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Five Minute Chats on Our Presidents

By JAMES MORGAN

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PRESIDENT FOR A MONTH

1773—February 9, birth of William Henry Harrison at Berkeley, Va.
1791—Entered the army.
1801-14—Governor of territory of Indiana.
1811—Battle of Tippecanoe.
1816-19—Member of congress.
1819-21—Member of Ohio senate.
1825-28—United States senator.
1828-29—Minister to Colombia.
1836—Candidate for president.
1841—March 4, inaugurated ninth president, aged 68. April 4, died in the White House, aged 68.

ALTHOUGH William Henry Harrison was elected to the presidency as the log-cabin candidate, in the first of our frenzied, parading campaigns, he was born to one of "the first families of Virginia," in a manor house on the banks of the aristocratic James. As a son of Benjamin Harrison, signer of the Declaration, with the blood of Pocahontas in his veins, and as a descendant of a Cromwellian colonel who signed the death warrant of a king, no president has had a longer, more historic lineage.

In ability William Henry Harrison fell below the standard of his predecessors. He was elected not because he was a great statesman or a great soldier, but because he was thoroughly representative of the new West, which was flattered to see in the White House for the first time a man created in its own image.

At Harrison's inauguration the presidency entered an eclipse and was held for 20 years by secondary characters, who reigned, but did not rule. With men of the eminence of Clay and Webster, Calhoun and Benton, latterly Cass and Houston, Douglas and Davis, Case and Wade, Seward and Sumner in the senate, distinction and leadership passed from the White House to the capitol. It was an ignoble period in our politics when both parties were dodging the irrepressible issue of slavery, and the smaller the candidate for president the better chance he had to dodge the question.

William Henry Harrison.

In the teeth of a piercing northwest wind, the old farmer president-elect, bareheaded and disdaining the protection of an overcoat, rode horseback to the capitol. After addressing a great crowd that shivered in its shawls and furs, he insisted, though half-frozen, on remounting his horse and leading the inaugural parade.

No sooner was the first Whig president in the chair than the claims of factions and the clamor for patronage assailed him. Clay had declined cabinet honors—and labors—in the confident expectation of playing the easier and more powerful role of the power behind the throne. The imperious manner of the Great Commoner wounding the presidential pride, he was requested to make his calls at the White House as infrequent and inconspicuous as he conveniently could. Thereupon his total absence became embarrassingly conspicuous.

The one clear mandate of the election of 1840 was to turn out the Democrats and give the jobs to the Whigs. Straightway a hungry horde fell upon Harrison and literally devoured him. In a month to a day he was dead of pneumonia, the first president to die in office throughout the more than 50 years of its existence.

This briefest of administrations is a pathetic little story of a simple, lonely old man, lured from his farm to be the sport of politics. Ailing in body and harried in mind, he was without the care and companionship of his good wife, Anna Symmes Harrison, daughter of a New Jersey colonel in the Revolution who became one of the pioneer soldiers of Ohio. Broken by the hard toil of a frontier household and sorrowing for the loss of eight of her ten children, this wife of one president and grandmother of another, still was making ready to take up her duties as mistress of the White House when the news of her husband's death came to her.

Americanism

By LEONARD WOOD

I am not a Virginian but an American. — Patrick Henry: Speech in the Virginia Convention, 1765.

THESE words of Patrick Henry make a sermon in Americanism. They are brief as a text, but as full of meat as any sermon.

Native-born Americans, perhaps, need the lessons to be drawn from Henry's words more than some of the American citizens of foreign birth. Men and women who come here from the other shores naturally think in terms of the United States and not in those of any state.

Henry was a Virginian talking to Virginians when he proclaimed his Americanism as paramount to his stateism. The state is the state and the country is the country. No man can be merely a Massachusetts man, or a New York man, or a California man, but he must be an American man if he is to meet the requirements of citizenship in the great republic. This has nothing at all to do with varying opinions concerning state powers and federal powers.

In the late war divisions of men representing every state in the Union fought for the right. Theirs was a pride, not local but national. In the camp and in the field the mingling of men from all parts of the country made in part for Americanization, but in larger part for Americanism. There were comparatively few soldiers who needed what we call Americanization.

The day has not yet come perhaps when the men of Maine can take the same pride in the deeds of men of California that they take in the deeds of the sons of the land of the pine tree. It is not human nature to suppose that this should be the case, but within the last few years a nearer approach to the ultimate goal of a perfected patriotism has been made.

There is nothing in this to prevent a man from taking pride in the particular state of his birth and upbringing. "There is no place like home." The affections center in one's neighborhood, but there are the broader affections which embrace the whole country and which in real American hearts are held supreme.

Abraham Lincoln, born in Kentucky, nominated and elected to the presidency from Illinois, thought only in terms of the union of states. Theodore Roosevelt, born in New York, living for some years in the open West, was intensely American. He knew nothing of state boundaries.

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