

Letters

Coolidge Was Eloquent Without Welliver

To the Editor:

William Safire, in "Buchanan's Win Wish" (column, Jan. 19), refers to the Judson Welliver Society in Washington, claiming that Judson Welliver, after whom the society is named, was responsible for Calvin Coolidge's reputation for eloquence. The Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation would like to set the record straight.

Judson Welliver was hired by Warren G. Harding and served in the White House from March 4, 1921, until Nov. 1, 1925, as "literary clerk." He wrote many of Harding's speeches, making Harding the first President to have a formal speechwriter. Welliver continued in the Coolidge White House for two years and may well have assisted Coolidge in researching facts for his speeches. But certainly he was not responsible for Coolidge's eloquence, which was well established before he became President. Coolidge's son, John, adamantly maintains that his father wrote his own speeches, often laboring over the precise choice of words.

In a talk in 1980 at Amherst College, Coolidge's alma mater, Harry V. Jaffa, Distinguished Professor of Political Philosophy at Claremont (Calif.) Graduate School, told how he stumbled across a copy of a speech Coolidge delivered in Philadelphia during the nation's 150th anniversary in 1926. Mr. Jaffa wrote: "I was simply stunned by it. I think I have read all the great speeches in Congress



from the Revolution to the Civil War, and here was a great speech in the tradition of Webster, Clay and John Quincy Adams. It was the greatest speech I have read on the Declaration since Abraham Lincoln."

Contrary to common belief, Coolidge was one of our country's most learned Presidents. When it comes to learning and writing, one must look long and hard to find a political leader in Coolidge's league. He deserves to be respected as the last President we know as a man of his own words.

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Calvin Coolidge Memorial Foundation
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