

The Centennial President

By Charlie McBriarty

On April 30, 1789, having received all of the electoral votes, George Washington was elected the first president of the fledgling United States of America and was inaugurated in New York City's Federal Hall. One hundred years later, on March 4, 1889, Benjamin Harrison was sworn in as the 23rd President of the United States, and has been called the Centennial President.

Benjamin Harrison was the eighth member of the Harrison family given the first name Benjamin. Though seldom used, his name at birth was Benjamin Harrison VIII. His great-grandfather, Benjamin V, was among the early settlers of Virginia. He represented the Commonwealth at the Continental Convention, added his signature to the Declaration of Independence, and was elected to serve as its governor both before and after it became a state. Benjamin VIII's father, John Scott Harrison, has the distinction of being a son of one president, William Henry Harrison, and the father of another.

Benjamin Harrison was born on August 20, 1833, in North Bend, Ohio, which is located on the Ohio River just 15 miles west of Cincinnati. His parents taught their eight children the value of education and supplemented their early schooling with tutoring. When Harrison was seven, his grandfather William Henry Harrison was elected president.

Harrison and his brother both attended Farmer's College, located near Cincinnati. After two years, Harrison transferred to Miami University, in Oxford, Ohio. He was very active at Miami, where he developed a network of lifelong friends and associates. Upon graduation in 1852 he served as an apprentice in a Cincinnati law firm. Prior to the completion of his apprenticeship, he married Caroline Scott, on October 20, 1853. The following year he moved his family to Indianapolis, where he was admitted to the bar and began his law practice.

Shortly after the 1856 formation of a new political party, Harrison switched from the Whig Party to become a member of this new Republican Party. In that same year, he was elected to the post of Indianapolis City Attorney. Just four years later he was elected to serve as reporter for the Indiana Supreme Court.

The Civil War interrupted his blossoming political career. At the beginning of the war he enlisted as an officer in the Union Army. His talents as a junior military officer were quickly recognized and he received rapid promotions. At war's end he had attained the rank of brigadier general.

As the war was drawing to a close in October 1864, Harrison was reelected reporter for the Indiana Supreme Court, where he served an additional four years. The following several years he focused his energies on his law practice, as well as speaking on behalf of various fellow Republican candidates. At the urging of friends, he campaigned for the Republican nomination for governor in 1872, but he failed to gain the nomination. However, in 1876 he accepted his party's invitation to be its candidate for governor. His campaign fell short of victory by just 5,084 votes. Although this loss was a disappointment, it did contribute to his statewide

recognition as an important member of the Republican Party. That recognition was further enhanced by his role in the process of mediating the Indianapolis dispute between railroad workers and management during the 1877 National Railroad Strike.

One year later, Indiana's United States Senator Morton died and Harrison's party nominated him to fill the seat. At that time, senators were elected by their state legislatures. In the Indiana legislature the Democratic Party had gained the majority, and elected its candidate to fill Morton's seat.

In 1879 President Rutherford B. Hayes appointed Harrison to the Mississippi River Commission. This was an important commission with responsibilities for internal improvements to the river. He also served as a delegate to the 1880 Republican National Convention, where he helped untangle an impasse that eventually resulted in James A. Garfield's becoming the Republican nominee for the presidency.

That same year the Republicans gained a majority in the Indiana Legislature and elected Harrison to the United States Senate, where he served from March 4, 1881, to March 4, 1887. Indiana's redistricting in 1885 resulted in Democrats regaining control of the legislature. As a result, Harrison's 1886 bid for reelection to the Senate failed. He returned home to his law practice and continued to be involved in the political arena.

At the June 1888 Republican Party National Convention in Chicago, Harrison was nominated on the eighth ballot to be the party's choice for president. His election opponent was the Democratic incumbent, President Grover Cleveland. The number of ballots cast in that election reached nearly 11,000,000, representing slightly more than 79% of the eligible voters. Although Harrison received almost 90,000 fewer votes than Cleveland, he captured 233 electoral votes, while Cleveland garnered only 188.

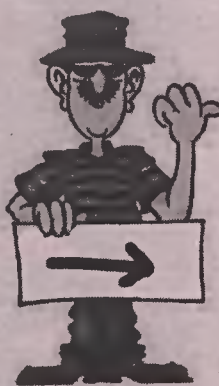
At Harrison's inauguration ceremony there was a heavy rainstorm. However, when Chief Justice Melville Fuller rose to swear in the new president, outgoing President Cleveland paid his respects by opening his umbrella over their heads to protect them from the rain. On that wet, overcast day, the son of John Scott Harrison and grandson of William Henry Harrison became the 23rd President of the United States.

Unlike his grandfather's inauguration speech, that still holds the record for its length, Benjamin's address was brief. In it he attributed the country's growth to its focus on education and religion, urged early statehood for the territories, committed to a protective tariff, called for an upgrade of the Navy, reaffirmed his commitment to the Monroe Doctrine and pledged noninvolvement in affairs of foreign governments.

Next month will focus on the Centennial President's successes and failures and perhaps explore his post-presidential life.

COMMUNITY YARD SALE

Pine Knoll Shores Fire Station
314 Salter Path Road
Saturday, October 10
8 a.m. until noon
Household items only, please



Reservations for a space will be \$10 and can be made by contacting Natalie Gible at 247-2268 or NGible@townofpks.com. You may use your own table, or the town will supply one for an additional \$5. Anything you want to donate after the sale is over will be taken to local charities. The deadline for reservations is Monday, October 5.

Start cleaning out those closets and attics.