

Instant History

By Chuck Ross

This is the latest in our series on Presidential elections, concerning the election of 1840. For forty years, since 1800 and the time of Jefferson, the Democrats, then called Republicans, had been in power. But now the opposition was organized, and they had an overwhelming issue — hard times.

The Fourteenth Election (1840)

Van Buren had scarcely entered the White House when the Panic of 1837 struck the country. It was hardly his fault, but he would bear the blame.

(1) What were the main causes of the Panic of 1837?

(2) The election was a heyday for political cartoonists and a press agent's dream. What was the meaning of the slogan, "Tippecanoe and Tyler, too"?

(3) Despite all the hoopla, the Whigs mounted a truly effective campaign, one that would be the envy of the politicians of today. How did they portray the opposing candidates?

(4) How did the election come out?

(5) The winning candidate was not to finish his term. Why?

Answers

(1) The hard times were brought about by rampant inflation, caused by easy money and widespread speculation. Jackson had de-centralized federal funds from the National Bank to state banks and private institutions. These "pet" banks made liberal loans, often to land speculators who bought land from the government on credit. The federal government also loaned large sums to the states for roads and other improvements. The money flowed out, little came in, and the situation was made worse by crop failure in the wheat fields. When demands for payment were made, the "pet" banks and the states could not pay in specie (gold or silver), and the depression set in.

(2) It was for the Whig ticket, General William Henry Harrison, hero of the battle of Tippecanoe, for President; John Tyler of Virginia for the second spot. The Democrats responded with a line of doggerel for their warrior, the Vice-President: "Rumpsey-dumpsey, rumpsey-dumpsey, Colonel Johnson killed Tecumseh!". Other sayings, still in usage today, were the Whig's "keep the

ball rolling", and "OK" for "Old Kinderhook", a nickname for Van Buren.

(3) Although the depressed economy gave the Whigs a great advantage, they knew that the reflected popularity of "Old Hickory" would be a strength of Van Buren's. Therefore, they concocted the nonsense of Harrison, a wealthy man who owned 2000 acres and a sixteen room mansion, as a poor farmer who lived in a log cabin and drank hard cider. Van Buren, they charged, tipped champagne and had made the White House a king's palace. Further, poor "Matty" was painted as a corseted, effeminate dandy, while the General was a hardy man of the soil. It was sheer malarky, but the electorate swallowed it.

(4) The popular vote was relatively close, 1,275,016 for Harrison, 1,129,102 for Van Buren. But the Whigs captured the Presidency by 234 electoral votes and 19 states to the Democrats 60 votes and 7 states. A new party, the Abolitionists, had little appeal in a time when the national hero was a "Hard cider man". Their candidate, James Birney, gained but 7,069 popular votes.

(5) General Harrison, mounted on a white charger, rode to his inauguration on a bitter, cold day, hat in hand and disdaining an overcoat. He developed pneumonia and died one month later. Vice President John Tyler succeeded "Old Tip", the first President to die in office.

Radio At Kiwanis

The Tryon Kiwanis Club will meet Tuesday at 12:45 p.m. at The Dinner Bell. Herbert Lee "Ace" Rickenbacker will talk on "Radio."

A native of Lenoir County, he was reared in Rutherford County and educated at Wofford. He is a veteran of the U. S. Air Force in World War II. He is an outstanding archer, likes to ride a motorcycle and has been in a number of Little Theater productions. He is presently serving on the Tryon Town Council.

He is program Director of WTYN and joined them 22 years ago, coming here from WSPA. He is married to the former Genelle Scoggins and they have one daughter, Sally, who is a student in the 7th grade at Tryon Middle School.

Girls Softball

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Cherokee at Polk Central

JV Tennis

Friday

Tryon at Spartanburg Day

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