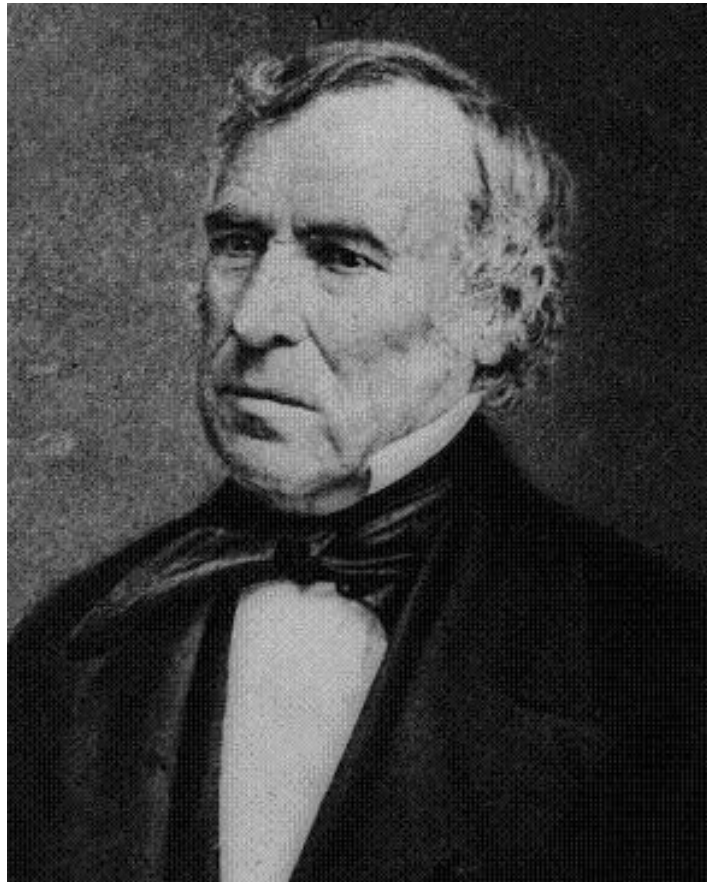


Zachary Taylor

Forever in Blue Jeans
Twelfth, 1849-1850



Nicknames: “Old Rough and Ready”, “The Hero of Buena Vista”

Birth: November 24th, 1784, near Barboursville in Orange County, Virginia

Death: July 9th, 1850, Washington, D.C.

Significant Events During Taylor's Partial Term: California Gold Rush ... California (#31) becomes a State

Quotes: *"The idea that I should become President seems to me too visionary to require a serious answer. It has never entered my head, nor is it likely to enter the head of any sane person."*

-- Zachary Taylor

"Any illusion to literature much beyond good old Dilworth's Spelling Book, on the part of one wearing a sword, was evidence [to Taylor] of utter unfitness for heavy marchings and combat. In short, few men have ever had a more comfortable, labor-saving contempt for learning of every kind."

-- Winfield Scott, fellow General during Mexican War

"He really is a most simple-minded old man. He has the least show or pretension about him of any man I ever saw; talks as artlessly as a child about affairs of state, and does not seem to pretend to a knowledge of anything of which he is ignorant. He is a remarkable man in some respects; and it is remarkable that such a man should be President of the United States." -- Horace Mann

"The power given by the Constitution to the Executive to interpose his veto is a high conservative power: but in my opinion it should never be exercised except in cases of clear violation of the Constitution, or manifest haste and want of due consideration by Congress." -- Zachary Taylor, 1848

"I am about to die. I expect the summons very soon. I have tried to discharge my duties faithfully. I regret nothing, but I am sorry that I am about to leave my friends."

-- Zachary Taylor, on his deathbed in 1850

"Zachary Taylor is dead and gone to hell, and I am glad of it!"

-- Brigham Young, Governor of Utah Territory, 1850

"It did not happen to General Taylor, once in his life, to fight a battle on equal terms, or on terms advantageous to himself – and yet he was never beaten, and he never retreated...General Taylor's battles were not distinguished for brilliant military maneuvers; but in all he seems rather to have conquered by the exercise of a sober and steady judgment, coupled with a dogged incapacity to understand that defeat was possible." -- Abraham Lincoln, 1850

How his term ended: Taylor died in office, and was replaced by Vice President Millard Fillmore. Some suggest Taylor was poisoned, but the generally accepted reason for his demise is that he became ill after gorging himself on cherries and milk on a hot summer day.

Other Professions: Soldier

Worst Mistake: Taylor stole the liberty from all of those whom he enslaved.

Saving Grace: Although a slaveholder himself, Taylor opposed the extension of slavery.

Notes: Taylor was born in a log cabin.

Taylor was the first President who had no previous political experience whatsoever. He was nominated and elected solely based on his war exploits.

Taylor was no dandy. He preferred civilian dress to a uniform, even in battle. He was short and plump (as had "Napoleon of the Stump" James Polk (#11), Taylor stood just 5'8" tall). Because of this and his uncommonly short legs, Taylor had to be given a boost by his orderly when he mounted a horse.

Taylor was related to James Madison, who helped Zachary get a commission in the military when Madison was Secretary of State.

The Taylor's only son, Richard ("Dick"), eventually became a General in the Confederate Army. In fact, he was reportedly the last Confederate soldier to lay down his arms at the conclusion of the Civil War. A grandson of Taylor's was also a Confederate officer. The apple *did* seem to fall or roll quite a ways from the tree in this case, as General and President Taylor had once said: "For more than half a century, during which kingdoms and empires have fallen, this Union has stood unshaken. The patriots who formed it have long since descended to the grave; yet still it remains, the proudest monument to their memory and the object of affection and admiration with everyone worthy to bear the American name. In my judgment its dissolution would be the greatest of calamities, and to avert that should be the study of every American. Upon its preservation must depend our own happiness and that of countless generations to come. Whatever dangers may threaten it, I shall stand by it and maintain it in its integrity to the full extent of the obligations imposed and the powers conferred upon me by the Constitution."

Similarly, one of the Taylor's daughters, Sarah, married Jefferson Davis (who would later become the President of the Confederacy) against her father's wishes. Taylor was so averse to his daughter marrying Davis, in fact, that the two almost dueled over the issue. Still, the couple courted in secret. Sarah died three months after the wedding, of malaria contracted while visiting relatives on her husband's side, an occurrence which did nothing to reconcile the Taylors with their erstwhile son-in-law. Nevertheless, twelve years later Taylor and Davis did fight together at the Battle of Buena Vista in the Mexican War.

As had William Henry Harrison, Taylor fought against Shawnee Chief Tecumseh.

During the Black Hawk War (in which both Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis served together), it was Taylor who personally accepted Black Hawk's surrender.

Taylor won the Battle of Buena Vista early in 1847 against Mexican President/General Santa Anna during the Mexican War, although his forces were outnumbered 4:1. What accounts for Taylor's force being outnumbered by such odds? As Taylor's popularity increased during the Mexican War (because of his victories in battle), President Polk became jealous of Taylor, seeing in him a potential political rival. This was similar to King Saul's reactions to David's exploits in ancient Israel, when people sang: "Saul has killed thousands, but David tens of thousands." In an effort to sabotage Taylor's chances for glory, Polk siphoned off many of Taylor's men, re-assigning them to serve with General Winfield Scott. This treachery backfired on Polk, though, when Taylor and his men won the battle anyway, even though they were so heavily outnumbered. Taylor was nominated for the presidency in 1848.

But the correspondence sent to Taylor of his nomination--over the most noted orators of the day, Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, as well as fellow soldier Winfield Scott--went unread for a number of weeks because it was sent to Taylor with postage due (a common practice at the time). Taylor had instructed the postmaster that he would only accept postage-paid mail, and so the message languished among the dead letters until the President of the political convention that had nominated Taylor realized what had happened and sent a new, postage-paid notification of the nomination to Taylor.

Not only did Taylor have no political experience, as mentioned earlier, he had never even voted in a Presidential election prior to his candidacy.

Taylor's wife prayed for her husband's defeat in the Presidential race, dreading the stresses of public life. She was semi-reclusive as first lady, perhaps because she had earlier vowed that she would give up the joys of society life if her husband would return safely to her from The Mexican War.

Besides the aforementioned familial connection to James Madison (they shared the same great-grandfather), Taylor was also (more distantly) related to both Robert E. Lee and Franklin Delano Roosevelt.