

The Artios Home Companion Series

Unit 1: Prelude to the Civil War – 1840s

Teacher Overview

During the presidencies of Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler, and Polk as well as during the war with Mexico and the California Gold Rush, every new decision, challenge, and territory was overshadowed by the conflict between slavery and abolition.



President Tyler

Key People, Places, and Events

Martin Van Buren
The Financial Panic of 1837
William Henry Harrison
Daniel Webster
John Tyler
The Webster-Ashburton Treaty
Dorr's Rebellion
The Mormons
Joseph Smith
Abolition
William Lloyd Garrison
General Samuel Houston
Samuel F.B. Morse
James K. Polk
General Zackary Taylor
James Fenimore Cooper
General Winfield Scot
John C. Fremont
Kit Carson
Santa Ana
The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
John W. Marshall
John A. Sutter

Vocabulary

Lesson 1:
partisan
annexation

Lesson 2:
dragoon
precipitated
armistice
arbitration
routed
forty-niner

Reading and Assignments

In this unit, students will:

- Complete two lessons in which they will learn about **the presidencies of Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler, and Polk, the War with Mexico, and the California Gold Rush**, journaling and answering discussion questions as they read.
- Define vocabulary words.
- Conduct research on **one or more of the new states admitted into the Union during these presidencies.**
- Complete biography notebook pages on **Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler, and Polk.**
- Visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.

Leading Ideas

The Bible provides the ethics upon which to judge people and nations.

— Acts 20:1-17

God is sovereign over the affairs of men.

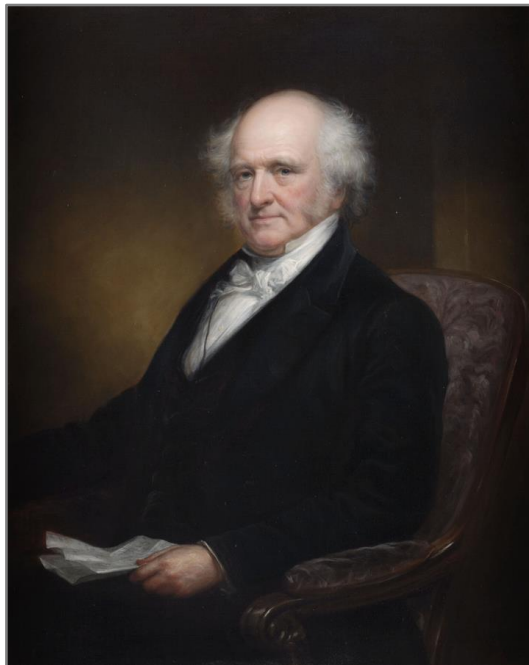
From one man He made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

— Acts 17:26

Lesson One

History Overview and Assignments The Presidencies of Van Buren, Harrison, and Tyler

As the country continued to expand, the question of slavery was at the forefront of everyone's mind as each new territory was annexed and moved towards statehood. Throughout the presidencies of Van Buren, Harrison and Tyler, events occurred that continued to divide the country along the line between slavery and abolition.



Van Buren as Governor

Key People, Places, and Events

Martin Van Buren
The Financial Panic of 1837
William Henry Harrison
Daniel Webster
John Tyler
The Webster-Ashburton Treaty
Dorr's Rebellion
The Mormons
Joseph Smith
Abolition
William Lloyd Garrison
General Samuel Houston
Samuel F.B. Morse

Vocabulary

partisan
annexation

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions and vocabulary, then read the article: *The Presidencies of Van Buren, Harrison, and Tyler*.
- Narrate about today's reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Define the vocabulary words in the context of the reading and put the word and its definition in the vocabulary section of your history notebook.
- Complete biography notebook pages on Van Buren, Harrison, and Tyler.
- Be sure to visit www.ArtiosHCS.com for additional resources.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the circumstances of the Financial Panic of 1837.
2. How did John Tyler move from the vice presidency to being president?
3. How do you think God feels about polygamy? (See Genesis 2:24 and I Timothy 3:2)
4. Describe the issues that forced the Webster-Ashburton Treaty regarding the northeastern boundary in 1842.
5. What caused Dorr's Rebellion in Rhode Island?
6. Describe the series of events that led the Mormons to relocate to Salt Lake City, Utah.
7. What led up to Texas being declared as The Republic of Texas and who led the people to that conclusion?
8. Who was William Lloyd Garrison and how did he further the cause of the abolitionists?
9. Who was Samuel Morse and what did he invent?
10. How did this invention change America?

Adapted for High School from the book:

History of the United States

by William M. Davidson

The Presidencies of Van Buren, Harrison, and Tyler

VAN BUREN'S ADMINISTRATION

Democratic: 1837 - 1841

Martin Van Buren, eighth president of the United States, was, like two of his predecessors, the son of a small farmer. He was admitted to the bar in 1803 and soon won distinction as an able lawyer. Like his predecessor, Andrew Jackson, Van Buren was a self-educated man, but he far excelled the former in polish and culture. He was a man of simple tastes and gracious manners,

and though a partisan in politics of the most pronounced type, he never allowed political differences to alienate him from friends who belonged to the opposite party, as is shown in the warm personal friendship existing between himself and Henry Clay.

Before his election to the presidency, he had served as attorney general and later as governor of New York. He had been United States senator from that state, and had served as Jackson's secretary of state from 1829 to 1831, when he resigned to accept the

appointment of minister to England. He never assumed the duties of that office, however, due to the fact that Calhoun, Webster, and Clay combined to secure his rejection by the Senate. The Democratic Party immediately nominated him as its candidate for vice president, and the following year he was elected to that office, thereby becoming presiding officer of the very body which had rejected his appointment to the court of England. Over the Senate he presided with dignity and fairness, his popularity won him both the Democratic nomination and the presidency.

After his retirement from the presidency, he still continued to take an interest in public affairs. Though defeated in 1840 for reelection, he again sought the nomination of his party in 1844, but failed on account of his antislavery sentiments. In 1853 he was nominated once more for the presidency by the Free-Soil Party, but was not elected.

He was born at Kinderhook, New York in 1782, and died in 1862 on his beautiful estate in Lindenwald, near his native city.

The Financial Panic of 1837

The issuing of the specie circular (by the Coinage Act, requiring payment for government land to be in gold) was one of the last acts of Jackson's administration. Van Buren now assumed all responsibility for this and committed himself to the policy of his predecessor. Banking institutions stood the strain of their gold and silver reserve as long as they could, then bank after bank suspended specie payment until not a specie-paying bank was left in the country.

The bubble of speculation, now blown to its full limit, burst, and the whole country

was overwhelmed with commercial disaster. Business house after business house closed its doors. Enterprise after enterprise shut down; every line of business in the country was overtaken by the storm; and, on account of Jackson's policy, the government was also involved in the ruin. Failures were everyday occurrences, the losses mounting up into the millions. "Hard times" prevailed among all classes of people. Bread riots occurred in New York, and hostility was shown everywhere toward the banks and speculating companies. The states could not pay their debts. The government was unable to meet its expenses. All confidence had been destroyed and trade was at a standstill by the time Van Buren called a special session of Congress to consider the state of public affairs.

The policy Van Buren adopted was to let the country recover from its business disturbances in its own way, and to aid in its recovery only by restoring the national credit. He outlined a plan known as the Independent Treasury, and for four years pressed this measure before Congress until the Independent Treasury Act, or Sub-Treasury Bill, as it is sometimes called, was passed by the body in the last year of his administration.

The Sub-Treasury Bill provided that all public money should be kept in the vaults of the United States Treasury at Washington and in sub-treasuries established by Congress, and that all payments made to or by the United States should be in gold or silver. This act for the first time in the history of the United States completely separated the financial affairs of the government from the banking interests of the country.

The sixth census showed the population of the United States to be 17,069,453—an increase in ten years of nearly six millions of people. Of this population 2,486,326 were slaves—an increase of nearly five hundred thousand in ten years. There remained in the North but 1,129 slaves.

The Presidential Election of 1840

Although business had revived somewhat as the time for the presidential election of 1840 approached, the country was still suffering from the effects of the panic of 1837. Discontent reigned everywhere, and the “hard times” were charged to Van Buren and his administration of the public affairs. And yet the Democratic Party unanimously renominated him, thereby showing their confidence in the “Little Magician,” as he was familiarly called. The Whigs again chose William Henry Harrison of Ohio as their candidate.

James G. Birney was placed in nomination at Albany, New York, by the Liberty, or Abolition Party, which declared itself in favor of using all Constitutional methods for the abolition of slavery.

The Democrats opposed the rechartering of the United States Bank, and all interference with slavery; they for the first time demanded internal improvements, came out boldly for a tariff for revenue only, and favored the sub-treasury.

The Whigs favored the revival of the bank and a protective tariff, and opposed the sub-treasury. They asked that a just limitation be put upon the president’s power of veto.

The campaign of 1840 was unique. The Republican simplicity of Harrison’s home

was made much of by his admirers, and the “log cabin and hard cider” campaign became one of the most enthusiastic presidential campaigns in the history of the country. The “coon-skin cap” became a party emblem. This was the first presidential campaign to introduce the great mass meetings and processions that have since become such a prominent feature of national elections.

“Tippecanoe and Tyler too” was successfully sung into the White House, and Harrison was inaugurated president on the 4th of March, 1841.

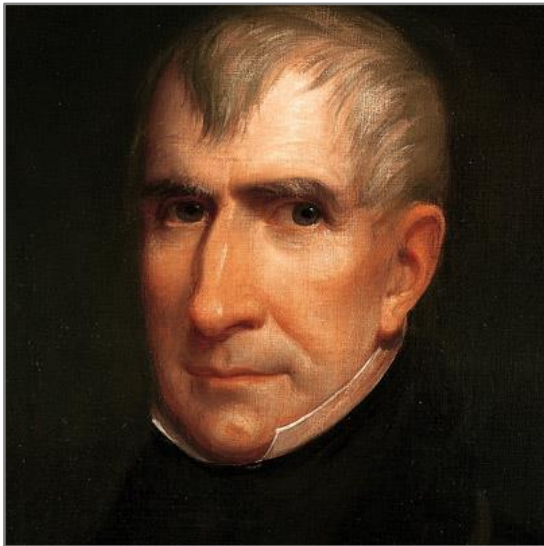
HARRISON AND TYLER’S ADMINISTRATION

Whig: 1841 - 1845

William Henry Harrison, ninth president of the United States, was the son of Benjamin Harrison, a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He was born in Berkeley, Virginia in 1773. On graduating from Hampden Sydney College, Virginia, Harrison began the study of medicine, but soon gave up that profession for a military life. He had served as a delegate to Congress from the Northwest Territory, and had been superintendent of Indian affairs. While governor of the territory of Indiana, his victory against the Native Americans at Tippecanoe had won him a national reputation. In the second war with England he had commanded the army of the west and had won a brilliant victory at the battle of the Thames. He had served as a member of Congress from Ohio, later as United States senator from that state, and still later as minister to the republic of Colombia, South America. In 1836 he was nominated

for president, but was defeated by Van Buren.

Four years later, the Whig National Convention made him their nominee, and Van Buren was again his opponent. Harrison was elected and at once surrounded himself with an able cabinet, in which Daniel Webster was his secretary of state. But just one month after his inauguration the country was shocked by the news of his sudden death. It was the first death of a chief magistrate while in office and came as a great blow to the Whig Party, which had hoped for much from his administration.



President William Henry Harrison

Harrison, while not a brilliant man, had shown great ability as an administrator and was a man of great prudence and common sense—a straightforward man of the people. He died at his post of duty in Washington April 4, 1841. Two days later the vice president, John Tyler, took the oath of office and succeeded to the presidency.

John Tyler, tenth president of the United States, was, like many of his predecessors, a Virginian. He was graduated from William and Mary College,

and was soon thereafter admitted to the bar. He entered public life in 1811 as a member of the legislature of Virginia, and later served as governor of the state. He represented Virginia in both houses of Congress, where he won distinction as a United States senator.

Tyler came to the presidency under peculiar circumstances. It was the first time in the history of the government that a vice-president succeeded to the office. Of course, all knew that such a succession was not impossible, but the leaders had given little serious thought to such an event.

Tyler was a man of strong Democratic tendencies, although somewhat independent of party ties. He had been elected vice president by the Whigs, with whom he had lately affiliated on account of his opposition to Jackson and Van Buren, as well as on account of his refusal to submit to all the dictations of the Democratic leaders in Congress. It was known that he differed from the Whigs on the question of renewing the United States Bank, and that he was an advocate of “state rights.” The Whigs, hoping to gain the doubtful southern vote, winked at Tyler’s opposition to the bank and placed his name on the ticket with that of Harrison, having no thought that the reins of government would soon fall into his hands.

He retired from office in 1845 to his estate in Sherwood Forest, a few miles from his native town, and was in retirement until 1861, when he became a member of the Peace Convention called by President Buchanan to avert the issue of civil war. He later advised the secession of Virginia, renounced his allegiance to the United States, and was soon after elected to represent the seceded state of Virginia in the

Confederate Congress. He died in Richmond, Virginia, in 1862.

The United States Bank and the Quarrel Between Tyler and Congress

Before Harrison's death he had issued a call for a session of Congress, which convened in the following May and continued in session until September. During that time there was constant clashing between Tyler and the Whig majority in Congress. A bill repealing the Sub-Treasury Act was promptly passed. There having been many business failures during the recent commercial disaster, Congress sought to relieve businessmen in all sections of the country from their debts by passing a general bankruptcy law. With the Independent Treasury out of the way, Congress sought to restore the United States Bank by passing an act rechartering it. To the chagrin of the Whigs, Tyler vetoed the bill. The party leaders now sought a conference with the president and secured his approval of a bill looking to the recharter of the bank. This bill was promptly passed through Congress, but Tyler, disregarding his pledge, again used his power of veto.

The Whigs, angered by this unexpected opposition from the man whom they had been instrumental in placing in the presidential chair, bitterly denounced Tyler as a traitor. Led by Clay, they read him out of the party and forced him, during the remainder of this administration, to act with the Democratic Party. The entire Cabinet resigned with the single exception of Webster, who remained until he had settled the northeastern boundary dispute with England.

When the Whig Congress of 1841 convened, it found itself facing a deficit of

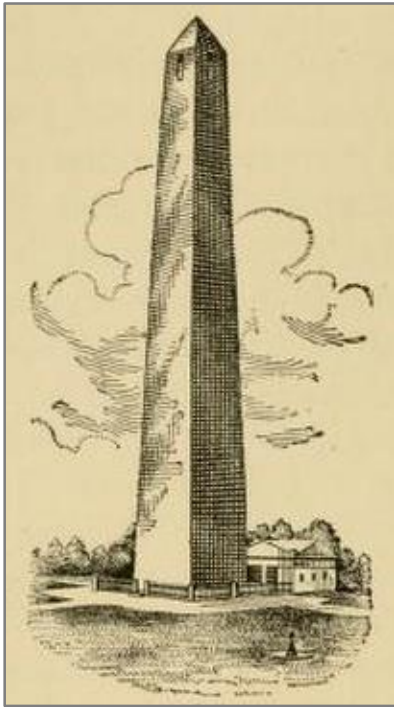
eleven million dollars inherited from Van Buren's administration. The time had also arrived when duties were to be reduced to the lowest point, as provided in Clay's Compromise Tariff of 1833. The Whigs, true to their party pledges, passed a tariff act which was promptly vetoed by Tyler. Another act was now prepared, which met with a similar fate. Millard Fillmore then came forward with a measure which, through his personal influence, he induced Tyler to support. This bill became law in 1842 and remained in force four years. It was chiefly a revenue bill, though slightly protective. It soon discharged the deficit, and by the end of Tyler's administration another surplus had accumulated in the Treasury.

The Webster-Ashburton Treaty: the Northeastern Boundary – 1842

Since the treaty of 1783 there had been a constant dispute between the United States and Great Britain over the northeastern boundary—particularly that portion located on the line between Maine and New Brunswick. This dispute had at times threatened the peaceful relations between the two countries. All efforts to settle it satisfactorily had failed until the year 1842, when the two governments agreed to refer the question at issue to Daniel Webster as secretary of state, and Lord Ashburton as the representative of Great Britain.

By the treaty they made, the northeastern boundary was established at its present limits—from the mouth of the St. Croix River on the Atlantic to the St. Lawrence River. The treaty also provided for fixing the northern boundary of the United States westward from the upper extremity of Lake Huron along the present

boundary line, to the crest of the Rocky Mountains, leaving the northwestern boundary—the northern boundary of Oregon—still unsettled.



Bunker Hill Monument

The year 1842 also marks the completion of the Bunker Hill monument, located on the crest of Bunker Hill, Boston, Massachusetts. When the Marquis de Lafayette visited in 1825, that hero laid the corner-stone and Daniel Webster, then in the prime of life, delivered the oration. At the completion of the monument in 1842, Webster again, at the sixty, delivered an oration to an audience of twenty-five thousands of his fellow countrymen.

The occasion was one of great patriotic interest in which the whole nation joined. All hearts were stirred as the great orator referred to Lafayette as the “electric spark through which liberty had been transmitted from the new to the old world,” and in a burst of the grandest eloquence paid tribute to the soldiers of the Revolution. The

reference was all the more stirring as there sat upon the platform with the orator a few old veterans—gray, grizzled, and bent with the weight of years—the remnant of the army of the Revolution.

Dorr’s Rebellion in Rhode Island – 1843

Rhode Island had for two hundred years acted under the charter which had been granted to Roger Williams by Charles II. This, her only constitution, contained some provisions which were not in keeping with the growth of republican ideas in America. One clause was particularly objectionable—that restricting the right to vote to property holders. At the time of the adoption of a new constitution in 1843, two rival parties contested for the control of the state. The “Law and Order Party,” acting under the old charter, elected a governor and proceeded, in a regular way, to organize the state government under the new constitution. The “Suffrage Party,” throwing the charter aside, elected Thomas W. Dorr as governor and organized a rival government. A clash resulted, but Dorr’s rebellion was soon suppressed by the aid of the United States troops. Dorr was tried for treason in Rhode Island and imprisoned, but afterwards released.

The Patroon War – 1844

A domestic disturbance also occurred in New York, called the “Patroon War,” growing out of the old “patron system” established in 1629.

Owing to the generosity of the wealthy proprietor of one of these rich estates—the Van Rensselaer—in the vicinity of Albany, rents had not been collected from the tenants for several years. The proprietor

dying in 1839, his heir undertook to force the collection of all back rents. This collection the tenants resisted, even going so far as to heap indignities upon officers of the law who were sent to enforce the collection of the rents. Tenants on other estates imitated their example. Finally, open revolt resulted, and riot and bloodshed followed. The aid of the military was called in, and the revolt was suppressed. The tenants continued to resist and sought relief in the New York Courts of Appeals, which gave a decision in 1852 largely sustaining the contention of the anti-renters, although the matter has not to the time of this writing been quite satisfactorily settled.

The Mormons

Another domestic disturbance occurred, this time of a religious nature. The Mormons, under the leadership of their prophet, Joseph Smith, settled in Jackson County, Missouri, where they rapidly multiplied until they numbered some fifteen hundred people. Their polygamous practices and teachings were so objectionable to their neighbors that the state of Missouri, through the aid of its militia, ejected them from the state in 1839. Crossing the Mississippi into the state of Illinois, they laid out the city of Nauvoo on a high bluff overlooking the river, and there erected a Mormon temple. Here they continued to increase more rapidly than before, their settlement numbering ten thousand persons by the year 1844.

The greatest hostility was manifested toward this sect. They were held responsible, perhaps unjustly, for many murders and thefts which had been committed in the vicinity. Their doctrines were abhorred. An uprising against them

was threatened when Smith and his brother were arrested, taken across the river into Missouri, and imprisoned at Carthage. Here the people stormed the jail in which the “prophet” was confined, and killed Smith and his brother. Determined to drive the Mormons from the state, the Illinois legislature annulled the charter of the city of Nauvoo. Acts of violence continuing against them, the Mormons now determined to retire beyond the bounds of civilization. They sojourned for a while in the vicinity of Council Bluff, Iowa. A few years later they transplanted their entire settlement beyond the Rocky Mountains and began the building of a “Mormon Empire” at Salt Lake City. Brigham Young succeeded Smith as the Mormon prophet.

The “Gag-Rule” and the Right of Petition

In 1836 the Republic of Texas applied for admission to the United States. The abolition societies at once sent petition after petition to Congress opposing its annexation on grounds of slavery. This angered the slaveholding members of the House of Representatives, which on the suggestion of the southern members revived an old rule prohibiting the House from receiving petitions in any way referring to the question of slavery. Ex-President John Quincy Adams, then a member of the House, with all the powers of his eloquence protested against this “gag-rule” as an infringement of the constitutional rights of the individual citizen of the Republic.

From that time until the year 1842, the “Old Man Eloquent” persistently attacked the rule and fought for the “right of petition.” He was abused on all sides by

members from the slaveholding states, but he kept up the fight. On one occasion he introduced a petition signed by a number of slaves, whereupon the wrath of the southern members knew no bounds. The greatest disorder prevailed in the House when the high falsetto voice of Adams rang out clear above the din as he read the concluding clause in the petition—begging the Congress of the United States not to abolish the institution of slavery. The slaveholding members, disconcerted and baffled, saw nothing laughable in this incident, and never forgave Adams for presenting the petition.

The whole matter came to a climax January 1, 1842, when Adams presented another petition signed by forty-five citizens of Haverhill, Massachusetts, this time protesting against the institution of slavery and praying that the Union be dissolved. Adams at once moved that the petition be referred to a special committee, with instructions to report why it should not be granted.

The reading of the petition raised a storm. Adams was greeted with cries of “Villain!”—“Curse him!”—“Expel him!”—and the House adjourned in the greatest confusion. The next day a resolution of censure was introduced, and its adoption urged in the most vindictive manner. Adams replied in language suited to the occasion and would not be silenced. When asked how long he expected to hold the floor, his reply was, “Burke took three months for his speech in the impeachment of Warren Hastings, and I think I may get through in ninety days or less.”

The southern members, now seeing that opposition to so fearless a champion was useless, voted that the resolution of censure

be laid upon the table. Adams had won in the final struggle of his life. Three years later, in 1845, the “gag-rule” was rescinded.

Abolition

The opposition to the “right of petition” had tended greatly to increase the abolition sentiment in the north. Since the year 1832 abolition societies and antislavery societies had been organized everywhere and now counted their membership by the thousands.

William Lloyd Garrison, with his weekly newspaper, “The Liberator,” had kept the whole country aroused. Through his influence abolition literature had been circulated even in the South. In Jackson’s time, the postmaster-general had directed that all such literature be excluded from the mails. This action only hastened the growth of the abolition movement.

From 1833 to 1837, Elijah P. Lovejoy edited “The St. Louis Observer,” an abolition paper in which he ardently attacked slavery. On account of violent opposition from the proslavery element in the city, he had moved in 1836 across the river to Alton, Illinois, where he was attacked by a mob and killed the following year, and his press destroyed and thrown into the river. This tragedy on the Mississippi bluff caused great outcry throughout the country, which grew in intensity as it rolled eastward into the New England states, where it gave to the antislavery cause its most brilliant advocate—Wendell Phillips. In a thrilling address at a mass meeting in Faneuil Hall—the Cradle of Liberty—made in reply to a speech by the state’s attorney of Massachusetts, in which that officer sought to excuse the mob at Alton, Phillips so

roused his audience and the entire country that he at once sprang into national prominence as the champion of human liberty. From that day on, the name of Wendell Phillips was coupled with that of William Lloyd Garrison—the great leader of the antislavery forces.



Republic of Texas

The Republic of Texas, a Disturbing Element in National Politics

The greatest event in the administration of Tyler was the annexation of Texas. Moses Austin of Connecticut, having secured permission from the Spanish government, had founded a colony in the province of Texas in 1821, where he took with him the spirit of Yankee thrift and enterprise. The soil being rich and the climate attractive, the colony made rapid growth. Its success at once attracted attention in the United States. Jackson, while president, had made an effort to purchase the province of Texas from the Mexican government, but all offers were rejected. This failure, however, did not check the tide of immigration which

continued to pour into the province of Texas from the United States.

Austin and his followers carried with them the institution of slavery. This institution was now attacked in 1835 by the Mexican government, which issued a proclamation granting freedom to every slave in Mexican territory and making Mexico a consolidated state. This proclamation aroused the opposition of the Texans, who immediately declared their independence and set up a government at Austin. A war resulted, which under the leadership of General Samuel Houston was fought to a successful issue at the battle of San Jacinto, whereupon the Texas Republic was established in 1836 with a constitution favoring slavery. General Houston became its president. The limits of the new republic were not clearly defined. Mexico insisted that Texas did not extend beyond the Nueces on the southwest and stopped on the west at a boundary far within the Texas claims. In fact Texas asserted the right to over twice the territory which Mexico admitted to belong to her. Here were the seeds of future war. The independence of the Texas Republic was soon acknowledged by the United States, England, France and Belgium.

Texas at once applied for admission into the American Union. From that date in 1836 until its annexation was accomplished, Texas was a disturbing political question in national politics.

Samuel F.B. Morse and the Telegraph – 1844

In the year 1844 Samuel F. B. Morse, while sitting in a small office in Baltimore, placed his fingers upon the key of a small magnetic instrument which, with its

mysterious clickety-click-click, instantly flashed to a friend in Washington this message: “What hath God wrought!”—the first telegram in America.

At the time the Democratic National Convention was in session in Baltimore. Morse accordingly sent a telegram to Silas Wright in Washington notifying him of his nomination for vice president. Morse’s assistants at Washington transmitted Wright’s reply, declining the nomination. This was the first news ever sent by telegraph wire. On the same day the news of the nomination of James K. Polk to the presidency was flashed to Washington, and on the following morning it appeared in the daily papers of that city. The people read in astonishment, almost unable to believe, but later applauded the name of Professor Morse as one of America’s greatest inventors.

Like all inventions, the electro-magnetic telegraph had cost infinite patience and unmeasured toil. Morse had begun his experiments twelve years before, and by 1834 had demonstrated to his own satisfaction that messages could be transmitted to distant points by wire through the agency of electricity. In 1835 he had submitted his invention to Congress and asked for an appropriation to construct a telegraph line between the cities of Baltimore and Washington—a distance of forty miles—but his request was refused. Morse then visited the countries of Europe, where he met with no better success. Returning to America, he persistently besieged Congress until that body in 1843 voted an appropriation of \$30,000 to construct the line for which he had asked in 1835. In 1844 this line was completed with

the startling, though successful, results here narrated.

The success of the telegraph was instantaneous. It quickly became one of the indispensable agencies in the transmission of news and the transaction of business. In the United States alone nearly 200,000 miles of telegraph line were installed, using nearly a million miles of wire. As the years went by, Morse’s instruments gradually improved and the efficiency of the telegraph service increased. The astonishment of the world was not greater in 1844 than it was in 1902, when Marconi, through the agency of “wireless telegraphy,” flashed a message from the shores of America across the Atlantic Ocean.

The Presidential Election in 1844

The presidential election of 1844 was held prior to the admission of Texas, which became an issue in the campaign.

Henry Clay of Kentucky was placed in nomination by the Whigs, who now opposed the annexation of Texas and asked that a restriction be placed on the veto power of the president. James K. Polk of Tennessee was nominated by the Democrats, who declared for the annexation of Texas and upheld the veto power.

James G. Birney of New York was again nominated by the Liberty Party, which opposed slavery. This party in 1840 had received but seven thousand votes; in this election it received sixty thousand votes. It was strong in New York, Birney’s own state, where it is said to have so successfully recruited votes from the Whig Party that the electoral vote of New York went to the Democrats — to which Clay’s defeat was

attributed more than any other cause. Polk was elected with George M. Dallas of Pennsylvania as vice president.

**New States Admitted Into the Union:
Florida – 1845**

Before the admission of Texas, Florida, with a constitution favoring slavery, was admitted into the Union as the twenty-seventh state.

Annexation of Texas – 1845

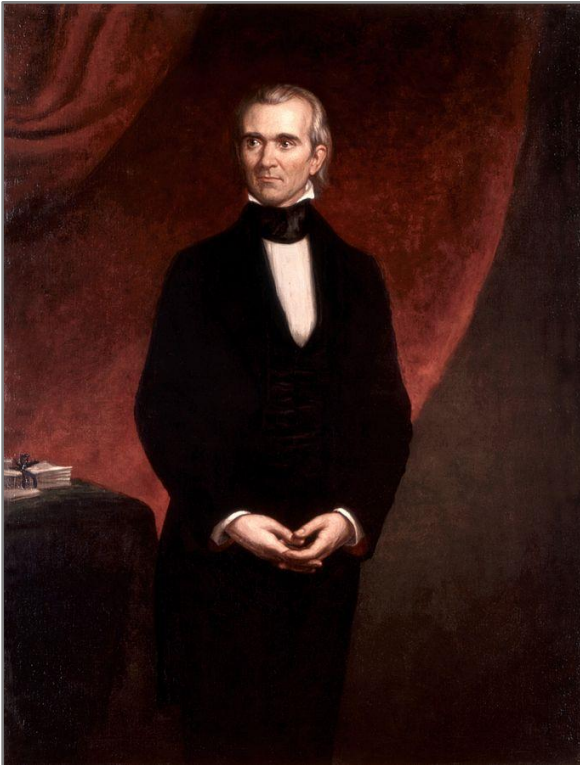
When Texas first applied for admission in 1836, Congress was flooded by petitions from the North opposing its admission on the grounds of slavery. On the other hand, annexation was strongly urged in the South. And yet neither political party seemed able to unite all its forces on either side of the question—the southern Democrats and

“states’ righters” favored it, while the northern Democrats and the “free-state” Whigs arrayed themselves against it. The question therefore became a sectional issue. Van Buren, though pressured by the southern Democrats, opposed annexation during his entire term. During Tyler’s administration, however, the Democrats, under the leadership of John C. Calhoun, made annexation a party issue and declared for the admission of Texas. The Whigs, under the leadership of Henry Clay, now united in opposition. This precipitated a bitter contest, in which those favoring annexation won. Congress, on December 29, 1845, passed a joint resolution annexing Texas to the United States and admitting it into the Union as the twenty-eighth state of the Republic.

Lesson Two

History Overview and Assignments President Polk, the War with Mexico and the California Gold Rush

The presidency of James K. Polk was filled with the war with Mexico, expansion of the United States, and the California Gold Rush. All the while, the tension between those believing in the institution of slavery and the abolitionists continued to escalate.



President James Knox Polk

Reading and Assignments

- Review the discussion questions and vocabulary, then read the article: *President Polk, the War with Mexico and the California Gold Rush*.
- Narrate about today's reading using the appropriate notebook page. Be sure to answer the discussion questions and include key people, events, and dates within the narration.
- Define the vocabulary words in the context of the reading and put the word and its definition in the vocabulary section of your history notebook.
- Complete a biography notebook page on Polk.
- For additional resources visit www.ArtiosHCS.com.

Key People, Places, and Events

James K. Polk
General Zackary Taylor
James Fenimore Cooper
General Winfield Scot
John C. Fremont
Kit Carson
Santa Ana
The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
John W. Marshall
John A. Sutter

Vocabulary

dragoon
precipitated
routed
armistice
arbitration
forty-niner

Discussion Questions

1. Why were many abolitionists opposed to the war with Mexico?
2. Why did the Whig party also oppose the war with Mexico? Were their suspicions correct?
3. What were the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo?
4. Who were involved in the dispute over the northwestern boundary between Maine and New Brunswick? How was it settled?
5. What were some of the results of the fast population growth in California during the Gold Rush?
6. In what ways did the Gold Rush reveal the sinfulness that lives within the hearts of people?

Adapted for High School from the book:

History of the United States

by William M. Davidson

President Polk, the War with Mexico and the California Gold Rush

POLK'S ADMINISTRATION

Democratic: 1845 - 1849

James K. Polk, the eleventh president of the United States, was the son of a farmer and a graduate of the University of North Carolina. He was born in 1795 and moved with his father to Tennessee, where he was admitted to the bar in 1820. He was elected congressman from Tennessee five years later, and served as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee in the House of Representatives. For five sessions, from 1835 to 1839, he was speaker of the house, which brought him prominently before the public. In 1839 he was elected governor of Tennessee, but was not reelected two years later. In 1844 he was nominated by the Democratic National Convention at Baltimore as a "safe" man, and because he favored the annexation of Texas.

On assuming the presidency, he

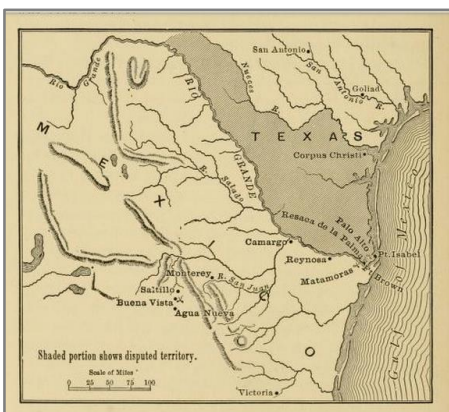
surrounded himself with an especially able Cabinet, among whom were James Buchanan, afterwards president of the United States, Robert J. Walker, an able financier, and George Bancroft, the historian.

It was during Polk's administration that political parties began to divide more and more over the extension of slavery. The very question of territorial expansion had become interlocked with the slavery question and became a national issue of the greatest importance, threatening the permanency of the Union. Polk, however, reared in the political school of Andrew Jackson, apparently had no fears of disunion and, like Jackson, consistently advocated national unity.

He declined a renomination to the presidency, and at the end of his term of office retired to private life in Nashville, Tennessee, where he died a few months later, in 1849.

Dispute Over the Boundary of Texas

When Texas in 1836 had declared her independence of Mexico she had claimed as her southwestern boundary the Rio Grande River, although the land between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande had been settled early in the seventeenth century by Spaniards and had been in undisputed possession of the Spaniards and Mexicans ever since. Mexico claimed the Nueces River was the southwestern boundary of Texas. When the news reached Mexico that Texas had been annexed, the Mexicans clamored for war and Texas sent an urgent request to President Polk to dispatch an army of United States troops to the frontier to protect the citizens of Texas against the threatened attack of Mexico. President Polk at once dispatched General Zackary Taylor with an army to the Mexican frontier to await developments.



Disputed territory

Taylor's Army and Occupation

General Taylor took a position at Corpus Christi on the west flank of the Nueces River, the actual Mexican frontier, and for several months there was nothing to indicate intended hostilities beyond the protection of Texas as one of the states of the Republic. In November, 1845, President Polk sent John Slidell as envoy

extraordinary to Mexico to negotiate with that government a settlement of the boundary question. Upon Mexico's refusal to recognize Slidell, Polk ordered Taylor to advance, and on the 8th of March, 1846, Taylor with a large army marched into the disputed territory. Selecting Point Isabel on the Gulf as a base of operations, he rapidly moved forward to the Rio Grande River and built Fort Brown, across from Matamoras, where a strong force of Mexicans had gathered under General Arista. On April 26, 1846, a small detachment of American dragoons under Major Seth B. Thornton was attacked by a force of Mexican lancers near Fort Brown, where the first blood of the war was shed. After a desperate fight Thornton was captured, whereupon more Mexicans soon crossed and began threatening Fort Brown. Taylor, fearing that the American army might be cut off from its base of supplies at Point Isabel, left the fort in charge of a garrison of three hundred men and immediately returned to the Point.

General Arista, believing that the American army had left for the coast in a precipitated retreat, at once moved an army of six thousand men across the river and took a strong position at Palo Alto, with the view of attacking Fort Brown. Taylor, having secured his supplies, began his return march to Fort Brown, and on the morning of the 8th of May unexpectedly came upon the Mexican troops at Palo Alto and at once gave battle. The Mexicans were driven from the field closely pursued by Taylor. On the following day he overtook them at Resaca de la Palma, where he so completely routed them that they did not cease in the headlong flight until they had placed the Rio Grande between themselves and their pursuers.

DECLARATION OF WAR

May 11, 1846

When news of Major Thornton's capture reached Washington, President Polk at once sent a message to Congress notifying that body that "Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, invaded her territory, and shed American blood upon American soil." His message recommended an immediate declaration of war since, he said, "war exists, and notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself." Congress promptly responded to the president's request, and on the 11th of May, 1846, declared war against Mexico, passed a bill making an appropriation of ten million dollars, and voted to raise an army of fifty thousand volunteers.

The war spirit ran high in the United States, particularly in the South. To the call for troops fully three hundred thousand volunteers responded, from which such splendid armies were selected that the Americans did not lose a single battle during the entire period of the war.

Opposition to the War

However, there were many citizens of the United States who opposed the issue of war with Mexico on high moral grounds. They urged that the Republic would place herself in an unfavorable light before the eyes of the civilized world should she wage a war against a sister republic for the purpose of despoiling her of her territorial possessions; and further, that the war was in the interest of the extension of slavery, and as such it would tend to provoke discord among the states of the American Union. James Russell Lowell wrote part of the first

series of the "Biglow Papers" against it, and James Fenimore Cooper did the same in his novel entitled "Jack Tier, or The Florida Reef."

The abolition element in the North was particularly strong in its opposition to the war. The moral sentiment of this region condemned every movement which tended to further extend slavery, and in other particulars condemned the war as unjustifiable. It was outspoken in opposition to a war, the disguised purpose of which was the "spoils of territory."

The war was also opposed on political grounds by the Whig party, which placed itself in opposition to a declaration of war when the president sent his message to Congress recommending war on the ground that American blood had been shed on American soil. Abraham Lincoln, then a Whig member from Illinois, introduced a resolution in the house known as the "spot resolution." In this he asked that the president be requested to give information to Congress designating geographically the particular "spot" where hostilities had begun and to prove that "the spot" was part of the territory of the United States—intimating thereby that the president had needlessly and uselessly precipitated the struggle at the prompting of the slaveholding states, in order that an excuse might be furnished to despoil Mexico of the provinces of New Mexico and California, which they hoped later to erect into slave states. This bit of history gives us a glimpse of the humor of Abraham Lincoln and reveals his keen insight into political methods. He divined that the war would be waged in the interest of the institution of slavery, and that therefore it would terminate in a war of invasion and conquest.

The result of the war justified Lincoln's conclusions.

Although nearly two-thirds of the citizen volunteers came from south of Mason and Dixon's line, yet even the New England states responded to the call and many came from the northwestern frontier. The Whigs had been the principal opponents of the war, yet the chief military renown of the war was won by this party—the two great commanders and leaders, Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott, being Whigs in politics.

The Plan of the War

General Winfield Scott, commander-in-chief of the American forces, immediately planned the invasion and conquest of Mexico. He first directed that Commodore Robert F. Stockton be sent around Cape Horn to assume command of the American squadron on the Pacific coast, which was then under command of Commodore John D. Sloat. This squadron was to attack the Spanish defenses on the coasts of Mexico and California and establish a blockade on the Pacific. General Scott then divided the fifty thousand troops placed at his disposal into three divisions.

(1) General Stephen W. Kearney was placed in command of the army of the west, with instructions to start from Fort Leavenworth, cross the Rocky Mountains, and conquer the Mexican provinces of New Mexico and California.

(2) General Taylor with his army of occupation was directed to cross the Rio Grande and subdue and hold the Mexican provinces in the North.

(3) General Scott himself, in command of the army of the center, was to land at some point near Vera Cruz on the Mexican coast, and with his army of invasion

penetrate the heart of the enemy's country and capture the City of Mexico.

Taylor's Campaign South of the Rio Grande - September, 1846 to February, 1847

General Taylor in the meantime had attacked and taken Matamoras. In September, 1846, he proceeded up the river to attack the Mexicans, at the strongly fortified city of Monterey. He found that place defended by ten thousand troops under General Pedro de Ampudia. But Taylor, always ready for battle—so much so that among his own soldiers he was called "Old Rough and Ready"—charged the defenses with such dash and daring that the American army, though greatly inferior in numbers, carried everything before it. Within six days, after the most desperate fighting, it had penetrated the very heart of the city, forced the surrender of General Ampudia, and unfurled the Stars and Stripes above the Grand Plaza of Monterey on September 24, 1846.

At this juncture an armistice was declared for two months, owing to the reopening of negotiations between the Mexican government and President Polk. When the truce ended, General Taylor received the startling intelligence that an army of twenty thousand men under Santa Anna was marching northward from the City of Mexico to crush the American army of occupation. Nothing daunted, Taylor proceeded to place his troops in readiness and prepared to give battle. Marching out of Monterey he selected a field for battle at Buena Vista. The position of the Americans was indeed critical. On February 22 the whole Mexican army came pouring through the gorges and over the hills which

surrounded the plateau upon which the army had entrenched itself ready for the attack. Santa Anna, confident of victory, asked for a parley under a flag of truce and demanded the immediate surrender of General Taylor's army. "General Taylor never surrenders," was the defiant reply, whereupon the opposing forces joined in the issue of battle. During the first day the Americans were steadily pushed back by the overwhelming numbers of the enemy. On the morning of the 23rd, the Mexicans made an effort to outflank the American position but were completely foiled, with the result that they broke and fled in greatest disorder. During the night Santa Anna withdrew, leaving General Taylor and his army in undisputed possession of the battlefield.

Buena Vista was the most brilliant engagement of the war. It made Taylor the popular hero and won for him the presidency.

Kearney's Campaign and the Conquest of New Mexico and California -

June 1846 to January 1847

In the meantime the army of the west, under General Kearney, had started out from Leavenworth in June, 1846. Reaching Santa Fe, Kearney raised the American flag and the Mexicans yielded without resistance.

Kearney then marched across the burning sands of the desert into California, where events had been taking place which anticipated his coming. John C. Fremont had for several years been engaged in a government expedition of survey and exploration in the Rocky Mountains and Sierra Nevada regions. He arrived in California at a time when the Americans

were protesting against Mexican interference. The settlers appealed to him for help, since he was an officer. Considering the Mexican provocation sufficient, he took it upon himself to champion the cause of his countrymen. A number of engagements ensued in which the Americans were, without exception, victorious. This was all done in actual ignorance of the declaration of war.

At about this same time, the American squadron which had been ordered to patrol the California coast in anticipation of just such an event put in an appearance. Commodore Sloat bombarded and captured Monterey, and Commodore Stockton, San Diego. On hearing of these events Fremont at once joined Sloat in a combined attack upon Los Angeles, where the American flag was raised and a military government established over the conquered territory.

In the meantime Kearney, with Kit Carson, the famous scout, as his guide, arrived on the scene and completed the work begun by Fremont and the two naval officers. A rebellion on the part of the Mexicans was suppressed by Kearney in the final battle of San Gabriel on June 8, 1847, and the subjugation of California was complete.

General Scott's Campaign and the End of the War - March to September, 1847

Just one month after Taylor's great victory at Buena Vista, General Scott landed an American force of twelve thousand men at Vera Cruz and at once began an attack upon the Mexican stronghold of San Juan de Ulloa on March 29, 1847. Six days later both the city and the castle surrendered. This victory inspired the Americans with the

greatest confidence, and after a week spent in preparation, the army began its triumphal march to the City of Mexico, over the same route made famous by Cortez three hundred years before.

Santa Anna, now fully alive to the dangers that beset his country, took charge of the Mexican army in person and disputed the advance of the invading army at every strategic point. He first took position at the pass of Cerro Gordo, where he was beaten on the 18th of April. On the 13th of May the victorious army marched to the ancient and sacred city of Puebla, which offered no resistance to the American advance. On the 7th of August the American army reached the summit of the mountains which overlooked the beautiful valley of Mexico, dotted with green fields, villages, and lakes. From those lofty heights the American soldiers beheld a populous city surrounded by snow-capped peaks and gazed in astonishment upon the same landscape which had excited the admiration of the conquering Spaniard at the very beginning of American history. A few minor engagements took place, in which the American army began a series of victories which ended in complete triumph. Contreras fell on the morning of August 20, after a sharp engagement of seventeen minutes, and during that day separate divisions of the army successfully captured the several fortresses on the heights of Churubusco and laid open the way to the very gates of the city.

The Mexicans made their final stand at the citadel of Chapultepec, which fell on the 13th of September. At sunset the American soldiers swept through the gates and pitched their tents in the suburbs of the city, and at sunrise on the 14th of September,

1847, the army entered the ancient city and took possession.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo - February 2, 1848

After the downfall of the City of Mexico, the American government sent peace commissioners to confer with the Mexican Congress in session at Guadalupe Hidalgo. Negotiations were satisfactorily completed and the treaty signed on February 2, 1848.

By the terms of the treaty, Mexico acknowledged the Rio Grande as the southern boundary of Texas and ceded to the United States the whole of upper California and New Mexico, thereby adding 500,000 acres of land to the public domain of the United States. For this vast expanse of territory the United States, on her part, paid Mexico \$15,000,000 in gold, and assumed all debts due from the Mexican government to American citizens to the amount of \$3,500,000.

The Northwestern Boundary Established – 1846

While the Texas boundary was settled by the issue of war, the Oregon boundary was settled by the peaceful method of arbitration. The dispute over the northwestern boundary had been longstanding between England and the United States. Both countries claimed the whole territory between the parallels of 54° 40' and 49°.

Since the year of 1818 the two countries, by mutual agreement, had jointly occupied the disputed territory. Either government wishing to terminate this agreement pledged itself to give the other twelve months' notice. The United States having served such notice on England, the question

was finally disposed of the 1846 by a treaty which arranged a fair compromise of the conflicting claims by establishing the northern boundary at its present limit of the fourth-ninth parallel of north latitude.



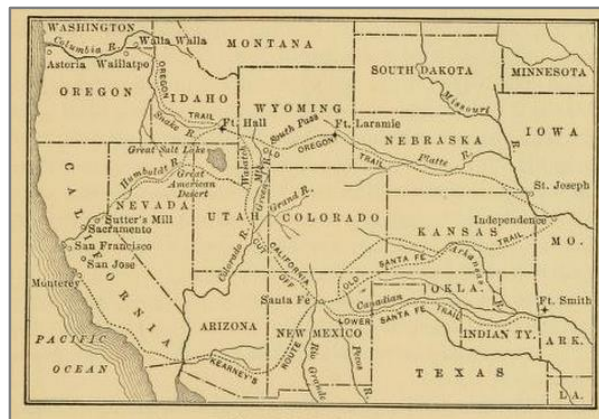
Map of the lands in dispute

The Tariff of 1846: the Walker Tariff

In this administration the majority party in Congress passed a bill known as the Walker Tariff—named after Robert J. Walker, secretary of the Treasury. It reduced the duties on imports so that they corresponded nearly to the schedule provided by Clay’s compromise tariff in 1833. Its chief purpose was to raise a revenue, although on some articles it was slightly protective. The Wilmot Proviso – 1846

During the Mexican War President Polk sent a message to Congress asking for an appropriation of money which might be offered to the Mexican government in the settlement of the dispute. A bill appropriating two million dollars for that purpose was at once introduced in the

House of Representatives, and then the slavery question was brought prominently before the country by David Wilmot, a Democratic congressman from Pennsylvania. Wilmot offered an amendment to the bill providing for the exclusion of slavery from any territory thus acquired. The northern Democrats and Whigs supported his amendment, which passed the house, but not the senate. The amendment provided that “neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of such territory, except for crime, whereof the party shall first be duly convicted.”



The trails to California

The amendment became known as the “Wilmot Proviso” and since it involved the whole question of slavery in relation to new territory, it became a national question. As the war with Mexico progressed, this proviso was time after time pressed upon Congress, by the antislavery advocates, but as often defeated. The discussion in Congress and throughout the country were heated and bitter in the extreme and led to the formation of the Free-Soil Party, which now absorbed the Liberty Party and place itself squarely against the further extension of slavery.

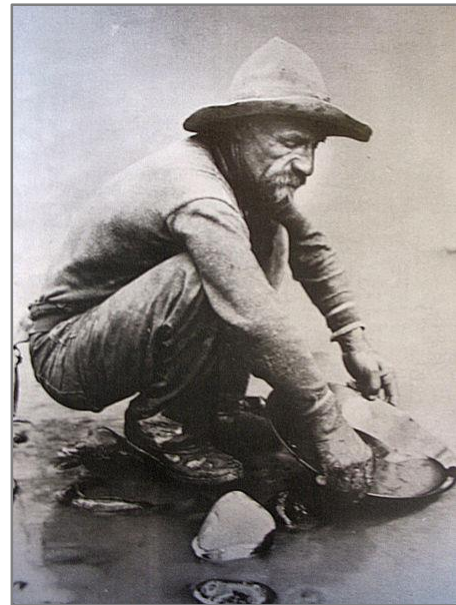
DISCOVERY OF GOLD IN CALIFORNIA

The “Forty-niners”

In the year of 1849 the world was thrown into a fever of excitement by the announcement of the discovery of gold on the Sutter settlement in California the previous year. The man to whom belonged the honor of this discovery was John W. Marshall, a laborer on the large estate of John A. Sutter, near the present city of Sacramento. While overseeing the digging of a mill race, Marshall was astonished to see the precious metal in the sand which was being shoveled from the ditch. An attempt was made to keep the discovery a secret, but the news rapidly spread and swept throughout the California settlements like wildfire. Gold seekers by the hundreds came flocking to Sutter’s Mill, and the whole region was soon a tented camp of fortune hunters. The news was passed on to the outside world, and in a few weeks was exciting the people in every state of the American union. It leaped the Atlantic Ocean and spread throughout the countries of Europe. It seemed that the news was borne upon the wings of the wind to the very ends of the earth. By the year 1849 news of the discovery was known in every civilized country on the globe.

People arrived in California by the thousands. In six months the port of San Francisco had grown from a village of a few huts to a city of fifteen thousand people, and the population of California from less than ten thousand to more than one hundred thousand—two years later it had reached a quarter of a million. All articles of food were sold at fabulous prices, the sanitary

conditions of the mining camps were poor, and as a result great suffering followed. Lawlessness and disorder prevailed everywhere. In order to assist the officers of the law the best citizens organize themselves into “vigilance committees,” which with firm, though often high-handed justice, brought order out of chaos and established the reign of law.



Forty-niner panning for gold

The greatest excitement prevailed everywhere when the rush of the “Forty-niners” to the gold fields of California began. Ships loaded with men went flying around Cape Horn. Other adventurers took the “short cut” by the way of the Isthmus of Panama. Ox trains by the hundreds, often with from forty to fifty “prairie schooners” in a single train, started from the states east of the Mississippi by the overland route to California. They wearily wended their way across the plains along the line of the Oregon trail, westward to Fort Hall; thence down through the Humboldt valley and across the Sierra Nevada’s to Sutter’s Mill; or along either the upper or lower Santa Fe

trails to Fe, thence along Kearney's route to Monterey, or by the California "cut-off" across the Wasatch Mountains or the Great Basin, through the Humboldt Valley, to their destination in California. It is said that a traveler on the Oregon Trail in the valley of the Platte River counted as many as four hundred and fifty-nine of these "prairie schooners" within a distance of ten miles. These ox trains mapped out the routes along which at least two great continental railways have since been built.

The discovery of gold in California led to the rapid development of that state and later of all the western states. As a factor in the western expansion of the United States, gold has performed an important part. To it is due the construction of several continental railroads, which have bound the American Union all the more firmly and compactly together, soon making San Francisco but five days distant from New York City.

The wealth from the mines of the west has, since the discovery of gold in 1849, mounted into the millions. The mines of California alone have added a billion dollars to the wealth of the world.

New States Admitted:

Iowa - 1846;

Wisconsin - 1848:

Oregon Territory

Organized – 1848

During Polk's administration two states were admitted—Iowa in 1846 as the twenty-ninth state, and Wisconsin in 1849 as the thirtieth. Both adopted constitutions forbidding slavery.

In the last named year the contest over slavery in the Oregon country was fought

out, terminating in the organization of Oregon territory, with a provision forever excluding slavery from within its limits.

The Presidential Election of 1848

The excitement over the war had hardly subsided when the presidential campaign began. Polk having signified his intention of retiring to private life, the Democrats nominated Lewis Cass of Michigan. The Whigs nominated the popular hero of the Mexican war, General Zachary Taylor of Louisiana. The Free-Soil Party nominated ex-president Martin Van Buren. This party cast a large vote but failed to secure a single vote in the Electoral College.

As in the election of 1844, New York decided the contest. The Liberty Party in New York in that year defeated Clay; in a similar manner the Free-Soil Party in 1848 defeated Cass, the vote in the Electoral College standing one hundred sixty-three for Taylor and one hundred twenty-seven for Cass. Millard Fillmore was elected vice-president.

In this election the Free-Soil Party declared itself squarely in opposition to all further extension of slavery, or its introduction into any of the newly acquired territory. It practically laid down the lines along which the final struggle on the sectional issue of slavery was to be fought out.

However, the contest was a personal rather than a political contest, in which the question discussed in party platforms cut but little figure. The popularity of "Old Rough and Ready" and the motto "General Taylor never surrenders" had most to do with the result.