

# This Day in History... November 2, 1865

## Birth of Warren G. Harding

The 29th president of the United States, Warren Gamaliel Harding, was born November 2, 1865, in Blooming Grove, Ohio. He was a popular president at the time, but a series of scandals were then revealed that tarnished his reputation.

When he was 10 years old, Harding began working for his father's weekly newspaper. In college, he worked on the school newspaper and gained a reputation as a gifted public speaker. Harding then moved to Marion, Ohio, and bought the struggling *Marion Star* newspaper in 1884. Though he wrote in support of the Republican Party, his fair reporting of both sides earned him the respect of Ohio politicians. Within ten years, Harding's paper grew to be one of the most popular in the county. When Harding reorganized his business, he allowed the purchase of stock in Harding Publishing Co., the first profit-sharing agreement in Ohio.

Harding began his political career in 1899 when he won a seat in the Ohio State Senate. After serving two terms, Harding ran for governor of Ohio in 1903. He was defeated but was given the position of lieutenant governor. In 1914, he was elected to the US Senate, a post he held until his presidential inauguration in 1921.

In running for the presidency in 1920, Harding promised to return America "to normalcy" and healing from World War I and the policies of President Wilson. Harding conducted a front-porch campaign from his home in Marion, Ohio, while his opponent traveled over 20,000 miles. Over 600,000 people came to visit him. In addition, entertainers such as Al Jolson and Mary Pickford entertained the crowds. Henry Ford and Thomas Edison also met with Harding and supported his campaign.

The results of November's election were the first in US history to be covered on the radio. Harding and his running mate Calvin Coolidge received 60 percent of the national vote, the highest percentage since James Monroe 100 years before.

During his campaign, Harding promised to appoint the best men he could find for his Cabinet. Some of his choices fulfilled this promise. Unfortunately, he also felt a sense of duty to men who supported his run for office and gave them influential positions as well. These men, later called the "Ohio Gang," would damage Harding's presidency. Many historians believe Harding was not aware of the corruption happening inside his administration. However, his choice of questionable men to serve in his Cabinet tarnished the reputation of his administration.

Harding worked to make the federal government smaller and more efficient. The Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 said the president must submit a budget to the Congress each year. The General Accounting Office provided oversight for Federal expenses. As director, Charles Dawes reduced government spending by 25 percent the first year and cut it in half after two years.

1923 Warren Harding

Memorial Stamp

The president felt lowering tax rates would help the country recover from the postwar depression it was experiencing. Under the guidance of Andrew Mellon, the top tax rate was reduced from 73 percent to 25 over the course of four years. Unemployment fell and tax revenue increased. Historians Schweikart and Allen wrote the economic policies "...produced the most vibrant eight-year burst of manufacturing and innovation in the nation's history."

Ongoing labor disputes erupted during Harding's administration, and more than once he called in federal troops to end strikes. In a time when the rights of African Americans were severely limited, Harding supported civil rights and educational opportunities. He advocated for a federal anti-lynching bill, but it was defeated in the Senate.

On November 21, 1921, Harding signed the Sheppard-Towner Maternity Act, which funded health centers around the country. It was the first large federal social welfare program in America. The law encouraged doctors to offer health care to prevent illness as well as treating it. Child welfare workers were trained to make sure children were being taken care of.

Harding relied heavily on Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes to conduct foreign affairs. Hughes led the Washington Armament Conference to reduce naval power in the hopes of maintaining peace. The US hosted Japan, Great Britain, France, Italy, China, Belgium, Netherlands, and Portugal for the three-month conference. The agreements reached brought stability to the Pacific region. Trade agreements with China were also signed.

Harding improved the nation's relationship with countries to the south. The Thomson-Urrutia Treaty awarded Colombia \$25 million as payment for land used for the Panama Canal. The president also improved relations with Mexico and began removing troops from occupied areas of Central America and the Caribbean.

In 1923, scandals in Harding's administration were beginning to surface. He told a journalist, "I have no trouble with my enemies, but my friends, they're the ones that keep me walking the floor at nights!" The president's health was suffering, so he decided to take a tour to the West and Alaska to reconnect with the people and promote his agenda. Accompanied by his wife and trusted advisors, Harding's train left Washington on June 20. After giving speeches throughout the Midwest, he and his party traveled to Alaska. Harding was the first president to visit there.

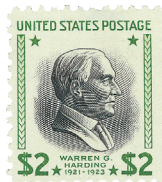
On the way back to the lower 48 states, Harding toured British Columbia, the first sitting president to visit Canada. As the trip continued, Harding became progressively weaker. On August 2, Harding died in San Francisco of an apparent heart attack. The president's body was transported by train across the country. Millions of Americans lined the track all along the route to pay their respects. His state funeral took place on August 8 in the Capitol building. Harding's term was the shortest of any president in the 20th century.



*The first fractional US postage stamp.*



*This stamp was never distributed to post offices. It was only available at the Philatelic Agency in Washington, DC.*



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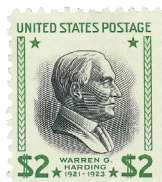
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