



CHAPTER 23 Section 2 Texans Look for a New Deal

John Nance Garner
Thirty-Second Vice President of the United States Pupil's Edition,
p. 482

John Nance "Cactus Jack" Garner (1868–1967) was a powerful Texas politician and a master of the legislative process. He joined Franklin Delano Roosevelt on the Democratic ticket in the 1932 presidential election.

John Nance Garner was born in a log cabin near the town of Detroit, Texas, on November 22, 1868. He entered Vanderbilt University at age 18, but he returned to Texas after only one semester. Garner studied law and was admitted to the Texas state bar in 1890. He then moved to Uvalde, where he joined a law firm.

The First Campaign In 1893 Garner ran for judge of Uvalde County. His opponent was Mariette Rheiner, whom he defeated and eventually married. In 1898 Garner was elected to the Texas state legislature, where he served until 1902. He earned the nickname Cactus Jack for his enthusiastic though unsuccessful championing of the cactus as the Texas state flower.

Enters the House of Representatives In the state legislature Garner helped create the Fifteenth Congressional district, which included Uvalde. He was elected to be that district's first representative to the U.S. Congress and was reelected 15 times. By 1909 Garner had enough seniority to be elected Democratic House whip (the party's second-ranked leader).

Becomes Speaker of the House In 1922 Garner became the ranking Democrat on the powerful House Ways and Means Committee. During the 71st Congress (1929–1930) he was minority leader, and after the 1930 election he was named Speaker for the 72nd Congress.

Garner's conservative views made him the darling of newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst, who backed Garner for the Democratic presidential nomination. Garner was competing with Franklin Roosevelt, and the vote became deadlocked after three ballots. Garner released his 90 delegates to Roosevelt, and Roosevelt offered Garner the vice-presidential slot on the Democratic ticket. With Roosevelt's victory on November 8, 1932, Garner became the thirty-second vice president of the United States.

Vice President Garner's relationship with Roosevelt began to unravel in 1936. They won reelection, but Garner was becoming more independent. The end of their working relationship came with Roosevelt's controversial effort to "pack" the Supreme Court by proposing that the number of justices be increased from 9 to 15.

Splits with Roosevelt By 1939 the 72-year-old Garner had revived his dream of running for the presidency. What he did not count on was that Roosevelt would choose to run for a third term. At the 1940 Democratic convention, Roosevelt beat Garner in the battle for the presidential nomination, 946 votes to 61. Garner retired to Uvalde. Sometime in the late 1940s, either he or his wife destroyed all of his public and private papers, leaving a void in political history. John Nance Garner died in Uvalde on November 7, 1967, just 15 days shy of his ninety-ninth birthday.

Review Questions

1. What newspaper publisher backed Garner for the presidency?
2. What happened to Garner's public and private papers?

Critical Thinking

3. **Making Inferences** Why might Garner have destroyed his papers?
4. **Making Judgments** Which position do you think was more important, Speaker of the House or vice president?