

"Log Cabin and Hard Cider" in Northwestern Virginia in 1840

"Probably no more exciting presidential campaign ever occurred in this country than in 1840"¹ between the Whig candidate William Henry Harrison and the Democrat candidate President Martin Van Buren. The sedate and aristocratic Whigs knew that in order to win the election they must avoid being labeled the old Federalist Party and that they must stir up enough excitement to disguise the fact that they were really "a discordant combination of the odds and ends of all parties." A banner "We Stoop to Conquer" carried in a Whig parade in Baltimore on May 4, 1840, epitomized the spirit of the Whig campaign planned from the start to capture the imagination of the common man much as Andrew Jackson had stirred the masses in 1828 and 1832. The Whigs resolved to "prostrate our opponents with the . . . weapons, with which they beat us."²

After an anti-Whig newspaper had derided Harrison with "Give him a barrel of hard cider and a pension of two thousand a year, and, our word for it, he will sit the remainder of his days in a log cabin", the Whigs turned the statement into slogan and symbols for the campaign: "Log cabin and hard cider."³ "The campaign was the most remarkable ever known and did immensely towards solidifying the people into party ranks. Prior to the time parties had been largely among the politicians and the governing class. Now the voters ranged themselves on one side or the other and entered the struggle with intense feeling. The Whigs took advantage of the situation very skilfully and out-demagogued the Democrats. They became the champion of the 'poor man' against such 'aristocrats' as Martin Van Buren, who [the Whigs insisted] actually had gold spoons upon his table. Those around him carried gold headed canes and devoured the people substance. The much belabored, frilled and ruffled shirt which the Whigs had been accused of wearing was now worn by Van Buren and his satellites. On the other hand General William H. Harrison . . . was a plain pioneer, who after his brilliant services to the country was content to live in a log cabin and drink hard cider instead of the costly wines served at Van Buren's tables . . .

"The log cabin with the raccoon skin on the door became the party emblem, hard cider the party beverage. A log cabin of buckeye logs, where this timber abounded, was raised in every Whig settlement. Songs celebrating Harrison's victories at Tippecanoe and the Thames took precedence of oratory. 'Tippecanoe and Tyler too' became the campaign slogan. The country went wild with enthusiasm, and the popular demonstrations exceeded anything known up to the time of the Civil War."⁴ Farmers named their horses "Tip and Ty". A couple in Cincinnati baptized their twins Harrison and Tyler; another Whig couple named their triplets William, Henry, and Harrison;⁵ the Thomas A. Hornor family who lived on Duck Creek in Harrison County, Virginia, would name the son born to them in 1841 William Henry Harrison.⁶ Every time western hens laid eggs they reputedly cackled "Tip-tip! Tip-tip! Tyler!" A U.S. senator in 1840 described the enthusiasm thus: "Since the world began there was never before in the West such a glorious excitement and uproar among the people."⁷

Late in the summer of 1840 William McGranaghan started publication of The Harrison Whig in Clarksburg, Virginia (W. Va.), with the words: "He [Harrison] is one of Virginia's own sons, and a true representative of the Virginia blood. As Virginians --- as citizens of Harrison [County], a name for which we are indebted to his illustrious father, one of the most efficient patriots of the Revolution, we are proud to do him honor --- proud to be ranked among those who consider him entitled to the highest honor in the gift of a free people."⁸

Believing that "the steam must be kept up", the triumvirate running the Whig campaign nationally --- Thurlow Weed, Horace Greeley, and William H. Seward, encouraged politicians in the centers of Whig culture to stage series of activities. In Wheeling, Virginia (W. Va.), Whigs raised in August a liberty pole 321 feet high "the tallest and best Harrison pole in the Union"⁹ and sent out word that a "Great Democratic Whig Convention of the three great states, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Virginia" would be held in Wheeling on September 3, 1840.¹⁰

A group of "forty or fifty" men from Clarksburg, Virginia, decided to join the fun in Wheeling. They traveled on horseback reaching Middlebourne the first night on the road and Moundsville the second night. The next morning they arrived in Wheeling: "their horses were turned out on pasture and the company assigned quarters."¹¹ Wheeling ready for the more than 30,000 visitors stocked "a public table with 360 hams, [meat from] 26 sheep, 20 calves, 1,500 pounds of beef, 8,000 pounds of bread, over 1,000 pounds of cheese, and 4,500 pies. 'Besides this', Niles' Register reported, 'every Harrison house was abundantly supplied and open throughout the day'.¹²

Men from Harrison County walked to the site assigned for Virginians to assemble for the parade which would move out on September 3 promptly at 10:00 a.m.: "On Fourth Street the right resting on the North side of Clay occupying Fourth on Quincy, East of Fourth Street."¹³ Chief Marshal F. B. Kelley led the parade.¹⁴ "Straight-outs,¹⁵ Bolters, and all seceders from the Van Buren party, whatever may be their name or State" marched at the head of the procession immediately behind the chief marshal. "Old soldiers, distinguished Strangers, and invited Guests" in carriages made up the second group in the parade followed by the groups of representatives from Pennsylvania, from Ohio, and from Virginia.

1. America Goes to the Polls, 3d edition, Hartford, Conn.: The Travelers Insurance Companies, 1964, p. 15.

2. Robert Gray Gunderson, The Log-Cabin Campaign, Lexington, Ky.: University of Kentucky Press, 1957, pp. 3, 11, 108.

3. Oliver Perry Chitwood, John Tyler, New York: Russell & Russell, 1939 (reissued 1964), p. 176. The log cabin symbol would have been more fitting for Martin Van Buren, the son of a tavern keeper. Harrison, son of a governor of Virginia, attended Hampden-Sidney College and studied medicine under Fr. Benjamin Rush in Philadelphia before enlisting in the army. Harrison lived in 1840 in Ohio in a stately clapboard house.

4. Henry Haymond, History of Harrison County, Morgantown, W. Va.: Acme Publishing Co., 1910 (reprinted 1973), p. 411.

5. Gunderson, pp. 127-8.

6. W.H.H. Hornor studied medicine and practiced medicine throughout his adult years until his death in 1917 at Dayton in the Kincheloe area of Harrison County. Interview with Louise Hornor, Clarksburg, W. Va.: Dorothy Davis, History of Harrison County, Parsons, W.Va.: McClain Printing Co., 1970, p. 492.

7. Gunderson, pp. 118, 128.

8. The Harrison Whig, Clarksburg, Va. (W. Va.), Vol. 1, No. 3, Sept. 5, 1840. The first page reads Sept. 6. On page three is the notation: "Saturday, September 5, 1840. The date on the first page of the paper is wrong --- read September 5."

9. Gunderson, p. 142.

10. Wheeling Times & Advertiser, Wheeling, Va. (W. Va.), Aug. 27, 1840.

11. Haymond, p. 412.

12. Gunderson, p. 154.

13. Wheeling Times & Advertiser, Wheeling, Va. (W. Va.), Aug. 27, 1840.

14. J.C. Vance "Chief Marshal" signed instructions for the parade formation published on Aug. 27, 1840; F.B. Kelley "Chief Marshal" signed identical instructions published on Sept. 3, 1840. Wheeling Times & Advertiser, Wheeling, Va. (W. Va.), Aug. 27, Sept. 3, 1840. This J. C. Vance is not Harrison Countain John Carl Vance born at Pruntytown in 1835, the son of Cyrus and Minerva Davis Vance. The ancestor of the Harrison County family, Cyrus Vance I, was born in Fayette County Pa., October 15, 1807, the son of Moses Vance.

15. "We purposely omitted, in our last, naming the straight-outs at the meeting here on 3d Sept. because we wished to make a separate article for them, and to ascertain first the true number of them. This we were unable to do, but we are able to say that in the procession there were three hundred who supported Van Buren at the last election and now support General Harrison. The straight-outs in Marshall County were not in the procession --- not being prepared in season. There were also hundreds at the convention who did not go into the procession. This was one of the most interesting bodies in the procession as their badge evinced that they were patriotic enough to leave their party for their country's good." Wheeling Times & Advertiser, Wheeling, Va. (W. Va.), Sept. 8, 1840.

According to instructions "The general formation [was] on foot with Cabins, Canoes, Balls, etc. Invalids and others desirous of going on Horseback or in Carriages . . . [came] in in the rear of the State of Virginia . . . All music brought into the procession [was] under the control of the Chief Marshal, and [was] posted at such points as [were] thought most suitable. Delegations and Clubs [appointed] their own Marshals who [acted] on foot. The city marshals [appeared] mounted, each wearing a blue sash, with white rosette on the right shoulder and carrying a white baton. The Chief Marshal [wore] a white sash with pink rosette."¹⁶

The parade moved "in South Wheeling down North Street to Water, down Water to First, up First to Market, up Market to Fourth, up Fourth to Washington, up Washington to North, down North to Market, thence over the bridge to Clay Street; in the city proper up Clay street to Sixth, up Sixth to Centre, down Centre to Fifth, up Fifth to Quincy, down Quincy to Fourth, up Fourth to Union, down Union to Main, up Main to the Virginia Hotel, where the Revolutionary Soldiers, Soldiers of the late War, and invited guests [were] received in front; thence up Main to Washington, up Washington to the turnpike, and then by the hill to the place selected for the exercises."¹⁷

All agreed that the Wheeling convention was a rousing success: "500 banners were displayed aloft and exhibited the appearance of the top gallant masts of numerous shipping with their flags flying. The Pittsburg Gazette reported that noble generous inhabitants of Wheeling have won the hearts of Pittsburgers whom they [earlier] could not conquer altho delegates admit that although Wheeling is not the 'head of navigation', it is very near the 'fountainhead of hospitality'."¹⁸

While the Clarksburg representatives, who broke up as a group to return home over various routes, were on the way back to Clarksburg, their hometown newspaper published a letter by a Van Buren supporter who was concerned because members of the Democratic Party had maligned a Clarksburg citizen: "There is one falsehood set afloat by us [loco focos¹⁹] that I am a little ashamed of not so much on account of its being palpably and notoriously untrue, as on account of its tendency to injury [injure] the feelings of a very worthy man, a distinguished clergyman of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It is this: some of our party, with good intentions no doubt, have reported, and many of the vulgar class believe it too, that at the time the congregation took up a collection in the Locust Grove, for missionary purposes, the clergyman alluded to told the people that he did not expect any money from Van Buren men, but he called upon Harrison men to give and give liberally. Now loco-foco as I am, I cannot stand this, and therefore take this occasion to pronounce it a base falsehood, not sanctioned by the more respectable class of the party . . . I am informed that there are some members of that clergyman's church who declare that in consequence in their faith in this report they will never hear him preach again."²⁰

The tempo of the campaign kept rising: In Wheeling the newspaper office sold Tibbecanoe flags for 50¢; and the Wheeling "city blues brass band started for the Convention at Cumberland on Thursday morning [September 17] in fine style. They have a beautiful car and with the beautifully comparisoned horses attached, made a fine show. We commend them to the kindest regards of our friends at Cumberland."²¹ "Governor John Tyler [Whig candidate for vice president] arrived in this city [Wheeling] last evening [September 21] and though suffering from weakness, which is attendant of a recent attack of bilious fever, was prevailed upon to address the Mechanic's Association for a short time, which he did very eloquently. He will remain in town today and tomorrow start for Columbus, where he will attend the straight-out convention on Friday."²² Whigs in "Harrison County and adjacent counties" attended a rally in Pruntytown on September 26.²³

The Wheeling Whigs acted as shepherd for the William Henry Harrison supporters in Northwestern Virginia: "We assure our neighbor of the Harrison Whig at Clarksburg that the Times is regularly addressed to him."²⁴ A Wheeling newspaper quoted the Richmond Whig that Whigs should carry Northwestern Virginia by a majority of 1,000 rather than by 300, the first estimate. Yet in the same issue of the paper a letter from Monongalia County insisted, "You may say to Mr. [Thomas] Ritchie that his majorities in the counties of Monongalia and Harrison will be very small, notwithstanding he flatters the voters of these counties by calling them great counties." The outcome of the election in Harrison County at the time was so uncertain that although the writer from Monongalia County gave General Harrison a majority of 50 votes in Lewis and 75 in Braxton counties and President Van Buren a majority of 50 in Tyler and 250 in Monongalia counties, he wrote "none" for the majorities in Harrison County for both General Harrison and for President Van Buren.²⁵

The forecast of the writer of the letter from Monongalia proved to be more accurate than the estimates of Whigs in Richmond when the votes were counted after the polls closed on Monday, November 2. The twenty-three electors pledged to President Van Buren won in Virginia.²⁶ But nationwide General Harrison won over Van Buren in a popular vote by 1,275,016 to 1,129,102 and in an electoral vote of 234 to 60.²⁷ "Harrison was elected and the Whigs all over the country went wild with joy as they were not accustomed to electing Presidents. Clarksburg illuminated and to make things lively, some one set a deserted house on fire, which stood on the hill back of Hornor Avenue, which added more fire and light to the jollification. It was a great time, and the old town was painted a brilliant red in honor of the occasion."²⁸

16. *Ibid.*, Sept. 3, 1840.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Niles' National Register*, Baltimore, Md., Sept. 19, 1840.

19. "Though onetime Federalists were content to let members of the farmer-labor alliance [Democrats] keep exclusive title to the name Democratic, younger Whigs were reluctant to accord them this designation which had become increasingly popular. Instead, they preferred to damn them as 'Loco-Focos', a name connoting a subversive combination of 'levelers' and radicals." Gunderson, p. 9.

20. *The Harrison Whig*, Clarksburg, Va. (W. Va.), Sept. 5, 1840.

21. *Wheeling Times & Advertiser*, Wheeling, Va. (W. Va.), Sept. 19, 1840.

22. *Ibid.*, Sept. 22, 1840. "Had it not been for an exceptionally successful speaking tour through the West by Democratic Vice-Presidential candidate Richard M. Johnson, Tyler might have remained quietly and comfortably in Williamsburg until the end of the campaign. As it was, Johnson's impact in the West momentarily frightened the Whigs and caused them to dispatch Tyler to Columbus to address a rally of Ohio Democrats for Harrison . . . From Tyler's standpoint it was a harrowing and distasteful experience." Robert Seager II, *And Tyler Too*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963, pp 137-8. The campaign of 1840 was the first for office seekers to meet the electorate face to face. Arthur M. Schlesinger, ed., *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968*, New York: Chelsea House in association with McGraw-Hill, 1971, v. 1, p. 737. "Gen. Harrison addressed, on the 17th, a meeting of 75,000 people at Chillicothe, Ohio. The 18th about 20,000 in Somerset. Yesterday he was at Lancaster, on Friday at Columbus. We have seen several men . . . who say that Harrison made the best speeches . . . they ever heard . . . he would travel further and make a better speech than any of them." *Wheeling Times & Advertiser*, Wheeling, Va. (W. Va.), Sept. 22, 1840. General Harrison's vigorous campaign may have weakened the sixty-eight-year old man and helped to cause his death on April 4, 1841.

23. *The Harrison Whig*, Clarksburg, Va. (W. Va.), Sept. 5, 1840.

24. *Wheeling Times & Advertiser*, Wheeling, Va. (W. Va.), Sept. 22, 1840.

25. *Ibid.*, Oct. 13, 1840.

26. Svend Petersen, *Statistical History of the American Presidential Elections*, New York: Frederick Unger, 1963, p. 25.

27. Francis R. Valeo, *Factual Campaign Information* (compiled by the Senate Library under the direction of Francis R. Valeo, secretary of the Senate), Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976, Table I following p. 251.

28. Haymond, p. 412.

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