

Harding, Warren G. Letter

Warren G. Harding Letter

1921 February 14

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Biographical Information:

Harding was born on Nov. 2, 1865, in the Ohio village of Corsica (now Blooming Grove) and graduated from Ohio Central College in 1882. After briefly holding several jobs, Harding and two associates purchased (1884) a newspaper, the Marion Daily Star. As editor and publisher, Harding supported the Republican party. The newspaper prospered, and Harding soon entered politics. Elected to the Ohio senate in 1898, he rose to a leadership position by 1901. Ohio Republican politics of the time were deeply ridden with factionalism, and Harding earned a reputation for being able to harmonize conflict. He served as lieutenant governor from 1904 to 1905. Then, although he returned to his newspaper full time, he worked to mediate intraparty disputes. In 1910 he was chosen Republican nominee for governor, a race that he lost.

In 1914, Harding reentered politics as a candidate for the U.S. Senate. He defeated Joseph B. Foraker in the state's first primary election and became Ohio's first popularly elected senator (the 17th Amendment now being in effect). Harding had an unspectacular career in the Senate. He introduced no bills of national importance and attempted to cast his votes so as to avoid alienating any important group of Ohio constituents. His ability as a harmonizer, however, drew him into the national leadership of the Republican party, where he voiced the call for unity after the Progressive party split of 1912. At the end of World War I he was a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and he gained some national attention as an opponent of the League of Nations.

In 1920, Harding ran for president initially as a favorite son in order to solidify his position in the Ohio Republican ranks. When a deadlock developed at the convention between the supporters of Leonard Wood and Frank O. Lowden, however, Harding was adopted as the compromise candidate, winning on the 10th ballot. The Republican nomination in 1920 was tantamount to election, as the Democratic party nationally was suffering from unpopular wartime policies and developments. Harding easily defeated the Democratic contender, James M. Cox.

One of his close associates said of President Harding that his only qualification for the office was that "He looked like a president." Harding, however, recognized his own limitations and made an effort to appoint some able men to cabinet posts, among them, Charles Evans Hughes to state, Herbert Hoover to commerce, and Andrew W. Mellon to the treasury. The president initiated little himself, preferring to give responsibility to his cabinet. This practice eventually destroyed his reputation.

In foreign policy the Harding presidency generally continued the retreat from assuming responsibility for world politics that began when the Senate rejected U.S. participation in the League of Nations in 1920. The president did encourage disarmament, however, especially in the Washington Conference of 1921-22, which led to international agreements to reduce naval forces. In domestic affairs Harding favored policies intended to reduce conflict between organized labor and business. He encouraged rationalization of the operation of the federal government with the development of the Bureau of the Budget and sought to bolster the national economy with a high protective tariff. By the time of his death the economy was recovering from a postwar depression, although this was not necessarily a result of federal policies. He sought harmony on the most divisive popular issue of the time, prohibition, by supporting the 18th Amendment while refusing to encourage its active and effective enforcement.

Harding's administration is best known for the scandals associated with it. The most famous of these was the Teapot Dome affair, in which the secretary of the interior, Albert B. Fall, arranged for the private

development of federally owned oil fields in exchange for a \$100,000 bribe. Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty, a longtime Harding confidant, was also implicated in graft, and other corruption came to light in the Veterans Bureau and the Office of the Alien Property Custodian.

The president was never directly implicated in the scandals. Nevertheless, worry about them weakened his health, already affected by a heart condition. Returning from a trip to Alaska, Harding died suddenly of a heart attack on Aug. 2, 1923. Further information about this individual or organization may be available in the Special Collections Research Center Wiki: [https://scdbwiki.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php?title=Warren_G._Harding_\(Warren_Gamaliel\)](https://scdbwiki.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php?title=Warren_G._Harding_(Warren_Gamaliel)).

Scope and Contents

A typed, single sheet, signed letter dated 14 February 1921, from Warren G. Harding to John W.H. Crim about the possibility of Harding receiving an honorary degree from William and Mary.

Related Materials:

University Archives Subject File Collections: "Visitors to Campus--Harding, Warren Gamaliel (1921)" and "President of the College--Inaugurations--Chandler, J.A.C. (1921)"; Mildred E. Barksdale Scrapbook; University Archives Oral History Collection interview of Henry Irving Willett, Sr. (p. 16-17); Scrapbook of President J.A.C. Chandler; University Archives Photograph Collection

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Degrees--Honorary
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Description of Subordinate Components

Letter

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Container 1 (folder)

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