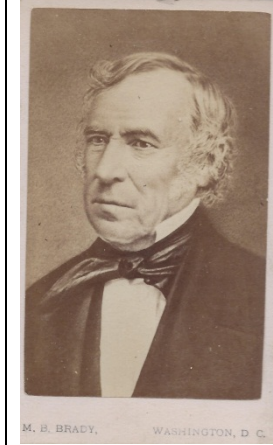


## Chapter 168 – General Zachary Taylor Becomes America’s Twelfth President



**Dates:**  
November 7, 1848

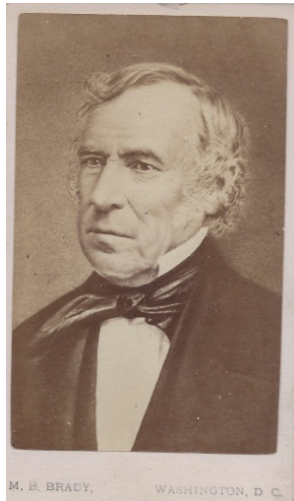
**Sections:**

- A Second Whig Wins The White House
- Zachary Taylor: Personal Profile

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Date: November 7, 1848

### A Second Whig Wins The White House



Zachary Taylor (1784-1850)

For the first time all Americans cast their ballots for president on the same day, in this case Tuesday, November 7, 1848.

Whig General Zachary Taylor wins the election, garnering 47% of the popular vote and a fairly comfortable 163-127 margin in the Electoral College. He dominates in the North and more than holds his own in the Border States and the South, where many assume erroneously that his slave-owning status signals his support for future expansion.

As expected the Democrats suffer from their internal divisions. Cass sweeps the six Midwestern states (Ohio to Wisconsin and Iowa) and also wins in Virginia, South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Missouri, Arkansas and Texas. But the Free Soilers, behind Van Buren, carve out 10% of the popular vote, signaling their power as a third party option.

The public once again repudiates the abolitionists and Gerritt Smith’s Liberty Party, in what turns out to be its final political campaign.

### Results Of the 1848 Presidential Election

	Party	Pop Vote	Elect Tot	South	Border	North	West
Taylor	Whig	1,361,393	163	43	23	97	0
Cass	Democrat	1,223,460	127	48	7	15	57
Van Buren	Free Soil	291,501	0				
G. Smith	Liberty	2,545	0				
Other		285	0				
		2,879,184	290	91	30	112	57

At the local level, Taylor records a crucial win of 36 electoral votes in New York over favorite son, Martin Van Buren -- who nevertheless manages to outpoll and derail Senator Cass in the state.

### Election Results In New York State (1848)

	Party	Pop Vote	%
Taylor	Whig	218,583	48%
Van Buren	Free Soil	120,497	26
Cass	Democrat	114,319	25
Smith	Liberty	2,545	1
Total		455,944	100%

A total of four states shift from the Democrats to Taylor and the Whigs in 1848, the two most crucial being New York and Pennsylvania.

### Party Power By State

South	1844	1848	Pick-Ups
Virginia	Democrat	Democrat	
North Carolina	Whig	Whig	
South Carolina	Democrat	Democrat	
Georgia	Democrat	Whig	Whig
Alabama	Democrat	Democrat	
Mississippi	Democrat	Democrat	
Louisiana	Democrat	Whig	Whig
Tennessee	Whig	Whig	
Arkansas	Democrat	Democrat	
Texas	---	Democrat	Democrat
Border			
Delaware	Whig	Whig	
Maryland	Whig	Whig	
Kentucky	Whig	Whig	
Missouri	Democrat	Democrat	
North			
New Hampshire	Democrat	Democrat	
Vermont	Whig	Whig	
Massachusetts	Whig	Whig	

Rhode Island	Whig	Whig	
Connecticut	Whig	Whig	
New York	Democrat	Whig	Whig
New Jersey	Whig	Whig	
Pennsylvania	Democrat	Whig	Whig
Ohio	Whig	Democrat	Democrat
Maine	Democrat	Democrat	
Indiana	Democrat	Democrat	
Illinois	Democrat	Democrat	
Iowa	Democrat	Democrat	
Michigan	Democrat	Democrat	
Wisconsin	---	Democrat	Democrat

Despite all of the Party turmoil preceding the election, the composition of both the House and the Senate is only marginally changed from 1846. The Democrats maintain a solid 35-25 lead over the Whigs in the upper chamber – although two transformative “Free Soil” senators are elected, Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, and John Hale of New Hampshire.

#### Senate Election Trends

House	1844	1846	1848	Change
Democrats	31	36	35	-1
Whigs	25	21	25	+4
Others		1		-1
Free Soil			2	+2
Vacant	0			

In the House, the Democrats pick up one seat to maintain a narrow majority.

#### House Election Trends

House	1844	1846	1848	Change
Democrats	143	112	113	+1
Whigs	78	116	108	- 8
Free Soil			9	+9
Others	6	6	1	-5

This victory in Congress shows that although the Wilmot controversy has shaken the Democrat’s solidarity, it has not yet caused an irreparable schism.

It does, however, signal that the path back to the White House will require a quid pro quo between Northern Democrats who aspire to the office -- like Stephen Douglas, Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan – and Southern Democrats who hope to extend slavery to the west.

Thus the idea of a “doughface” presidential candidate for future Democrat nominees is advanced – a man of the North, but one willing to reach accommodations with Southern wishes on slavery.

On the other side, political strategists like Thurlow Weed and Salmon Chase have been able to deny the Democrats their successor to Polk, no small accomplishment. But Zachary Taylor’s credentials as a Whig, in the mold of Henry Clay, are thin at best – and internal divisions over slavery are already intensifying.

If the Whigs are to dislodge the Democrats on a more permanent basis, it appears that some linkage to the Free Soil Movement will be required, possibly around opposition to expanding slavery.

But for now, it’s time for “Old Rough & Ready” to take his turn at the presidency.

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**Zachary Taylor: Personal Profile**

Zachary Taylor is the fourth American president whose fame rests heavily on his military achievements. Like Washington and Harrison, he is born on a Virginia plantation to a prominent family, with roots in his case tracing back to the Plymouth Colony. His father is Lt. Colonel Richard Taylor, who fights at Trenton and Monmouth and is with George Washington at Valley Forge.

In 1790 his family picks up and moves to the frontier in Kentucky, two years before its admission as a state. Taylor is six at that time and is raised, like Andrew Jackson, in a log cabin, while his father works his 8,000 acres worth of land, with the help of 23 slaves. His formal education is hit or miss, and he favors a rough physical life in the outdoors rather than intellectual pursuits in the classroom.

**Comparisons Between Taylor And The Three Previous Military Presidents**

<b>Presidents</b>	<b>Family Heritage</b>	<b>Education/Career</b>	<b>Landmark Battle</b>
Washington	Virginia plantation	Tutors/planter/military/politics	Yorktown (1781)
Jackson	Childhood poverty in SC	Self-educated/lawyer/planter/militia	New Orleans (1815)
Harrison	Virginia plantation	Tutors/medical school/militia/politics	Tippecanoe (1811)
Taylor	Virginia plantation	Self-educated/military/politics	Buena Vista (1847)

In 1808 his second cousin, James Madison, then Secretary of State, arranges a military omission for him as 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant in the army’s Seventh Infantry Regiment. He is posted to New Orleans, earns a promotion to Captain in two years, and marries his wife “Peggy,” who prays daily for his safety throughout her life. He is then off to the Indiana Territory in 1811, defending Ft. Knox and Ft. Harrison against Tecumseh and the Shawnees during the War of 1812. His successes here draw praise from General William Henry Harrison, the nation’s military and political leader in the Northwest territories.

When the war ends, Taylor resigns briefly to farm a 324 acre plantation just east of Louisville, Kentucky that his father has given him as a wedding present. He is now a slave owner, and will add many more “servants,” as he calls them, in the years to come.

His farming hiatus proves brief, and in 1816 he is back in the army, with the rank of Major. He spends two years at Fort Howard in the upper reaches of the Michigan (later Wisconsin) Territory at Green Bay, before being promoted to Lt. Colonel and assigned to duty in Louisiana.

From 1822 to 1824, he commands Fort Robertson in Baton Rouge, and while there acquires a second plantation, 300 acres along with more slaves, in Feliciana Parish. It will become his off duty home for the rest of his life.

After a stint as a recruiting officer, he is called to Washington, DC in 1826, before heading back west for tours at Fort Snelling and Fort Crawford, in what will become the Minnesota Territory. He is a full Colonel when he joins the fighting in the brief Blackhawk War of 1832.

Based on his own up and down experiences in the army, Taylor refuses in 1835 to approve the marriage of his daughter Sarah to a twenty-six year old 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant named Jefferson Davis. While the two lovers elope anyway, she dies three months after the marriage, leaving both Davis and Taylor in despair.

Taylor's military career takes another leap forward during the Second Seminole War in southern Florida. On Christmas day 1837 he wins the Battle of Lake Okeechobee, earning his nickname, "Old Rough & Ready," along with a promotion to Brigadier General in charge of all U.S. troops in Florida.

As his fame grows, so does his wealth. In 1840 he purchases his third plantation, *Cyprus Grove*, in Rodney, Mississippi, along with 81 more slaves, for \$95,000. He also begins to dabble around the edges of politics, in communication with Harrison, his old superior, about to be elected President.

After leaving Florida, he is stationed in Arkansas, with command over most American forces west of the Mississippi River. This places him along the frontier facing Texas, as tension builds with Mexico over the March 1845 annexation. On January 12, 1846 Polk orders him to advance west to the Rio Grande, and three months later the war with Mexico is under way.

The hard-charging Taylor now moves into the Mexican interior winning battle after battle despite being often outmanned by upwards of two to one margins. His crushing win at Monterrey on September 24, 1846 is followed by a strategically brilliant victory over Santa Anna at Buena Vista on February 23, 1847.

Buena Vista marks the end of Taylor's days as a combat officer and the beginning of his persona as a hero on the national stage and a potential candidate for the presidency. It is not a position he chases after – in fact, early on he is quick to dismiss the idea out of hand. But two Whigs in particular – the strategist, Thurlow Weed, and Senator John J. Crittenden – finally win him over.

Reservations aside, the Whigs nominate Taylor on the fourth ballot, and proceed to mail him a letter seeking his acceptance. When nearly a month passes without a response, the General, busy with both his command of the western armies and his plantation, finally comes upon the "lost notification" and signals his agreement.

At sixty-four years old, Taylor and his reluctant wife, prepare to leave home for what will be his final, and an abbreviated, tour of duty.