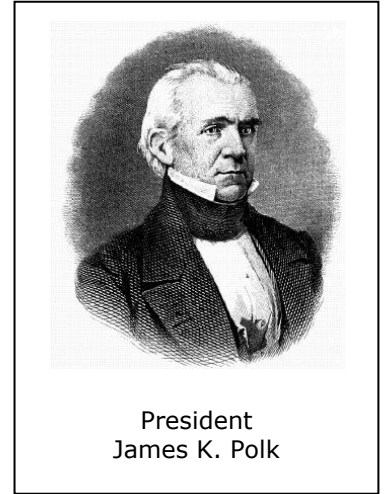


Thirtieth Congress

Dec. 6, 1847-Mar. 3, 1849

Administration of James K. Polk

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Historical Background

Following the seizure of Mexico City, in September 1847 the Mexican-American War had unofficially come to a conclusion. On February 2, 1848, just nine days after gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill (still technically a Mexican province), U.S. commissioner Nicholas P. Trist and the Mexican commissioners sign a treaty in the village of Guadalupe Hidalgo, near Mexico City, officially ending the war and ceding Texas, New Mexico, and California to the United States. Included within this area, comparable to the Louisiana Purchase, are the present States of Texas, California, New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah, most of Arizona, the Oklahoma panhandle, most of Colorado, and southwestern Wyoming. With the treaty's ratification in March, President Polk completed two of his election promises and succeeded in reaching the U.S.'s "Manifest Destiny," stretching the country from coast to coast.

That June the Senate ratified another treaty, this one with New Granada (present-day Colombia), which granted to the United States the right of free passage across the Isthmus of Panama and lay the groundwork for the Panama Canal. In August of 1848, a bill organizing Oregon as a territory without slavery became law. Also, in 1848, construction of the Washington Monument, meant to commemorate George Washington, was begun in Washington, D.C.

As the 30th Congress drew to a close in 1849, the California Gold Rush was underway, bringing some 300,000 people into the newly acquired territory, including immigrants, earning themselves the name the "Forty-niners." The sudden influx of raw materials and immigrants reinvigorated the U.S. economy, but also had a severe impact on labor forces, as men left their current positions to pursue mining and the search for gold.

House	Senate
Majority Party: Whigs (116 Seats)	Majority Party: Democrats (38 seats)
Minority Party: Democrats (110 Seats)	Minority Party: Whigs (21 seats)
Other Parties: Independent Democrats (2 seats); American (1 seat); Independent (1 seat)	Other Parties: Independent Democrats (1 seat)
Speaker of the House: Robert Charles Winthrop	President Pro Tempore: David R. Atchison

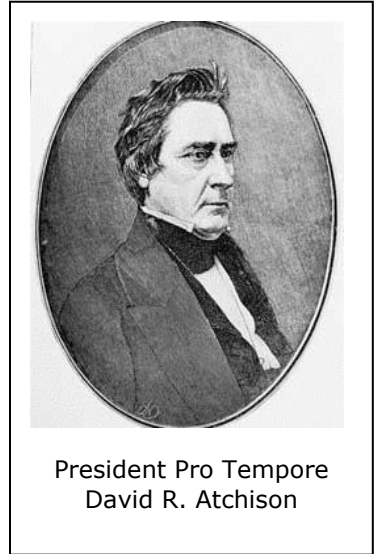
Among the various bills signed by Polk during his final hours as President was legislation providing for the creation of a Department of the Interior, placing responsibility for matters involving the census, Indians, public lands, and patents under its control.

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War or Peace?

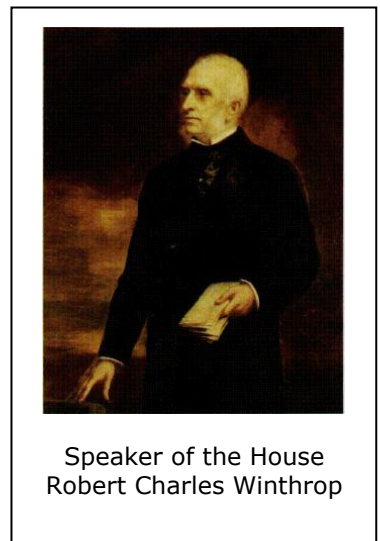
Mexican-American War

In the intervening time between the 29th and 30th Congresses, with Mexico still unwilling to surrender, President Polk ordered an advance on the Mexican capital. The overland journey to Mexico City from the north, however, was long and arduous, 500 miles through desert and mountainous terrain. It was decided that the better course was to send troops on a seaborne expedition to land at Veracruz. General Winfield Scott captured the port after eighteen days and then began the 280-mile route to Mexico City. After a series of skirmishes, Scott and his army of 10,000 troops captured Mexico City in September. The Americans had also captured San Francisco, ending Mexican rule in Upper California. The last official campaign of Mexican President Antonio López de Santa Ana led to defeat in the Battle of Huamantla in October 1847.

U.S. Expansion and Manifest Destiny

As the 30th Congress convened, the United States was concluding its engagement in the Mexican-American War. In his address before the first session of the 30th Congress, President Polk made clear the territorial aspirations at the root of his prosecution of the war—the practical application of his embrace of the ideology of “Manifest Destiny,” the belief that the expansion of U.S. territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast was providential. Claiming that the government of Mexico has no liquid resources with which to indemnify U.S. citizens’ claims against it, Polk argued that “the only means by which [Mexico] can reimburse the United States for the expenses of the war, is a cession to the United States of a portion of her territory [. . .]. If we refuse this, we can obtain nothing else.”

Polk was to attain his wish. The terms of the cessation of the conflict were set by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which was ratified in 1848. Per the terms of the treaty, Mexico ceded the territories of New Mexico and Upper



California and formally recognized the U.S. annexation of Texas, with the Rio Grande as the shared border—the expansion of U.S. territory during Polk’s administration is the largest in its history. In return, the United States was to pay \$15 million directly to the Mexican government and assume responsibility for an additional \$3.25 million in claims of U.S. citizens against Mexico.

Source:

Polk, James K. [*Message from the President of the United States, to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the first session of the Thirtieth Congress.*](#) Senate, Dec. 7, 1847. 30th Congress, 1st Session, S.exdoc.1/1 (Pr11.1/1:847), ProQuest Congressional, 503 S.exdoc.1/1

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Economic Trends and Conditions

During the first years of his administration, President Polk prioritized liberalizing the economy, particularly with respect to protectionist trade practices. In July 1846 the Congress enacted the Walker Tariff, which replaced the so-called Black Tariff of 1842, and reduced tariffs from 32% to 25%. Thus, though the Treasury experienced budgetary stress related to the prosecution of the war with Mexico, during the fiscal year ending December 1, 1847, the government saw an \$8 million increase in revenues from customs duties. Moreover, the liberalization of U.S. trade policy was met with salutary measures by U.S. trading partners, strengthening markets for U.S. agricultural and manufacturing exports.

In addition to the increased economic robustness brought about by Polk’s economic liberalization policies, in the days leading up to the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, significant gold and mercury deposits were discovered in the territory of Upper California at Sutter’s Mill, which was presently to be ceded to the United States. This would have a substantial impact on Federal revenues in the ensuing years, but in the near term the discoveries wreaked havoc on the U.S. labor market. In his address before the second session of the 30th Congress, Polk reported on the situation in California, “labor commands a most exorbitant price, and all other pursuits but that of searching for the precious metals are abandoned. Nearly the whole of the male population of the country have gone to the gold districts. Ships arriving on the coast are deserted by their crews, and their voyages suspended for want of sailors.” Polk further urged the Congress to authorize the establishment of a branch of the U.S. Mint in California in anticipation of the development of these new mineral resources.

Sources:

Polk, James K. [Message from the President of the United States, to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the first session of the Thirtieth Congress](#). Senate, Dec. 7, 1847. 30th Congress, 1st Session, S.exdoc.1/1 (Pr11.1/1:847), ProQuest Congressional, 503 S.exdoc.1/1

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Major Treaties

Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo – Terminated the war with Mexico and provided for Mexico to relinquish all claims to Texas north of the Rio Grande and ceded New Mexico and Upper California to the United States. In return, the U.S. agreed to pay \$15 million directly to Mexico and assume the responsibility for an additional \$3.25 million in adjusted claims of American citizens against the Mexican government. Concluded February 2, 1848; Approved by the Senate, with amendments, March 10, 1848 ([9 Stat. 922](#))

Treaty with New Granada – Granted to the United States a right-of-way across the Isthmus of Panama. In return, the United States guaranteed the neutrality of the Isthmus and the sovereignty of New Granada over it. Concluded December 12, 1846. Approved by the Senate June 3, 1848 ([9 Stat. 881](#))

Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#). Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

License Cases, three cases argued together before the Court, held that Massachusetts's, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire's laws restricting the sale of alcoholic liquors and spirits to those with licenses were constitutional, 46 U.S. 504 (1847)

Source:

Costello, George A. and Johnny H. Killian. [Constitution of the United States of America. Analysis and Interpretation](#). CRS, Library of Congress, Jan. 1, 1996. 103rd Congress, 1st Session, S. Doc. 103-6 (Y1.1/3:103-6). ProQuest Congressional, 14152 S.doc.6

1847 Events

- **Jan. 4:** [Samuel Colt sells his first revolver pistol to the U.S. government](#)
- **Jan. 30:** Yerba Buena, California is renamed San Francisco
- **Feb. 11:** American inventor Thomas Alva Edison is born
- **Feb. 22:** *Mexican-American War* – [General Taylor marches to Buena Vista, refusing to surrender to Mexican forces lead by Santa Anna](#)

- **Feb. 23:** *Mexican-American War* – [General Taylor's army of 4,800 men defeats a Mexican army of approx. 15,000, making Taylor and instant war hero and securing his future Presidential candidacy](#)
- **Feb. 28:** *Mexican-American War* – [Colonel Alexander Doniphan defeats Mexican forces at Sacramento Creek](#)
- **Mar. 1:** *Mexican-American War* – [Colonel Doniphan occupies Chihuahua](#)
- **Mar. 3:** Scottish-American inventor Alexander Graham Bell is born
- **Mar. 9-29:** *Mexican-American War* – General Scott's forces land near Vera Cruz, laying siege to the fortified city in the battle of Vera Cruz; the city falls after three weeks with high Mexican civilian casualties
- **Apr. – May:** *Mexican-American War* – [General Scott marches to Mexico City, taking the cities of Cerro Gordo and Puebla along the way](#)
- **Apr. 10:** Hungarian-American journalist and publisher Joseph Pulitzer is born
- **May 7:** The American Medical Association (AMA) is founded in Philadelphia
- **July 1:** [The United States issues its first postage stamps](#)
- **July 24:** [After a journey of 17 months, Brigham Young leads 148 Mormon pioneers into the Salt Lake Valley, resulting in the establishment of Salt Lake City](#)
- **July 26:** [The Republic of Liberia declares its independence from the American Colonization Society](#)
- **Aug. 20:** *Mexican-American War* – [Santa Anna asks for an armistice](#)
- **Sept. 7:** *Mexican-American War* – [Peace negotiations fail and the armistice ends](#)
- **Step. 14:** *Mexican-American War* – [Following a week of fighting, General Scott win the Battle of Mexico City and seize the city](#)
- **Oct. 19:** Charlotte Brontë publishes *Jane Eyre* under the pen name Currer Bell
- **Dec. 14:** Emily Brontë and Anne Brontë publish *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, respectively, in a 3-volume set, under the pen names Ellis Bell and Acton Bell
- **Dec. 22:** [The freshman Congressman, Abraham Lincoln, addresses the House for the first time, speaking against the Mexican War](#)

1848 Events

- **Jan. 24:** [Gold is discovered at Sutter's Mill in California](#)
- **Jan. 31:** [Construction of the Washington Monument begins in Washington, D.C.](#)
- **Feb. 21:** Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels publish *The Communist Manifesto* in London
- **Feb. 23:** [John Quincy Adams, sixth President of the United States, dies](#)
- **Feb. 23 - 24:** *European Revolutions of 1848* – [François Guizot, Prime Minister of France, resigns and King FraLouis Philippe I of France abdicates after days of revolution in Paris](#)

- **Mar. 2:** *European Revolutions of 1848* – March Disturbances break out in Sweden
- **Mar. 10:** *Mexican-American War* - [Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo is signed concluding the U.S. war with Mexico and provided for Mexico to relinquish all claims to Texas north of the Rio Grande and ceded New Mexico and Upper California](#)
- **Mar. 15:** *European Revolutions of 1848* - [The Hungarian Revolution of 1848 begins when young revolutionary intellectuals organize peaceful demonstrations in Pest forcing the Habsburg authorities to accede to demands for Hungarian self-determination and political liberalization](#)
- **Mar. 18:** *European Revolutions of 1848* – [fighting between revolutionary and royalist forces breaks out in Berlin, Germany](#)
- **Mar. 24:** *European Revolutions of 1848* – [Start of the First Schleswig War, a military conflict between Germany and Denmark over the contested duchies of Schleswig and Holstein](#)
- **Apr. 11:** *European Revolutions of 1848* – First Hungarian national government is formed, led by Lajos Batthyány
- **May 19:** *Mexican-American War* - Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ratified by the Senate
- **May 29:** [Wisconsin is admitted as the 30th U.S. State](#)
- **June 21:** *European Revolutions of 1848* - The Proclamation of Islaz is made public and a Romanian revolutionary government is formed during the Wallachian Revolution
- **Aug. 14:** [Oregon Territory organized, encompassing modern day Oregon, Washington, Idaho and parts of Wyoming and Montana](#)
- **Sep. 12:** *European Revolutions of 1848* - The Swiss Federal Constitution, patterned after the U.S. Constitution, enters into force, establishing the Swiss Federal Republic as one of the first European liberal democracies
- **Sept. 25:** *European Revolutions of 1848* - [The Hungarian King and Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand V refuses to recognize the Hungarian government of Lajos Batthyány](#)
- **Nov. 4:** *European Revolutions of 1848* – France ratified a new constitution beginning the Second Republic of France
- **Dec. 2:** [Austro-Hungarian Emperor Ferdinand I abdicates in favor of his nephew Franz Joseph, who will reign until his death in 1916](#)
- **Dec. 19:** English novelist Emily Brontë dies

Sources:

["An Act for the Admission of the State of Wisconsin into the Union."](#) (9 Stat. 233, Chap. 50; May 29, 1848). ProQuest Congressional

["An Act to provide for carrying into Execution, in Part, the Twelfth Article of the Treaty with Mexico, concluded at Guadalupe \[Guadalupe\] Hidalgo."](#) (9 Stat. 348, Chap. 71; Feb. 26, 1849). ProQuest Congressional

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May, Henry. [Monument to the memory of Washington. \(To accompany Joint Resolution no. 58.\)](#) Select Committee on the Washington National Monument, House, Feb. 22, 1855. 33rd Congress, 2nd Session, H.rp.94. ProQuest Congressional, 808 H.rp.94

Nelson, William. [American Colonization Society.](#) Committee on Claims, House, Dec. 12, 1850. 31st Congress, 2nd Session, H.rp.2. ProQuest Congressional, 606 H.rp.2

["Oregon Territorial Government."](#) Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session (Aug. 14, 1848) Vol. 17, pp. 1080-1081. ProQuest Congressional, CG-1848-0814

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[Postage on steamboat letters.](#) Committee on Post Offices and Post Roads. House, Feb. 29, 1848. 30th Congress, 1st Session, H.rp.315. ProQuest Congressional, 525 H.rp.315

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Taylor, Zachary. [Message from the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress \[...\].](#) Committee of the Whole House, House, Dec. 4, 1849. 31st Congress, 1st Session, H.exdoc.5/1 (Pr12.1/1:849). ProQuest Congressional, 569 H.exdoc.5/1

Major Acts

Oregon Territory Act, established a territorial Government for Oregon in which slavery would be prohibited. Approved Aug. 14, 1848. ([9 Stat. 323, Chap. 177](#))

Department of the Interior, established the Department of the Interior (originally called the Home Department) with responsibility for matters involving the census, Indians, public lands, and patents. Approved Mar. 3, 1849. ([9 Stat. 395, Chap. 108](#))

Sources:

Dell, Christopher and Stephen W. Stathis. [Major Acts of Congress and Treaties Approved by the Senate, 1789-1980](#), Government Division (CRS), Sept. 1, 1982. 97th Congress, 2nd Session, 82-156 GOV. ProQuest Congressional, CRS-1982-GOV-0005

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