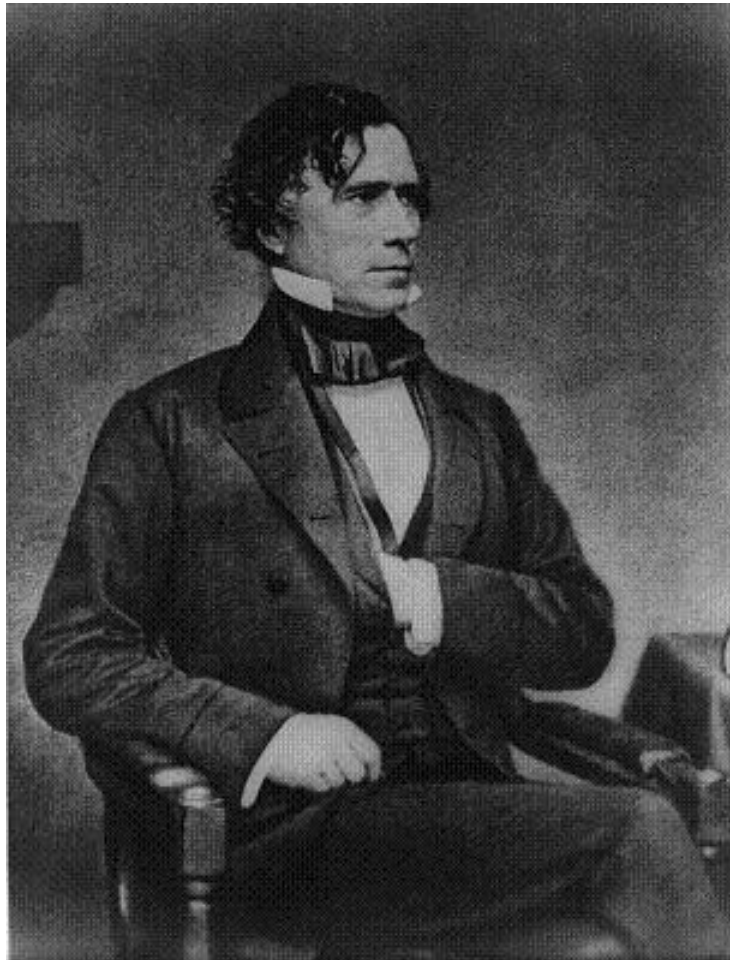


Franklin Pierce

Straight Arrow
Fourteenth, 1853-1857



Nicknames: “Young Hickory of the Granite Hills”, “Handsome Frank”, “The Fainting General”

Birth: November 23rd, 1804, Hillsboro, New Hampshire

Death: October 8th, 1869, Concord, New Hampshire

Significant Events During Pierce's Term: Kansas/Nebraska Act ... Gadsden Purchase
... Number of States remains thirty-one

Quotes: *"In a body [Congress] where there are more than one hundred talking lawyers...you can make no calculation upon the termination of any debate and frequently the more trifling the subject the more animated and protracted the discussion."* -- Franklin Pierce

"I hope he won't be elected for I should not like to be at Washington and I know you would not either."
-- Benjamin Pierce, Franklin and Jane Pierce's eleven-year-old son, in a letter to his mother, writing about his father. Benjamin died in a train wreck before his parents' eyes just before Pierce became President.

"It is a relief to feel that no heart but my own can know the personal regret and bitter sorrow over which I have been borne to a position so suitable for others rather than desirable for myself."
-- Franklin Pierce

"I believe that involuntary servitude, as it exists in different States of this Confederacy, is recognized by the Constitution. I believe that it stands like any other admitted right, and that the States where it exists are entitled to efficient remedies to enforce the constitutional provisions...I fervently hope that the question is at rest, and that no sectional or ambitious or fanatical excitement may again threaten the durability of our institutions or obscure the light of our prosperity." -- Franklin Pierce

"[Pierce was] a small politician, of low capacity and mean surroundings, proud to act as the servile tool of men worse than himself but also stronger and abler. He was ever ready to do any work the slavery leaders set him." -- Theodore Roosevelt (#26)

How his term ended: Pierce's party did not renominate him; instead, they chose the eventual victor of the next election, James Buchanan.

Other Professions: Teacher, Lawyer, Soldier

Worst Mistake: Although a Northerner, Pierce supported the extension of slavery. He referred to abolitionists as "reckless fanatics" and worked against the adoption or even consideration of antislavery petitions in Congress. In 1854, Pierce supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which repealed the Missouri Compromise of half a century earlier and was conducive to the extension of slavery.

As the Civil War approached, Pierce spoke in favor of the South and warned the federal government against trying to enforce its will on ending slavery there. Similar to what happened to Millard Fillmore (#13), after Lincoln was assassinated an angry mob, viewing Pierce as a Copperhead (recalling his pro-Southern sentiments and warnings to the government against forcing an end to the "peculiar institution"), threatened his home.

Pierce put a price on John Brown's head for his work in circumventing the Fugitive Slave law then in effect (besides his energetic work in Kansas, Brown was also a guard on the Underground Railroad, stationed in the north).

Saving Grace: Some are of the opinion that Pierce was good-looking; that is, of course, not

really important, but I had to put *something* in this section. Thirty-third President Harry Truman even went so far as to say, "Pierce was the best looking President the White House ever had – but as President he ranks with Buchanan and Calvin Coolidge." Then again, Truman's eyesight wasn't the best.

Notes: Pierce was born in a log cabin.

In 1775, when Franklin Pierce's father Benjamin was eighteen years old, he heard about the Battle of Lexington while plowing his field. He immediately left off farming and marched off to war. Within nine years he rose from Private to Lieutenant to Company Commander. Benjamin Pierce fought at Bunker Hill, Saratoga, and suffered along with the rest of the revolutionaries at Valley Forge.

As a soldier himself in the Mexican War, Pierce twice injured his knee, both times fainting as a result. In this way he acquired one of his nicknames, "The Fainting General."

Pierce often drank to excess. He was quite possibly an alcoholic.

Franklin Pierce's wife Jane did not like Washington and refused to live there. She finally talked Franklin into retiring from the Senate and returning to New Hampshire. Ten years later, though, in 1852, Pierce was nominated for President. When Jane heard of this, she collapsed. Their son Benjamin's response to his father possibly becoming President is quoted above. When Benjamin was killed in a train accident, Jane viewed it as an act of God. She felt that the reason for their son's death was to prevent Franklin from worrying about Benjamin's welfare while her husband had the important work of his office to carry out.

In his entire career in politics, which spanned a quarter of a century, Pierce never lost an election.

Pierce has been the only President to serve a complete term without making a single change in his Cabinet.

Pierce kept the Sabbath so strictly that he wouldn't even open his mail on Sundays. Rather than "swearing," Pierce substituted the term "swear" with "affirm" when he took the oath of office. So, instead of saying: "I do solemnly *swear*..." (etc.), he said: "I do solemnly *affirm* that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

It seems odd, even macabre, that a person would be so persnickety as to avoid the *word* "swear" but at the same time have no compunctions about keeping a people in involuntary servitude.

Pierce was a lifelong friend of Nathaniel Hawthorne (author of, among other books, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*).

The forty-eight contiguous states (known as “The lower 48” in Alaska and “The Mainland” in Hawaii) achieved their ultimate dimensions during Pierce's term. This took place in 1853 with the Gadsden Purchase, in which America paid Mexico \$10 million for the southernmost portions of Arizona and New Mexico.

Pierce also endeavored to acquire Cuba, either with money or by military might. He was willing to offer Spain up to \$120 million, or else wrest it from their grasp by force of arms, but his plan was not well supported enough at the time to be implemented.

Pierce has no direct descendants. His sons all died young, one in infancy, one at four years of age, and one (Benjamin, mentioned above) at twelve.