



William Henry Harrison: The American Presidents Series: The 9th President, 1841

By Gail Collins

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The president who served the shortest term? just a single month? but whose victorious election campaign rewrote the rules for candidates seeking America's highest office

William Henry Harrison died just thirty-one days after taking the oath of office in 1841. Today he is a curiosity in American history, but as Gail Collins shows in this entertaining and revelatory biography, he and his career are worth a closer look. The son of a signer of the Declaration of Independence, Harrison was a celebrated general whose exploits at the Battle of Tippecanoe and in the War of 1812 propelled him into politics, and in time he became a leader of the new Whig Party, alongside Daniel Webster and Henry Clay. But it was his presidential campaign of 1840 that made an indelible mark on American political history.

Collins takes us back to that pivotal year, when Harrison's "Log Cabin and Hard Cider" campaign transformed the way candidates pursued the presidency. It was the first campaign that featured mass rallies, personal appearances by the candidate, and catchy campaign slogans like "Tippecanoe and Tyler, Too." Harrison's victory marked the coming-of-age of a new political system, and its impact is still felt in American politics today. It may have been only a one-month administration, but we're still feeling the effects.

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Editorial Review

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That William Henry Harrison was president requires his entry in the American Presidents series, this one written by an op-ed columnist for the New York Times. Harrison's mark on presidential history was that his administration was the briefest in U.S. history. He died of pneumonia only 31 days after taking office. Harrison sprang from a fine old Virginia family, his father a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Harrison made the military his career, rose to general, and earned a reputation (though a questionable one) in the Indian skirmish called the Battle of Tippecanoe. He later added the offices of governor of the Indiana Territory and congressman and senator from Ohio to his résumé. But the real story Collins has to tell is Harrison's against-all-odds presidential candidacy in the 1840 election as the Whig contender. Calling it "one of the most ridiculous presidential campaigns in history," Collins sees how the Whig leaders put an incredible spin on Harrison, selling this Virginia aristocrat as a humble soldier with log-cabin origins—"marketing genius," as Collins has it. --Brad Hooper

Review

"A surprisingly entertaining biography. . . . [that] tells everything the average reader might want to know about our ninth president. . . . While he accomplished nothing as president, [Harrison's] earlier achievements are well served in this excellent addition to the American Presidents series." *Publishers Weekly*

About the Author

Gail Collins is an op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*, where she previously served as editorial page editor—the first woman to hold that position. She is the author of *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present*; *America's Women: 400 Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines*; and *Scorpion Tongues: Gossip, Celebrity, and American Politics*. She lives in New York City with her husband, Dan Collins.

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