, he kept most of them, I think all of them on until it became very clear that there was too much trouble, and some left, but all very proper, all very clear. And he had the blessing I think of not knowing much about it, and people could see that he hadn't really known much as vice-president, though he had suspected. And really, the one thing he resented about Warren Harding whom he liked very much was that Harding might be sullying the presidency. Coolidge had great respect for the presidency.

SWAIN: Is it true that Grace Coolidge went to listen to some of the Senate hearings on the scandal of the administration?

BITTINGER: Well, I'm not sure about the scandals, but I think she did go from time to time to Congress, and she did listen in on what was going on. But she kept very much in the background. She was more in the tradition of first ladies to have a happy home life, take care of her children, greet the public, but not meddle in public policy.

SWAIN: We're going to go back in time now and learn a little bit about how the two of them met, and how this political partnership. What was it, the double harness?

BITTINGER: Double harness.

SWAIN: Double harness. And how that all got started? Here's a bit of the story of how the Coolidges met.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JULIE BARTLETT NELSON, ARCHIVIST - CALVIN COOLIDGE LIBRARY & PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY: This is the Clark School for the Deaf where Calvin and Grace met for the first time. She was a teacher living in a dormitory here, and he was a tenant in a boarding house in the property. So, we're standing outside the building that Grace Coolidge had lived in as a teacher at the Clark School. She was up here in the second floor of this building in the dormitory. We're standing in a courtyard area. It would have been a flower garden and roses that Grace would have tended to in her free time.

The building right beside us is where Calvin Coolidge lived as a boarder while working as a lawyer in North Hampton. His room was up on the third floor back of the building. And he would have stood there watching Grace in the flower garden. She caught a glimpse of him standing there in his undershirt, and he would watch her tend the rose garden.

We're now in Grace's bedroom in her Clark School dormitory building. And this window here is where Grace would have looked out and seen Calvin across the courtyard of the next building. And she would have put a candle in this window here to signify to Calvin that the parlor room below them was available for them to meet up in.

We are now in the parlor room of the dormitory that Grace Coolidge lived in. And in this room was where Calvin and Grace, when they were courting, would meet up and be able to sit and talk, and have some time together. Despite him being in his 30s and her, in her 20s, they still had to abide by the rules of the school, and needed to meet somewhere where they were supervised and chaperoned while they were on campus. And here, they would sit and talk and get to know each other.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: And we learned about their North Hampton meeting. What about the two attracted them to each other?

BITTINGER: I think coming from Vermont, of course -- both of them from Vermont attracted them but yet, she's the urban one. She's from Burlington, Vermont; he's from little rural Plymouth. So they were quite different in that respect, but she found him engaging and thoughtful, and he found her beautiful, but he didn't quite know how to romance her.

So he asked one of his friends, who happened to be the shoemaker in town, what to say to Grace. And the shoemaker said, "Just compliment her. Tell her her dresses are beautiful. Do that kind of thing." And then, Grace actually saved the letters that Calvin wrote to her. Even though they were neighbors, he wrote her letters, and they were very affectionate letters between them.

SWAIN: And how long did they court before they married?

BITTINGER: They met in 1903 and they married in October of 1905.

SWAIN: Her family, she was an only child, and I've read that her mother wasn't so happy about the relationship.

BITTINGER: Well, Lemira, of course, adored her only child and thought that after Grace had graduated from the University of Vermont, she would stay in the Burlington area. But Grace had a mind of her own and had met deaf children through the Yale family who were neighbors, and said, "I'd like to teach at the Clarke School for the Deaf." So Grace said, "I'm moving to North Hampton."

And Lemira said, "Oh, that's a woman's town. That's the home of Smith College, and I guess most of the men are married so it will be all right." So Lemira could still look for a husband for Grace. So that was sort of her idea what would happen here. But Grace with her mind of her own finds Calvin, Calvin finds Grace, and the rest is history. Of course, Lemira didn't get what she really wanted. And on the wedding day, Lemira has a headache and doesn't feel well, which isn't actually her normal appearance.

SWAIN: She got married at her parents' home?

SHLAES: She did, and a bit earlier than her mother would have liked, as Cyndy said, and with some trepidation, writing her friends that she was going off into this adventure, but they were quite determined. And this was a modern thing, they chose one another. Very modern. She'd been to college. She'd been to co-ed college. She had a trade. She taught the deaf. Very modern marriage compared to many of the preceding presidencies.

SWAIN: Jennifer Sinyarrow wrote on Facebook, "I'm interested in her work with the disabled." She says, "One of the first to do so, was she involved with Gallaudet University when she was in Washington, D.C.?" Do you know that?

SHLAES: No, because she believed in lip reading, and she had been trained to do that, not sign language. I've been to the Clarke School for the Deaf several times, and it is a very different art, and I would say a very difficult one. So Grace took on quite a challenge.

SWAIN: And here our first caller of the evening. This is John watching us in Seattle. Hi, John. You're on the air.

JOHN (ph): Hi. I'm from Seattle. I think you just answered my question much.

SWAIN: Yes.

JOHN (ph): Did Grace know ASL? And it looks like you might have answered the question for me. Thank you.

SWAIN: How much of a controversy where the two approaches to teaching the deaf?

BITTINGER: I don't think it was that much of a controversy. These were different concepts. And the feeling is that you would fit in society better if you did lip reading. Sign language would not advance you in terms of your career. I think we feel differently about that now, but back then, there was a real drive to fit in and participate in society.

SWAIN: Next is Jim from Springfield, Illinois. Hi, Jim. You're on.

JIM (ph): OK. I just had a couple of questions. One was there was a famous anecdote -- and oh, by the way, I talked to Jim Cooke whom I'm sure you're familiar with. His one-man show called More Than Two Words.

Anyway, there was a story about when they were in the White House , when Grace was ill one Sunday and Calvin went to church alone. And when he returned, Grace asked him what had been the subject to the sermon. And he replied, "Sin." And Grace said, "Well, what did the preacher have to say about it?" And Calvin, is alleged to have replied, "He was against it." Are you familiar with that or any of the other anecdotes about their relationship in the White house?

SWAIN: Thanks very much. There seem to be all kinds of favorite stories about the man of few words. Do you have a favorite one yourself?

SHLAES: Well, being against sin, that's a very good one. That's a kind of New England-ism. If you've lived in New England, you sin; he was agin' it.

And Coolidge, when Coolidge said he were -- the cadence, the way he said it was very much of his region. Jim Cooke, the Coolidge impersonator whom the caller mentioned, captures this. And if you were on the show, he takes a full minute to say the word "cow." They had, they speak more slowly and more interestingly.

The other story, to which the caller refereed is that Coolidge goes to a dinner party and a bright lady says, "Well, Mr. Coolidge, I made a bet could get you to say more than two words tonight." And the fellow, I think at that time the vice-president said, "You lose." And that was Coolidge's humor.

Today, we'd think that was a little cold. There's a little pause after and you laugh. That's boarding house humor.

SWAIN: What are some of the other things we should know about the early years of the relationship before they come to the White House that are key?

BITTINGER: Well, building on some of the stories, when they get married, Calvin delivers to Grace 52 pairs of socks to be darned. And Grace says, "Did you marry me to darn socks?" And he said, "No, but it comes in pretty handy." And she started doing it. I mean, it was OK. So they did kid each other quite a bit.

And I think she adjusted to some of his personality. I think he was a little tough when he was writing speeches. And she said she was really his safety valve. She would listen to him and, you know, be positive when he was doing something like that.

SWAIN: Also some key roles before they came to the White House. We talked about their vice-presidential years. What other ones were formative in the two of them establishing the people they would become as first couple.

SHLAES: Well, when he was governor, he came into a difficult situation. The governor of Massachusetts, the turmoil that we described before, and in the middle of it , there was the Boston police strike, a public sector union striking just before, by the way, his election, and many of the policemen were his own constituents.

There are whole dissertations written about how good Coolidge was with immigrants, and of course, the Boston policemen were Irish. And yet, Coolidge just, they went off, there was anarchy in Boston, and Coolidge fired the policemen. A very dramatic moment, incredible tension for him.

His political career at risk, not sure he's doing the right thing. Some of us aren't sure he did the right thing. And Grace is in the background where? At home in Northampton. And that was their relationship in Massachusetts.

He'd go on the train, back and forth, different lines, sometimes back to Northampton. In the middle of the strike, he went home. It was his -- I've read it's his son's birthday right in the middle there. But that was the peace to take the hard decisions.

Another place he went once in a while when he had to make a hard decision was to the little cemetery to see his ancestors who had come over much earlier in Massachusetts. So his family was important to him. And safety valve, when you heard Grace say that phrase, well, that's a little bit ominous, "I'm my husband's safety valve" isn't it? Because it sounds a little bit like anger and unmodern, but she was that and she was content with it.

SWAIN: Next is Sean, watching us in Louisville, Kentucky. Hi, Sean.

SEAN (ph): Hi. How are you doing? I just want to say how much I appreciate the series. And I wanted to see if your guests have commented on the death of the Coolidges' son and how it affected Mrs. Coolidge. And also, I wanted to say how much I loved Mrs. Coolidge's portrait in the White House with her dog. Thank you.

SWAIN: Thanks so much. We are going to talk about the death of their son later on because it was so important to, obviously, to the parents and to his election in his own right as president. So let us catch up with that story a later little on.

But you asked about her First Lady's portrait. We're going to show that to you. And as we do, when you have the opportunity to see the First Lady's portrait, I must say that Grace Coolidge's official portrait is rather arresting in the red dress. Can you talk a little bit about that portrait, how it was done and what it -- how well it epitomizes her?

BITTINGER: Well, a couple of things here. Howard Chandler Christy is the portrait painter, and he was posing, having Grace pose, and he said, "I really like this because of this contrast between a red dress and the white dog."

Calvin came by and he said, "Oh, I like Grace much better in her white dress. I don't agree and I think we should just have her wear her white dress and dye the dog red." So there was that kind of joking too. The painting is also important because the Pi Beta Phis gave this to the White House, and they came 1300 strong. It was the biggest gathering of women at the White House up until that time.

SWAIN: And who were they?

BITTINGER: And they were her fraternity. They called them fraternities in those days. She was a fraternity sister; now we would say sorority sister. She had started the Pi Phis at the University of Vermont.

And then always stayed interested and involved, and was appointed to higher and higher offices there, and had to really recede once they reached the national office. But she always loved her sisters. And in 1915, she started round-robin letters with her sisters. That means writing letters to them and they write letters to her, and passing these around. So the Pi Phis were very important for us, the historians, because we have those letters to read.

SWAIN: We're going to learn more about Grace Coolidge's style in this next video.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JENNEY: There are a number of items that don't come out very often because of their fragility and sensitivity to light, and so forth. We have these in our permanent storage area here.

And she was really quite a fashion plate of the 1920s, and that was largely because of him. That was his one physical weakness, actually, was to keep her in beautiful clothing. And much of the jewelry is more of the costume style, but there are a few fancies pieces that I kind of like to show.

This is a beautiful jade pendant that included a plaque and is surrounded by sapphire and diamonds. And so, of course, this would fit in very nicely with the 1920's interest in the oriental style.

There is a small brooch that was given to her, and there are newspaper reports of her wearing this piece. It is the eagle of the United States, and it is diamonds, rubies, and sapphires set in platinum, wonderful little art deco traveling clock.

Among the several fans that we have in the collection is this one here which she received from the president of Cuba, when they went to that country. Cuba was the only other country that Calvin and Grace visited during their White House years. And this is a particularly fine fan, as you can see, with the mother of pearl, with gold inlay, and the hand painted screen.

One of the gowns in the collection is actually so heavily beaded that we can never display it in its upright position. And so whenever we have this out in display case, it is flat. And you can see that it is almost entirely beads and sequins, quite heavy, actually.

She had a great impact on the style of the 1920s. This was not the flapper look by any means, but the gowns very much have the rugged hemlines that was so popular during the 1920s, the heavily beaded features, very typical. You can only imagine what this must have looked like as she came down the stairs of the White House.

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SWAIN: Patricia Canagleo on Facebook picks up on this. Is it true that President Coolidge was very frugal except when it came to his wife's clothing? I read that he would buy her very expensive dresses. I mean, we've just seen that. When did that whole dynamic first started in the relationship?

BITTINGER: I think he was interested in clothing for both of them, right from the beginning. And he even wrote his father to get funding for their clothes because he wanted to look good. This was part of their image as a couple. I think it's fascinating.

I also -- we haven't mentioned Frank Waterman Stearns yet, his backer who owned the Stearns Department Store in Boston. I have a feeling that Frank Stearns was able to maybe get some

discounts on some of this clothing so that Grace could wear it. That could have been part of it. But Calvin would go window-shopping, which is so interesting as a president. And he would buy a hat and bring it back for Grace to wear. So he was very interested in what she wore.

SWAIN: Do you have more to say on this topic?

SHLAES: Well, just that if she didn't like it, she didn't always say. She saw how important it was to him, but she certainly enjoyed the clothing. And that was something they could do together, wasn't it? That she enjoyed how lavishly he, you know, he attended to her. So this was one of the happy parts to their marriage, and she was so beautiful. That's what we forget how beautiful she was. She became a great and important symbol for Americans. Her joy, her beauty, all of that.

SWAIN: And we have had first ladies earlier in history who have set fashion standards. But this was the time of the great rise in advertising. We're beginning to see national media. So how good was this for business?

SHLAES: I'm sure it was very good, to have a first lady like this. She didn't, as we mentioned before, she didn't speak much in public, so everyone loved her. She never said anything you wouldn't like because she didn't speak very much. So that was actually pretty good.

SWAIN: But like her predecessor, she was the master of the photo op. Is that true?

SHLAES: She absolutely was. And you know, this is also theater. He played this -- excuse me -- he played the silent one and she played the big, you know this volume. You know some of this is theater, and in marriage, we trade off roles, don't we? So they had their act down. That's what we could say.

SWAIN: You should note as a style or fashion icon as the first lady. I think she was even honored by the French fashion industry for her style that she set in the United States. But someone asked whether or not she could be considered the woman of the jazz age, was she?

SHLAES: Well, he wouldn't have liked that. I think she might have liked it. She was -- she wanted to dance. She took dancing lessons. She took lessons in Washington. But Coolidge wouldn't have liked that. He didn't want her to have short skirts, you know. He would say, well, to a young lady, "What you need is a rug," when he saw knees. And he didn't like her to wear pants. Grace didn't wear pants until after Calvin passed away.

So I don't think you can go all the way. And her hair bobbing, maybe Cyndy can speak about this, but he didn't really like the idea of bobbing hair. No. She didn't bob her hair until after the presidency either.

BITTINGER: She did have music, though, wonderful music at the White House, but it wasn't jazz. It was more traditional, Sergey Rachmaninov. She loved to showcase people at the White House who were very talented, but it wasn't jazz. That was going a little too far. So we're in this transition time period where some people feel this couple was quite traditional as the nation was becoming very, very wild in some ways. Remember, they believe in prohibition, too.

SWAIN: On the First Ladies website, in her biography, they write about her. She was among the first of first ladies to pursue a study of her predecessors, writing that "since I went to the White House, I have read eagerly everything I could finding I could find concerning former mistresses of the nation and have regretted that there was so little."

We have some quotes from them that look at their approach to this role of first lady we want to share with them. First is Grace Coolidge herself, and this is a pretty famous one. You'll both be familiar with it.

As she thought about herself as first lady, she wrote or said, "This was I and yet, not I. This was the wife of the President of the United States and she took precedence over me. My personal likes and dislikes must be subordinated to the consideration of those things which were required of her."

And here is Calvin Coolidge about the role. "The public little understands the very exacting duties that she must perform and the restrictive life that she must lead."

I'd like to have you both comment more about this studied approach to the role of first lady.

SHLAES: Remember how many hands they had to shake because people came through by the thousands. So, when Calvin did Grace a favor, it was that he would shake 3,000 hands so she didn't have to. She might stay out of the reception, but more often, she had to be there, or she had to entertain or she…

So, just the very physical obligations were hard to endure. At a point, she did become ill later in the presidency. So you can see how much they had to do just in terms of pure reception. This idea of the White House as the democratic place, you know. That meant that people come in, and certainly, the Hardings had set that precedent.

SWAIN: Cyndy?

BITTINGER: Actually, as we all know, you are the head of state. We don't have royalty here. And they are somewhat our royalty, and that's what you're getting at a little bit with all of this adulation by the public. I mean, when they would travel, people swarmed them, so to speak. And she brought a little more discipline into the role of first lady, though. She had two secretaries instead of one.

Florence Harding let people come any old time to the White House. And Grace said, "No. I think you should need me at noon on the steps or 3:00 reception." She was a little bit more organized about these things.

And then people forget that they had the Mayflower yacht. That was their Camp David which we know about today. This is a place they could go and be themselves. The military run it and the public really didn't know a lot about what was going on there, even though, of course, it was very upright, still it was a time out for them a little bit.

SWAIN: When they escaped, did they go to Northampton? Did they go back to Plymouth Notch? Where…?

SHLAES: Well, each place they escaped to, they found was often no escape because of the crowds. So Plymouth Notch, especially, people camped out, shopped and the neighbor created a tea house. Coolidge wasn't sure people should exploit the presidency in that way, but he wanted his neighbors to do well.

There's always this ambivalence, so they began to go on summer retreats. And you can see them in Swampscott, Mass one year in a house called White Court. Or they went to the Adirondacks, or they went to South Dakota, or they went to Wisconsin where they could sort of have a distance from the rest.

But always you want to remember, this was the president of saving and economy. So if he lived too opulently, what about that? And one of the interesting things at Plymouth Notch or in Barre at the Vermont Historical Society that you can find is the tension over the spending on food in the Coolidge White House.

There was a housekeeper. She spent too much. Coolidge didn't like the way she spent. She went to the specialty stores. He thought she should go to the Piggly Wiggly and save. Soon, she was gone and they brought a New England lady, Ms. Riley.

And I know Cyndy had looked at her papers, too, and Ms. Riley kept a record of every penny that was spent, and indeed, she spent less. And Grace had to be the wife in all of this, had to appear to save with all these social demands. And what tension that must have caused for her.

BITTINGER: I think it was good that they did -- this is the couple that did have to pay for everybody's food, but they had a diplomatic budget. They have an entertaining budget. And some historians said they entertained more than many presidential couples because they had this separate budget.

Remember, this is a very middleclass couple coming into the presidency and the first ladyship. They don't have their own wealth, as we've seen with others.

SWAIN: Chad Crabtree on Twitter asked. What was Grace Coolidge's religion? And was that an important part of her public life?

BITTINGER: It was very important. She was raised as a Methodist, but at the age of 15, she went -- this is in Burlington, Vermont -- she moved over to the Congregational Church. She thought the minister was very good there, and her family followed her to the church.

She felt and said in her memoirs that -- we do have the articles that she wrote about herself -- that she was in a church from the time she was little. And also, I feel her faith was very much part of her character and got her through a lot of tough parts of life.

SWAIN: Phil is in North Hollywood, California and up next. Hi, Phil.

PHIL (ph): Hi there. I'm so glad you're on. I was worried that you weren't going to be on today. I'm a big fan.

SWAIN: Thank you.

PHIL (ph): My second call. I'm really enjoying this. Just a comment, maybe a question about Mrs. Coolidge. When they -- I always wondered if Sinclair Lewis maybe based his book, Babbitt on Calvin Coolidge's persona. I mean those people have, and even today, looked at him as the puritanical and maybe kind of pursed lipped, hardly speaking kind of myopic, very conservative viewpoint of life.

Or even social reform and things like that and butt of jokes in Vaudeville at the time. And the Algonquin Table with Dorothy Parker saying when Mr. Coolidge passed away, "How could they tell?" You know? I mean those kinds of things. Did any of those kind of that persona or that idea of what Calvin Coolidge would look like to the general public permeate or into Mrs. Coolidge's consciousness, the jokes and everything else that were made of her husband at the time. I'm just wondering, or if was she screened away from that, you know?

SHLAES: Nobody could be totally screened away from that, but she asked a very good question, and she handled it wonderfully. So you want to imagine Sinclair Lewis was being the Colbert or something, the Rachel Maddow to them. And they handled it very well.

Most of the time, Coolidge didn't really like Sinclair Lewis picking on him so much. And in one column, he wrote subsequent to the presidency, you can see him complaining about Sinclair Lewis, this author who was after him. I think Grace just looked away. She had a great grace in that way. She just looked past it and wasn't so worried about what people said about her husband most of the time.

SWAIN: Two other questions, and one of them, people keep asking us questions about in many of the photograph we have seen her picture, with the dog and dogs, including her official portrait. Terry on Twitter asked, "Tell us about the Coolidge animals at the White House including the chow dog."

BITTINGER: Well, yes, there was Blackberry and there was Terrible Tim, those were the chows. The Coolidges just loved their animals. As a matter of fact, I even brought with me the list that Grace typed of her animals that she had. And the names, the nicknames, and who they were.

She loved her animals but I think the best story is Rebecca Raccoon, because Rebecca, the Raccoon, was sent to the Coolidges for Thanksgiving dinner. And both the Coolidges being animal lovers were outraged at this and decided to raise Rebecca at the White House.

Now, this is the only time I read that the staff was not terribly happy, because Rebecca was sitting in the bath of the First Lady's room, throwing the soap up, climbing the curtains. It wasn't the best for the staff, but Grace just loved Rebecca. She even sent Rebecca out to the Black Hills to play with her. It was quite something.

But Rebecca got rambunctious, it was a bit too much and they got Reuben to come to the White House and settle Rebecca down. But they both escaped different times, even though Grace designed a house for Rebecca on the grounds. So they eventually were taken to the zoo.

SWAIN: OK. How did she square the furs that we see her wearing?

BITTINGER: She did wear quite a bit of fur, yes. How did she square with that? I don't know. I'm sure she didn't. She just thought that was fun.

SWAIN: One other passion, baseball.

SHLAES: It was said, she was rabid. She loved baseball. She loved baseball more than the president. And I think she loved that it lifted him up. I noticed when I was writing about some of his great battles, say over taxes or fiscal problems or vetoing that he had to do, Grace would take him to a baseball game. And you know, that's what they did in Washington. And later, when she was alone, she went to baseball with her friends in Boston herself, subsequently.

SWAIN: She was a Red Sox fan?

SHLAES: She was a Red Sox fan.

SWAIN: But here, they watch the Washington Senators as they were known back then.

How far into their months in office after the death of President Harding did they decide that they would, that he would seek the presidency himself in 1924?

SHLAES: I think that was pretty automatic. But the moment where it became clear he could do it for, you know, among the other politicians was when he gave a long speech, like the State of the Union speech around December of '23.

And the speech was so good, everyone knew. And right before that speech, as Cyndy knows, the president was particularly cross because he knew this was a key speech. If he did it well, wow, he might truly be the candidate in '24, and he was.

Suddenly, there was respect for him. You see it in the letters of the Senator from Indiana, of the other senators across the nation. This man knows how to lead, to lay out an agenda, to take some risks, to

focus, not just to take rash risks but to focus and hit the risk. In that case, the risk was tax, cutting taxes, so that was his civil war. His big campaign was tax cuts and it was all laid out in that speech.

SWAIN: Before the election happened, a great tragedy struck the Coolidge family, but we haven't really set the stage for it. The Coolidges brought two sons to the White House. How old were they? And tell us about their two sons.

BITTINGER: They were teenagers. Actually, when Calvin was vice-president, they were still at home in Northampton. And as I mentioned before, that was difficult.

So Grace and Calvin conferred with Admiral Boone who was the Assistant White House Physician and some others, and decided that the boy should go to Mercersburg Academy in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. And that would only be a couple of hours from the White House, and maybe she could see them a little bit.

And also, after talking to Admiral Boone, she felt it would be a good place to have the boys. They would have good leadership with them, and they would become fine young men. So that was pretty much the decision.

SWAIN: And their sons' names were John and Calvin Jr.?

BITTINGER: John was born in 1906; Calvin, 1908. So they were fairly close together. She felt she really raised them at home, because Calvin commuted to the General Court in Massachusetts, which was in Boston, and she's the one who put out the train tracks. She's the one who built the little roadster. She's the one who played with the boys.

And their father came home on weekends and often -- I interviewed the president and first lady's son a couple of times. He said, "I was supposed to be quiet, Cyndy, when my father came home, but he insisted we wear shoes with metal toes, and often we woke him up, so it was difficult for us."

SWAIN: Well, the two boys came home for some of their vacation to the White House, come to the White House that summer. And that's really when tragedy struck. We're going to learn a little bit more about what happened with the Coolidge sons on our next video.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

KATE BRADLEY, DIRECTOR OF ENGAGEMENT & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS - CALVIN COOLIDGE MEMORIAL FOUNDATION: Let's head into the vault where we keep specific things about the Coolidge family. Grace Coolidge's earlier life before her marriage to Calvin Coolidge, as well as documents about her relationship with her family, specifically, her sons and her grandchildren.

Grace was not only a loving wife. She was also a loving mother. And we have some wonderful correspondence that documents that. In 1922, Grace wrote to the head of the Mercersburg Academy where both of her sons were. And she writes, "Is there a way in which we can arrange for Calvin Jr. to have a soft boiled egg for breakfast for a time without great inconvenience?" Calvin Jr. just had a little minor surgery and Grace was very worried about his health.

The other letter we have is written by Calvin Jr. This was written in 1924. Like many sons, he talks about his schooling which wasn't going too well; his clothing, which needed updating because he was growing out of it; and his plans for travelling back to Washington D.C. to visit his mom and dad.

And the letter reads, "I hope you are well and happy. I know you are happy. With love, Calvin." Here's an interesting little side note. Obviously, he had forgotten to add something in the letter. "Send

me some socks." And it's sad, too, because we see it as basically the last documented letter that we have before Calvin Jr. suddenly passes away while in Washington D.C. less than a month later.

Shortly after his death, people wrote to the president and first lady in the White House, sending their condolences. And as was common at the time, Grace and Calvin acknowledged their sympathies by sending letters in reply, thanking them for their condolences and their sympathy. And these letters were always bordered in black as a way of showing that they were in mourning, and we actually have quite a few of those letters in our collection.

Grace and Calvin had two sons. John was the older and Calvin Jr. was the younger. John Coolidge did not die young and lived to a very old age. We have a wonderful letter from John to his mother on her birthday. And it's a wonderful letter where he just described his love.

"Dearest Mother, just to let you know I'm thinking of you on your birthday, and loving you as no boy has ever loved his mother."

John and Grace had a very close relationship throughout their lives. He never really said much about how the passing of his brother affected the family. He was very quiet on that score. But you can tell from the letters between John and Grace until her passing. There were letters many times a year, and they were very, very close. So whether that was increased by Calvin Jr's passing or not, there's really no way of knowing, although I would assume that is the case.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: So, Cyndy here that he died but we didn't hear the story of how he died.

BITTINGER: The boys loved tennis, and some historians think Grace taught them tennis when they were little, which kind of makes sense. Anyhow, the White House had tennis courts. The boys played on the tennis courts. This was fun on vacations.

They weren't there that much at the White House, but one day Calvin Jr. went out without any socks and he got a blister on his toe from playing tennis. And nothing was made of this, but when Assistant White House physician, Admiral Boone arrived one day to play tennis again, he noticed that Calvin Jr. was quite ill and had a fever. And he did look him over and found out that there were streaks of red on his leg.

So Admiral Boone was alerted right away to do something about this. He called in military advisers, military physicians, and he called in civilian physicians, and the family knew this was quite serious.

And they also took samples and they found out it was first staph, and then it was septicemia. And even today, you can die of septicemia. So this went so quickly, and I think Calvin and Grace just were shocked that anyone could lose a son this way, it's just so innocent and yet so fast.

SWAIN: And to your point, we just saw a notes saying, "Send me some socks." And it was his lack of socks, but it started this all in motion. And when you read of the death, it was a very painful death for their son, and they watched all of this.

So what happened to the first couple after their son's death? How did the president respond? How did the first lady respond?

SHLAES: You know, you want to remember that they were not the only one in this period who lose a son. You look around, it was a much more common event -- Charles Doss would be the vice-president who lost a son. T.R. lost a son in World War I. All around them were people who had been

through this singular experience that no parent would wish. Lincoln had lost a son and there are echoes of Lincoln in the way this was handled. And you know, the paper boys called Extra.

The carts rolled with the flowers. They set up the stations in the White House. People came to call. And then the train, you know, went to, took the sad cargo to Vermont where Calvin was buried. It was all, it was new and horrible and very familiar, a very American event.

SWAIN: There's a quote of Calvin Coolidge about his reaction. "When he died," he said, "the power and the glory of the presidency went with him." Some biographers suggest that in the time afterwards that he really went into a state of depression, that he was working shorter days and that it was Grace who was the more stable of the two. Did your research tell you that?

SHLAES: No. Actually, there was a very good biography that posits that by Mr. Gilbert. And he said, "This is the story of yes, but Calvin Coolidge could have completed his presidency but his son died." Anyway, it was terrible.

But I see it as more of like Abraham Lincoln. A terrible loss which drove the parents nearly insane but still, but yes Lincoln prosecuted his war after the loss of the son; Coolidge pursued his policy plans, was the president, he did good things, notwithstanding the loss of his presidency. More joyless as he notes in his autobiography, but still that perseverance. So, no, Coolidge did not give up, and Grace did not give up.

BITTINGER: I think that the difference between the two is interesting, though. When there were holidays, Calvin would know who wasn't at the table. Grace took joy with whoever was at the table. They just were very different that way, the way they handled it.

SWAIN: Bill is watching us in Bloomington, Delaware, and you're up next. Hi, Bill.

BILL (ph): Two quick questions. Is it correct historically that the third floor where we now know as the Solarium and the other rooms on the third floor was built by the Coolidges because there was a roof leak. Did that originate during the Coolidge Administration? And did that occur during his full term or prior to him being elected to a full term in 1924?

My second question is, probably later on the show that I'd like to know since Mrs. Coolidge outlived President Coolidge for so many years, did she develop a friendship that Lou Henry Hoover, Eleanor Roosevelt, Bess Truman and Maime Eisenhower? And did she ever go back to the White House? Thank you all.

SWAIN: Thank you so very much. Brief answers to both please because we will talk about it a little bit later.

SHLAES: We know that there was a Solarium built, and she retreated to it in the end of the first full term of President Coolidge, that is toward the end of his presidency. And I don't know whether she visited with succeeding first ladies.

BITTINGER: Yes, she did. But back to the roof leak, yes. The roof had to be reinforced, it was cracking, and they redid the family quarter as well and put in more closets, and that kind of thing. And the Coolidges had to move to DuPont Circle. So they were gone for a little while, and Grace even donned a hard hat to go and crawl up and look and see what they were doing at the White House. So yes, that did happened.

In terms of friendship with other first ladies, yes. She made a few jokes about Madam Roosevelt, but yes, they did get together. And there are people who saw Madam Roosevelt pay her respects to Grace Coolidge in Northampton. So yes, there was sort of a first lady's club in some ways.

And when the Coolidges were suddenly thrust into the presidency, did you realize that Mrs. Wilson came to call; Mrs. Taft came to call. The first ladies were very supportive of each other.

SWAIN: What was their inauguration like? After they won the White House…?

BITTINGER: It probably was a little bit tense. It was supposed to be good but it was ruined by the vice-president who took the opportunity to kind of berate the Senate for blocking legislation and making everything so difficult. And Coolidge found it very unseemly and was disappointed. He thought his vice-president lacked discipline. He himself had served only the president and given a very short inaugural address when he was vice-president.

So it was a day that wasn't as happy as they expected it to be.

SWAIN: So did they have an inaugural ball and a parade?

SHLAES: I don't think -- I'm thinking not -- the ball was canceled the time before austerity, right?

Not really -- and that was one of the things that Mrs. Harding used to needle Grace. And Grace what shall we wear and Mrs. Harding said, well, there won't be any inaugural ball, so it's stricken. Remember this is a period when the government was trying to save.

SWAIN: We do this wonderful photograph and actually on the Ferrell biography it's used on the front cover. It is of Grace and President Coolidge traveling together to the inauguration and what seems to be rather iconic about it is the expression on both of their faces. You can see there the president looking very serious as he goes this swearing in, and Grace Coolidge having what looks to be a fabulous time.

What does these pictures say to you?

BITTINGER: It says to me that she is a joyous person and she is going to take, as I said before, she's going to take joy in the moment and make it work for everybody. She felt it was her job and make it work for her husband, make it go better for him. And in this term that they do win in their own right she is more involved.

When they're up at Plymouth, when he is somewhat campaigning Edison and Firestone, and, who is the other one who visits with them -- Ford, Henry Ford, and she's involved in the conversation. Here is this one who is not supposed to be involved in public policy, she's talking to them. So things are changing a little bit in this term.

SWAIN: Ellen Cabot on Facebook asked, "Did Grace Coolidge vote in the 1924 election? Did the first couple vote publicly?"

BITTINGER: They did vote. They voted publicly and she even organized some effort in her town of North Hampton to get women out to vote.

SWAIN: What was happening, this was within the second women could have voted, what was happening with women in politics as a result of their ability to participate with the vote?

SHLAES: Well, people suspected they might another way than their husband but they didn't. I think that was one of the big surprises of the '20s. And then you want to ask should they be in politics? And there were a few female appointments by Coolidge but not many and no -- there were no big ones, no cabinet ladies.

So it was -- it was more modest and might have predicted or hoped for by the suffrage, wasn't it?

SWAIN: So this was also, as we said the time that the talkies came into being, the first films that actually had sound attached to them. And so, this becomes the first president and First Lady that we cannot only see on film but also hear.

Coming up next just short clips of Calvin Coolidge on film with sound and followed by that Grace Coolidge with film and sound.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

JOHN CALVIN COOLIDGE, FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT: I want the people of America to be able to work less for the government and more for themselves. I want them to have the rewards of their own industry. This is the chief meaning of freedom. Until we can reestablish a condition under which the earnings of the people can be kept by the people we are bound to suffer if there should be a and distinct curtailment of our liberty.

GRACE COOLIDGE: The ringing of this bell announces the opening on Thanksgiving Day of the 22nd annual sale of Christmas Help Seals (ph), the proceeds from which go to the work which is being done for the prevention of tuberculosis in the United States of America.

This is a picture of a sheet of the 100 of the seals, each seal costing one cent. No letter to your sweetheart is considered authentic unless it bears one of these seals .

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: And there we have it of President and at that point Former First Lady but it's the first time we have her on the sound and film.

I wanted to ask you about how being to hear and see a president as you went to the movie theater around America, but increasingly popular for the American public, how did it change politics?

SHLAES: It changed politics a lot but there is a myth that goes with that, that Coolidge wasn't good in the new media and he was so stiff. He was very good on radio. They said his voice caught through the air like a wire, that New England voice.

Our problem is we -- he ranked high in the polls. When people were polled, which radio voice do you like? Our problem is we don't have those recordings. The radio wasn't recorded as it is now, or as it was for Franklin Roosevelt after him, so it was popular, it was impactful and he was part of it as Roosevelt and Hoover would be.

SWAIN: Next, is Michael watching us in New York City. Hi, Michael ?

MICHAEL (ph): Fine, how are you?

SWAIN: Fine, thanks, what's your question about Grace Coolidge?

MICHAEL (ph): I wanted to ask about the rumored affair she had with a Secret Service agent. Was that a public scandal at that time? Is it something that's been speculated about more recently, and either way is there any credence and thanks again for (inaudible) programming.

SWAIN: Thank you very much. So what -- at what point in the presidency did this mini scandal with the Secret Service agent take place?

BITTINGER: It was in the Black Hills when they were there for the summer White House. She and the Secret Service agent were lost for a few hours. And when they returned Calvin was not happy mainly because he thought she's been hurt. And a Secret Service agent is supposed to be taking care of the First Lady and making sure she's not hurt.

So he sent Jim Haley back to Washington D.C. And Grace tried to explain that no, nothing had happened. She was OK. She hadn't fallen down. It was all right. They had just been lost. That was all that happened.

So I say no there is nothing to this. She kept up letters, communication with his family. She felt embarrassed about the whole thing. This was very much in the public. There was no affair. It's just that a few people thought that Jim Haley was handsome and there should be an affair.

SWAIN: I want to tell you at this point about our fabulous website at cspan.orgflashfirstladies , where we have been accumulating all kinds of video attached to this year-long series, not only the programs themselves are stored there in their entirety for you to watch or to share with your friends but we also have additional videos of the places that we've been visiting that we haven't been able to put in to the television program.

Each week there is also a featured item and this week the featured item is the piano that was given to Grace Coolidge by the Baldwin Piano Company which she kept in the private quarters of the White House. Was she a pianist?

BITTINGER: Yes, she loved her music. She had had lessons when she was a child. She kept up her interest continually and invited famous people to come to the White House to play the piano. So it's very important in her life. Music was very important in her life.

She would turn on the radio to listen to music. It helped her day go better.

SWAIN: Next is a call from Sandra or Sondra watching us in Huntington, Maryland.

Hi, Sandra , you're on the air.

SANDRA (ph): Hi, I want to thank you. It's a wonderful program. And my question was regarding children. And I hadn't heard anything about them and then you came on and talked about the children, so it did answer my question.

SWAIN: Great, well, thank you for watching. We're delighted. Do you have another comment?

SANDRA (ph): Well, I just want to say how very much I enjoy the program, it's wonderful.

SWAIN: Great, glad to have you in the audience and thanks for making the call tonight.

So celebrities, the film was becoming enormously popular in American culture. Celebrities had become part of the politics and the political scene during the Harding White House. Did the Coolidges continue that trend? Did they involve celebrities in their politics?

SHLAES: Oh, absolutely, not only the Hollywood celebrities who were brought around to show they were jolly at various points, and they had this elaborate friendship with Will Rogers who was kind of a superstar. I think he was like Jon Stewart. I don't know who you would compare him to. But he had columns, he did acts, he had movies and he was very funny. And he came and he called Mrs. Coolidge -- well, the first -- his favorite first female number one. And they had a whole courtship going, the Rogerses and the Coolidges.

And then of course also Charles Lindbergh, the flyer who was -- who had become a celebrity by going over to Paris, in that way they hosted the Lindberghs at the house on DuPont Circle where they were -- while they were out of the White House. Yes, of course they were with celebrities.

SWAIN: And a rare picture of Calvin Coolidge with a big smile on his face as he's standing next to Charles Lindbergh, and his mother, I think.

BITTINGER: And that was a very important moment because Calvin And Grace went to a talk at the budget bureau and left Mrs. Lindbergh with Dwight Morrow and they sort of plotted to get together Charles and Anne Morrow. So that was the beginning of that idea.

SWAIN: Another celebrity that they brought to the White House that they brought to the White House was someone that continued Grace Coolidge's passion with the deaf and that's Helen Keller

BITTINGER: Yes.

SWAIN: We have some film of Helen Keller's visit to the White House which we're going to show people, but as we do that will you talk about when she visited, the significance of her visit and how the public reacted?

BITTINGER: It was very significant. Helen Keller wanted to use the White House to publicize the need for support for deaf education. And Grace and Calvin were both happy to accommodate her. And yes, you do see in this picture Helen Keller reading the lips of Grace. And she also reads the lips of Calvin too.

So Grace did as much as she could to bring children, deaf children, children with disabilities, veterans with disabilities to the White House and highlight their needs for the American public.

SWAIN: Anne in Newport, Vermont. Hi, Anne?

ANNE (ph): I was going to -- quite a few years ago I went to a yard sale found a, an old cookbook, a New Orleans county cookbook put together in 1924 by various women's groups. And there is a recipe here for Coffee Soufflé by Mrs. Calvin Coolidge, Washington D.C.

And I've been upstairs, I've been missing the program but I thought I'd give Mrs. Coolidge a chance to share her recipe if you would like it?

SWAIN: Well, thank you so much. There are many Grace Coolidge recipes available online because this was part of the way that they established her persona to the public. Will you talk about that?

BITTINGER: Well, she was kidded by Calvin a lot, we haven't mentioned that, about her cooking, not being very good. But when she gets to the White House of course she has some recipes that had been handed down over the years and that she's happy to share with the public.

She also felt that the First Lady should leave something at the White House that they had made and she made a coverlet for the Lincoln bed. So she did want to highlight things that were cooking and sewing, crocheting, those were important things to her.

SWAIN: Randy Williamson on Twitter, "Mrs. Coolidge was asked to give a speech to newspaperwomen, newspaperwomen which she did for five minutes in sign language. Was that the first?

BITTINGER: I did asked her son if that was true and he said absolutely not. So we have a contrary in here. He said, "My mother would never have used sign language. She didn't know it." So I don't know, was it observed by anyone who disagreed with him, I don't know.

SWAIN: I want to go back to the renovation of the White House because the Coolidges, by the decision to create that third floor space changed forever the White House and also the way that first families use this with the creation of the solarium.

So we have a view of what the solarium looked like when they were finished and also we're going to show some video from our White House documentary series of what the solarium looks like today as first families use it. This space established by the Coolidges back during their administration is very much a private space on the top floor of the White House.

Can you talk about Grace Coolidge's desire to change and improve the White House and how involved she was in the project?

BITTINGER: She was very involved. We always think of Jackie Kennedy as the first one to want antiques at the White House. No, other First Ladies did want to do this and Grace got to the White House and said I'd like to have a committee, I'd like to have Congress allow gifts to be given to the White House and that did go through.

She then was able to accept gifts. She went through the attic trying to find colonial antiques. Her committee got a little ahead of itself though and the American Institute of Architects got a little upset at them, and felt they were in charge of the White House. So at one point when they're off at the one of the summer White Houses, Calvin says we really got to stop and we can't pursue this attempt to change the Green Room and the Red Room. So she sort of drops that.

But she's really one of the First Ladies to say the White House is a museum and we must honor it.

SWAIN: We have a still with some of the important points of the Coolidge presidency including his Vetoed Farm Subsidies. In 1924 the Indian Citizenship Act passed. In 1926, he signed the Revenue Act which was in fact lowering of taxes and the Kellogg-Briand Pact which was also known as the Paris Peace Treaty which did what?

SHLAES: Outlawed war.

SWAIN: Good job they did with that.

SHLAES: We mocked it but it's getting -- I think it has a new attraction because what President Coolidge said, well, maybe, the rules of law, international law might be a better step than intervention. Well, that idea is interesting, you know, we should consider that as well.

What I noticed about these though is that they took enormous political capital to get them through and each one of them was hard for Calvin. And when you look at their marriage and his view of scandal, the reason that he -- and what I learned about scandals from the Coolidges, the reason he avoided scandal, and indeed any controversy, right down to her wearing a riding habit or redecorating the White House too loudly was because he wanted that capital to pass laws.

And, well, OK, that's what you're elected for, and this is all going in their marriage. You feel like redecorating the house but maybe you shouldn't because it attracts so much attention and then I might have one fewer votes for this or that, quite cold but also a quite concentrated and focused presidency in that way. That's what struck me, you know, as I went over the years seeing that.

SWAIN: Calvin Coolidge was also experiencing a number of digestive problems, as they were called stomach problems as his presidency progressed. How much a factor was his health and his decision not to run for reelection?

SHLAES: Real but I would not say dispositive.

SWAIN: And when did he announce this decision?

SHLAES: This is in the summer of '27, and what I noticed when I was writing it was that he happened to be near Mount Rushmore and indeed went up to Mount Rushmore.

And Coolidge was a man who was concerned about having his head turned by power. He thought of like, you know, every president thinks about am I becoming a narcissist, because the presidency makes narcissists. And, you know, when I worked with President Bush I see that he didn't become a narcissist and that he always thinks about humility and you see that with Coolidge too, you try very, very hard not to turn into it's all about me, and Coolidge writes about this very carefully in his autobiography that the presidency -- the president is surrounded by flatterers and what becomes of him.

And there he was at Mount Rushmore with big heads coming, they weren't sculpted yet, of giant presidents. And I think he was grossed out by it. He said that's not the kind of presidency I want to have or be remembered for. Therefore I will not run again though I might.

And he stepped back and you can see in some footage which you may also have him at Mount Rushmore when the sculptor Gutzon Borglum was about to, you know, either take some step in the process. Coolidge really looked as though, well, I'm going to draw back. I don't want to be part of this show of vanity. So it was a very moral decision, his decision not to run in summer of '27.

SWAIN: Then there are stories about how, well, how Grace Coolidge was informed of her husband's decision not to run again. What do you and the scholars believe and you're writing of her biography, of how much she knew in advance?

BITTINGER: She did know it in advance.

SWAIN: She did know…?

BITTINGER: I found the letters, yes. I found the letters to her girlfriends and she told them in March, I'm getting ready, I will soon be on the trolley. I won't have these cars. She did know about it and she kidded around how pleased -- you know, treat me like everybody else. So she did know it was coming.

However, when he announced it that day she acted as if she didn't know, so I'm perplexed a little bit about that. It was once again, I've got to stay out of this public policy, I don't want to comment, type of thing maybe.

SWAIN: We have one more video as our program hurdles towards its close and this is about Grace Coolidge and baseball.

(BEGIN VIEDO CLIP)

JENNEY: One of the letters that she wrote to her friends dating from October 22nd, 1946, "Yes, I was much excited over baseball. I'm terribly disappointed that the Red Sox lost the World Series. I had a grand time at the game in Boston and met many of my old baseball friends, as well as some of the players."

She was a lifelong baseball fan starting out as early as an undergraduate at the University of Vermont where she was the official score keeper for the UVM baseball team. And this continued on. Of course being in Massachusetts and Vermont they were big Boston Red Sox fans. When they went to Washington they had a little allegiance to the local team down there, the Washington Senators.

In our collection we have a number of the season passes that she was given by the American League. Usually they were issued to her either in a wallet or a pocketbook. Some of the pocketbooks are wonderful are deco in style. Of course he was given the 14-carat gold season passes. And so, we have them as part of the display as well.

And we acknowledged the president's interest in the sport but focus most especially on Grace's passion for it. One of the items in the exhibit is the certificate that she was given by the Boston Red Sox and the Washington Nationals as they were called in 1955 designating her First Lady of the Land, First Lady of Baseball.

Another object in the exhibit is a very fine baseball that was given to John Coolidge, the son of Grace and Calvin and it is signed by both Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: We're going to return to phones calls. Next up is Joseph in South Deerfield, Massachusetts.

Hi, Joseph .

JOSEPH (ph): Hi, I'm just wondering if the panel is aware of Calvin Coolidge's, I think it's his great-great grandson Clark Coolidge who is one of America's greatest living poets. I haven't heard any mention of him and he's really is a quite important figure in American literature. I will take your response off air, thank you.

SWAIN: Thank you very much. How many grandchildren did John have?

BITTINGER: Well, that would not be a direct line because Calvin and Grace had John and Calvin Junior, who we heard about. John married Florence Trumbull, the governor of Connecticut's daughter. And they had two daughters, Lydia and Cynthia. And Cynthia had Chris and Lydia had Jenny and John.

And now the next generation is coming along too. John has two children. Jenny has two children and Chris has two children and I hear his two sons love baseball.

SWAIN: So the Coolidges left the White House to return where afterwards?

SHLAES: They returned to Northampton, Massachusetts where Coolidge had begun his career as a county seat attorney, if you can imagine. And they went back to their house on Massasoit Street which is half of a two-family with not much distance to the sidewalk so people could come up. And of course people did come up and as much as they wanted to fit back into their old clothes, that was the metaphor Grace used, of course they couldn't because it wasn't comfortable because people were always pressing them, whether it was the president's office downtown in Northampton or at the house.

So eventually they retreated to a house with a bit of a border around it, the Beeches, also in Northampton. And the president said, well, the doggies can run here. But it was also a bit more fenced. They could have some privacy, still quite modest by presidential standards, the Beeches. And after the president passed away, Mrs. Coolidge built yet another house somewhere nearby.

SWAIN: How long after they left the White House did the president die?

BITTINGER: It wasn't very long. It's January of 1933. So in his retirement he did write articles, his daily articles. And then he turned to Grace and said, you know I think you could write too. So she started writing some articles for American Magazine, and those are very important to those of us who study the First Ladies because she does tell about her life.

But then he seems to feel strongly about what's happening in the nation. His friends say he's not good at figuring out his own medical problems. He sort of denies medical treatment and one day he goes up to shave and Grace goes out and walks back and just by happenstance goes upstairs and finds him and he has died.

SWAIN: And here is what she said, a quote from her about the death of her husband, her lifelong partner, "I am just a lost soul. Nobody is going to believe how I missed being told what to do. My father always told me what I had to do, then Calvin told me what I had to."

How do we process that remark?

SHLAES: I don't think we judge it. It's a different time. She was a different kind of wife, and for someone who didn't know what she was going to do she did quite a lot as a widow. She was active at the Clarke School.

One of the stories that's a background of this is the story of great love. I've been watching President Bush you know build his library and we watched other president do that. And Coolidge too had to raise money for his library or his papers and stuff, and he did get his friends, led by Clarence Barron of the Wall Street Journal to raise $2 million. And I don't know quite, you know, what he would do with the money. They didn't really believe him but in the end he did what he said which is he gave all the money of his friends to his wife's favorite charity, the Clarke School for the deaf.

Because he was giving back -- after she had given to him Coolidge wanted to give to Grace and therefore there was no great monument for the Coolidge papers. There was only her charity and he knew he would pass, I think, and he knew that it would be wonderful if after he died his wife could be the most important lady in the town and lead the charity that meant something to them both at the Clarke School where she had begun her career so many years ago. And you can't think of a greater act of love than that. So you have to juxtapose it with these statements that shall I say un-modern to ours and decide what you make of this marriage and we find it quite wonderful and intriguing.

SWAIN: She stayed the Trustee of the Clarke School throughout her widowhood? We have a photograph of her with a young John F. Kennedy, what's that photograph? How did they work together?

BITTINGER: Oh, because she was constantly fund raising…

SWAIN: Was he not also a Trustee of the school?

BITTINGER: Yes, she was and he also was powerful as a senator, so a good person to talk to. She understood politics and got his support for her cause, so very, very smart of her.

She also, when Calvin died, asked about 50 friends to write up their view of Calvin Coolidge, and so, that softened his image quite a bit. And she contributed the last love letter that he wrote to her, which was really just before he died. So she did somewhat manipulate his image a little bit at the end.

SWAIN: Josh, in East Hampton, Connecticut. Hi, Josh

JOSH (ph): Hi, how are you doing? This is really -- it (inaudible) me out, this show. This is great talking about the '20s.

My question is about what happened after Calvin died, did Grace have to be the defender of the Coolidge presidency through the ravages of the Great Depression and through the rest of the '30s. A lot of people say something to the policies of the '20s caused the Depression in the '30s.

Did she have to answer for that or was she put a -- a lot of weight put on her to cope with that?

SHLAES: Well, two things, you don't have to accept that contention that the policies of the '20s made the Depression, as great as it was. But also Grace didn't have to and that was her license because she'd never been political. And that's the great liberty of not being political. She could say, well, it's very sad and you can see her doing charity work throughout the '30s. It was a terrible time, but she didn't have the burden of it having been her policy.

SWAIN: Well there are some references in some biographies that she whispered to friends the Depression was coming. Was there a knowledge that the country was heading toward the financial calamity that it had?

BITTINGER: No. I don't think so. People, I mean, I defer to Amity on that but people didn't really know a crash was coming.

SHLAES: Well, crashes came all the time, Coolidge had six or seven serious crashes in his career, the market went down more 20 percent, more than -- but they never led to a decade of double digit unemployment, it's not the crash so much as the depth of the unemployment and the duration of it that makes the Depression great in our memory.

So that's the key thing, and he was bewildered by it and also by the policy applied to it. And she was bewildered as well.

SWAIN: She lived a great long time until 1957, what was her role during World War II.

BITTINGER: Very important, very few people know this but in the run up to World War II she was a champion of the Jewish children in Germany. She was part of a Northampton committee and she wanted to rescue children. And she proposed that about 25 children come to the town of Northampton.

I wouldn't have been surprise if she wouldn't have taken a couple in herself, but her proposal was sent to the State Department, it was folded into the Wagner-Rogers Bills which all of us know in 1939 did not pass. So she was rather brave with that stand and strong about America's participation. She urged Americans to get involved in World War II.

SWAIN: Jerry in Decatur, Georgia, you're our last caller, what's your question?

JERRY (ph): Yes, hi, good evening. Good evening. My question has to do with race relations during the 1930s. I've seen several images of African Americans in the program here. And my question is what were the Coolidge's reaction to and how they deal with race relations in the 1920s, and particularly the lynchings that were going on in America during the 1920s.

SWAIN: Thank you so much.

SHLAES: Well, very briefly and it's a good question. Too bad we don't have more time.

Someone wrote that he was deploring that a Black man ran for office, I think, Congress in the United States, and Coolidge wrote back, "I'm really appalled. Anyone may run for any office." That's the main thing.

And there is a famous speech that Coolidge gave to Steele in Quite , the Ku Klux Klan. As you know in the '20s, in any case lynchings went down over time and that was an effect, much, of the prosperity of the period.

Thank you for the question.

SWAIN: So the (inaudible) per life was just not very long after the Civil War, all the way to 1957, think of the enormous changes that our country went through during the Grace Coolidge's lifetime.

But for those years that she spent in the White House how did she change the job of First Lady or what should we remember her for?

BITTINGER: I think we should remember her for treating the White House as a museum. She took her job very seriously. She thought she was the national hugger. She was to hug everybody, greet as many people as she could. Keep the doors open for the public, so to speak. Also keep her husband and her children happy. It was very important to be a good wife and mother, provide a solid home life for them. So that's what she saw as her role, and to be an advocate for people with disabilities.

SWAIN: When she died of heart failure in Northampton in July of 1957 she joined her husband in death at Plymouth Notch, Vermont and you could visit their gravesites if you…

SHLAES: And we hope you do especially in summer.

SWAIN: Both of you having worked there, we would encourage people to come and visit, it's a lovely place.

SHLAES: Come and visit us, especially the Fourth of July.

SWAIN: So as we close what would your answer be? What should she be remembered for?

SHLAES: Her great joy, really that she could transcend any trouble to her faith and her joy.

SWAIN: Our thanks to our partners at the White House Historical Association for their help throughout this series and to our two guests for being here tonight to tell us more about the life and legacy of Grace Coolidge. Thanks to both of you.

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