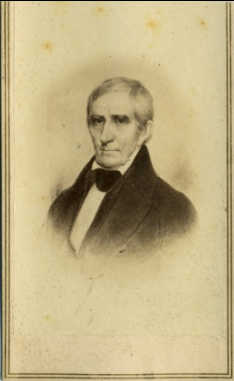
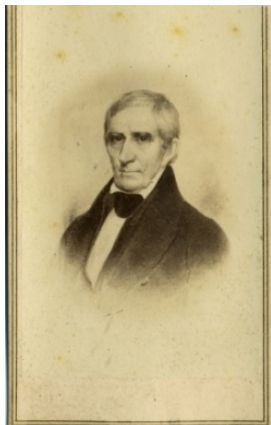


Chapter 126 – Harrison Wins The Election Of 1840 Then Dies

	Dates: March 4 – April 6, 1841	Sections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • William Henry Harrison Becomes America’s Ninth President • Personal Profile: William Henry Harrison • Inaugural Address • Harrison Dies After One Month In Office • Vice-President Tyler Claims The Oval Office
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Date: Fall 1841

William Henry Harrison Becomes America’s Ninth President



William Henry Harrison
(1773-1841)

The election of 1840 is marked by a dramatic upswing in the number of popular votes cast, probably the result of growing public unrest with the economy and the excitement surrounding Harrison’s candidacy.

Popular Votes Cast For President

Year	Number	% Vs Y-A
1832	1,286,700	+12.1%
1836	1,502,300	+16.8
1840	2,411,808	+60.5

The race itself marks a turning point in the character of political campaigning. Instead of focusing on “issues” – where Harrison’s positions are typically vague – the Whigs focus on selling his “personal story” vis a vis Van Buren.

Despite his patrician roots in Virginia, Harrison is cast as “Old Tip,” a “log cabin and hard cider” common man of the West, and a military hero in wars against the Indians and the British. Meanwhile, the Whigs paint Van Buren as “Van Ruin,” a New York snob, detached from the economic suffering of the people caused by the inept policies of his administration.

Harrison actively pursues the high office, touring the country, making speeches, handing out log cabin-shaped bottles of whiskey. Van Buren follows tradition, staying in the White House and allowing surrogates to reach out on his behalf.

Voting runs from October 30 to December 2 with 80% of all eligible taking part.

The Whigs win 19 of 26 states, sending the Democrats and Martin Van Buren down to an eye-opening defeat. The popular count – 53% to 47% -- turns out closer than many expect. But in the electoral college, Harrison runs away from Van Buren by a margin of 234 to 60.

The new Liberty Party records fewer than 7,000 votes in total.

Results Of The 1840 Presidential Election

1840	Party	Pop Vote	Elect Tot	South	Border	North	West
Harrison	Whig	1,275,390	234	50	28	123	33
Van Buren	Democrat	1,128,854	60	44	4	7	5
Birney	Liberty	6,797	0	0	0	0	0
Other		767					
		2,411,808	294	94	32	130	38

State by state returns show the North turning against Van Buren, including his home state of New York, along with a pronounced weakening of the Democrats hold on the “solid South.”

Party Power By State

South	1836	1840	Pick-Up
Virginia	Democrat	Democrat	
North Carolina	Democrat	Whig	Whig
South Carolina	Whig (Mang)	Democrat	Democrat
Georgia	Whig (White)	Whig	
Alabama	Democrat	Democrat	
Mississippi	Democrat	Whig	Whig
Louisiana	Democrat	Whig	Whig
Tennessee	Whig (White)	Whig	
Arkansas	Democrat	Democrat	
Border			
Delaware	Whig (Har)	Whig	
Maryland	Whig (Har)	Whig	
Kentucky	Whig (Har)	Whig	
North			
New Hampshire	Democrat	Democrat	
Vermont	Whig (Har)	Whig	
Massachusetts	Whig (Web)	Whig	
Rhode Island	Democrat	Whig	Whig
Connecticut	Democrat	Whig	Whig
New York	Democrat	Whig	Whig
New Jersey	Whig (Har)	Whig	
Pennsylvania	Democrat	Whig	Whig
Ohio	Whig (Har)	Whig	
Maine	Democrat	Whig	Whig
Indiana	Whig (Har)	Whig	
Illinois	Democrat	Democrat	
Iowa	Democrat	Democrat	
Michigan	Democrat	Whig	Whig

The Whigs also sweep to victory in both houses of Congress.

Congressional Election Of 1840

House	1838	1840	Chg.
Democrats	126	98	(28)
Whigs	108	144	36
Anti-Masonic	6		(6)
Conservative	2		(2)
Other			
Senate			
Democrats	29	22	(7)
Whigs	23	29	6
Anti-Masonic			
Conservative			
Other			
	Van	Harr	

For the first time since John Quincy Adams victory in the 1824 election, the Democratic Party's stranglehold on political control has been broken!

Personal Profile: William Henry Harrison

Harrison's career mirrors Andrew Jackson's in many ways. He is born a British citizen in the old South, although in his case to a wealthy father, who signed the Declaration of Independence, served as governor of Virginia and is master of the Berkeley Plantation. After studying medicine at Penn College, he joins the army and in 1794 serves under Mad Anthony Wayne in his fight against Indian tribes in the NW Territory.

Harrison's future now lies in the West, much like Jackson. He marries an Ohio woman, resigns from the army to enter politics, and in 1799 wins a seat in the U.S. House. In 1800 he pushes the Harrison Land Act through congress, winning lasting approval from settlers by lowering the per acre price for new homesteads. John Adams names him the first governor of the vast Indiana Territory (what will become Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin and part of Minnesota), and he serves from 1801-1812.

On November 6, 1811 he defeats a confederation of tribes (Shawnee, Pottawatomie, Miami and others) near Prophetstown, Indiana, at the Battle of Tippecanoe. In 1812 he wins the Battle of Thames in upper Ontario, killing Chief Tecumseh, who had sided with Britain in the war, and is the acknowledged leader of the Indian uprisings.

Like Jackson, these victories on the battlefield mark him forever as a national hero.

After serving in the House and Senate from Ohio between 1816 and 1828, Harrison retires to his farm to breed horses and open a distillery. But in 1836 he is back in politics as the newly formed Whig Party convinces him to run for President. While losing to Van Buren, he records over 550,000 votes.

As the slavery issue heats up, Harrison's views prove sufficiently ambiguous to not alienate any Whig factions.

Despite his early involvement with anti-slavery Quakers and Methodists at college, Southerners are comforted by the fact that he has grown up on a Virginia plantation, and that, in 1803, as Governor of the Indiana Territory, he tries to repeal the "free soil" ban on slaves.

Meanwhile, anti-slavery elements find reassurance in an 1833 speech, where he declares:

I am accused of being friendly to slavery. From my earliest youth to the present moment, I have been the ardent friend of Human Liberty. At the age of eighteen, I became a member of an Abolition Society established at Richmond, Virginia; the object of which was to ameliorate the condition of slaves and procure their freedom by every legal means... I have been the means of liberating many slaves, but never placed one in bondage... I was the first person to introduce into congress the proposition that all the country above (North of) Missouri... should never have slavery admitted into it.

By 1840, Harrison's slaves have been "converted" into indentured servants, and he publicly adopts what will become the "centrist position" on the issue – concern about the morality of the institution, a hope that it will wither away over time, combined with a promise to not have the federal government interfere in the state's rights of the South.

Time: March 4, 1841

Inaugural Address

Harrison is 68 years old when he steps to the podium on March 4, 1841, to take the oath of office from Chief Justice Taney. The temperature is 48 degrees, but a brisk wind chills the onlookers. As the oldest president elect to that time, Harrison is intent on demonstrating his personal vitality, so he refuses to wear an overcoat, hat or gloves. He also delivers the longest inaugural address in history, lasting for one hour and 45 minutes.

His opening line sounds a particularly ironic note given his soon to be fate -- the old warrior called out of retirement to spend the "residue of (his) life" as chief executive:

Called from a retirement which I had supposed was to continue for the residue of my life to fill the chief executive office of this great and free nation, I appear before you, fellow-citizens, to take the oaths which the Constitution prescribes as a necessary qualification for the performance of its duties; and...to present to you a summary of the principles which will govern me in the discharge of the duties which I shall be called upon to perform.

In a thinly disguised slam at Jackson and Van Buren, he reassures the nation that his administration will reject any notions of “divine right” when it comes to wielding executive power:

We admit of no government by divine right...the Constitution.. contains declarations of power granted and of power withheld.

From there he launches into a lengthy and thoughtful analysis of the 1787 Constitution, citing issues facing the founders, precedents from the Romans and Greeks, his interpretation of the core principles and how he intends to treat them while in office.

He dwells on the veto and promises to use it, but only sparingly. He cites the founder’s early fears about the federal government drowning out the voice of the individual states – but concludes that this hasn’t happened.

The great dread (was that) the States would be absorbed by those of the Federal Government and a consolidated power established, leaving to the States the shadow only of that independent action for which they had so zealously contended and on the preservation of which they relied as the last hope of liberty...(But) the General Government has seized upon none of the reserved rights of the States.

He attacks the patronage system as a force for corrupting government, and the “unhallowed union” which has developed between the Treasury and the Executive.

(Regarding) the divorce, as it is called, of the Treasury from the banking institutions. It is not the divorce which is complained of, but the unhallowed union of the Treasury with the executive department, which has created such extensive alarm.... I have determined never to remove a Secretary of the Treasury without communicating all the circumstances attending such removal to both Houses of Congress.

He admonishes politicians for staying too long in office, and promises that he will exit after one term :

I give my aid to it by renewing the pledge heretofore given that under no circumstances will I consent to serve a second term.

He insists that all revenue generating schemes originate with the Legislature, not the Executive, and that those wishing to abolish a paper currency are dead wrong.

An exclusively metallic currency...appears to me to be fraught with more fatal consequences than any other scheme having no relation to the personal rights of the citizens that has ever been devised

He promises to protect the absolute freedom of the press and the shared rights of all living in the District of Columbia. Avoiding conflicts between states or sections is paramount to the overriding goal of preserving the sacred Union.

Of all the great interests which appertain to our country, that of union—cordial, confiding, fraternal union—is by far the most important, since it is the only true and sure guaranty of all

others... The spirit of liberty is the sovereign balm for every injury which our institutions may receive.

Foreign policy is touched on briefly, with the usual assurances about maintaining friendly relations with all.

I should give some indications to my fellow-citizens of my proposed course of conduct in the management of our foreign relations. I assure them, therefore, that it is my intention to use every means in my power to preserve the friendly intercourse which now so happily subsists with every foreign nation

As he winds down, he turns, like many of his predecessors, to the threat to both liberty and the Union that he sees in partisan politics.

Before concluding, fellow-citizens, I must say something to you on the subject of the parties at this time existing in our country...The true spirit of liberty...is mild and tolerant and scrupulous as to the means it employs, whilst the spirit of party, assuming to be that of liberty, is harsh, vindictive, and intolerant...

If parties in a republic are necessary to secure a degree of vigilance sufficient to keep the public functionaries within the bounds of law and duty, at that point their usefulness ends. Beyond that they become destructive of public virtue...It was the beautiful remark of a distinguished English writer that "in the Roman senate Octavius had a party and Anthony a party, but the Commonwealth had none."

Always the friend of my countrymen, never their flatterer, it becomes my duty to say to them from this high place to which their partiality has exalted me that there exists in the land a spirit hostile to their best interests—hostile to liberty itself. It is a spirit contracted in its views, selfish in its objects. It looks to the aggrandizement of a few even to the destruction of the interests of the whole. The entire remedy is with the people...It is union that we want, not of a party for the sake of that party, but a union of the whole country for the sake of the whole country...All the influence that I possess shall be exerted to prevent the formation at least of an Executive party in the halls of the legislative body. I wish for the support of no member of that body to any measure of mine that does not satisfy his judgment and his sense of duty to those from whom he holds his appointment...

By now cold to the bone, he takes his leave – a leave that will last only thirty-one days.

I deem the present occasion sufficiently important and solemn to justify me in expressing to my fellow-citizens a profound reverence for the Christian religion and a thorough conviction that sound morals, religious liberty, and a just sense of religious responsibility are essentially connected with all true and lasting happiness;

Fellow-citizens, being fully invested with that high office to which the partiality of my countrymen has called me, I now take an affectionate leave of you.

Harrison Dies After One Month In Office

Harrison begins his term by visiting and studiously evaluating all six Departments of government, and then naming his cabinet. It includes men who will be marked by their dedication to preserving the Union, including, to Clay's chagrin, Daniel Webster, as Secretary of State.

William Henry Harrison's Cabinet

Position	Name	Home State
Secretary of State	Daniel Webster	Massachusetts
Secretary of Treasury	Thomas Ewing	Ohio
Secretary of War	John Bell	Tennessee
Attorney General	John Crittenden	Kentucky
Secretary of Navy	George Badger	North Carolina
Postmaster General	Francis Granger	New York

Other administrative duties descend swiftly on Harrison.

Despite criticism of the patronage or "spoils" system established by Jackson and Van Buren, he is immediately besieged at the White House by those seeking favors. To escape, he takes to walking unaccompanied around the capital.

One such stroll ends with a downpour, from which he develops what appears to be a severe cold.

On March 26, when his condition worsens, Harrison calls upon his doctor, Thomas Miller, complaining of fatigue and "derangement of the stomach and bowels." Miller is 35 years old at the time, an 1829 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania medical school, and a highly regarded professor and surgeon.



Dr. Thomas Miller (1806-1863)

Miller proceeds to "purge" Harrison's intestinal system, through doses of laxatives, opium and a series of enemas, administered over the next eight days. Nothing works, and the President suffers increased intestinal pain and bouts of delirium.

At 3PM on April 3, he is hit by "profuse diarrhea," with his extremities turning blue, and his pulse fading. He dies at 12:30am on April 4.

Miller attributes the death to pneumonia, but admits to uncertainty about his diagnosis. Modern analysis suspects typhoid fever, attributable to the same polluted drinking water in Washington that later sickens President Polk and perhaps kills President Taylor. If in fact Harrison suffered from Salmonella pathogens in his intestines, Miller's "treatment" probably hastens his end -- since opium inhibits natural expulsion of the infection and enemas only spread its effects.

The death leaves the country without a sitting president for the first time in its history.

Its initial response lies in providing a proper funeral for Harrison. The White House is draped in black crepe and the Episcopalian ceremony, by invitation only, is held in the East Room. Six white horses carry the ex-President's body on a two mile journey, filled with well over 10,000 onlookers, to a public vault, where it is stored until a later trip home to North Bend, Ohio, for final burial. May 14 is declared as a day of national mourning.

The recorded cost of the funeral is \$3,088, including \$90 for a walnut coffin. Harrison's wife is later awarded \$25,000; the one year salary allotted the Chief Executive.

Vice-President Tyler Claims The Oval Office

While the burial ceremonies proceed, Daniel Webster's son, Fletcher, rides to Williamsburg, Virginia to inform John Tyler of Harrison's death. The Vice-President is there because he has no responsibilities in Washington until the Senate reconvenes in June. But Tyler has received reports of Harrison's illness and is poised to assert his claim to successor status. He makes a hasty journey to DC, arriving on April 6 to meet with the Cabinet and assume command.

At this point, a legal debate ensues, with opponents of Tyler arguing that he is merely the "Acting President," serving until another election can be called to choose a permanent successor. They try to make their case around wording in the 1804 Twelfth Amendment which says the Vice-President shall "act as President" not "become" President.

If the House shall not choose a President...then the Vice-President shall act as President, as in the case of the death or other constitutional disability of the President.

Tyler simply ignores the issue, plows forward and takes the oath of office, and at fifty-one years old becomes, de facto, the youngest man to serve so far as President.

Critics of Tyler like John Quincy Adams are immediately alarmed:

Tyler is a political sectarian, of the slave-driving, Virginian, Jeffersonian school, principled against all improvement, with all the interests and passions and vices of slavery rooted in his moral and political constitution — with talents not above mediocrity, and a spirit incapable of expansion to the dimensions of the station upon which he has been cast by the hand of Providence, unseen through the apparent agency of chance. No one ever thought of his being placed in the executive chair.

Henceforth opponents will refer to him with the snickering epithet "His Accidency."