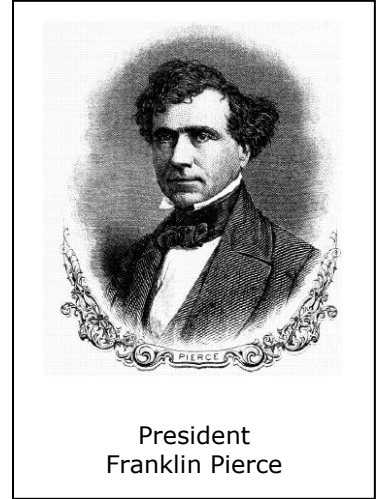


Thirty-Fourth Congress

Dec. 3, 1855 – Mar. 3, 1857

Administration of Franklin Pierce

Historical Background.....	1
War or Peace?	2
Economic Trends and Conditions.....	4
Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions.....	5
1855 Events.....	5
1856 Events.....	5
Major Acts.....	7



Historical Background

After the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, it fell to the citizens of each territory to determine whether they will prohibit or allow slavery within its borders. Early in 1855, the Nebraska Territory proceeded, in a peaceful and orderly fashion, to establish a Free Soil government—the Free Soil Party was a short-lived, single-issue party that opposed the expansion of slavery into newly organized territories—under acting Governor Thomas B. Cuming. Cuming convened the first legislature in Omaha. The election of the territorial assembly in Kansas, however, quickly devolved into a bitter struggle between pro-slavery and Free Soil factions. Pro-slavery activists flooded across the border from Missouri, tipping the electoral scale in their favor. A shadow, Free-Stater Kansas government was convened in Topeka and civil strife broke out between abolitionists and pro-slavery settlers. Throughout the 1850s, the so-called “Bleeding Kansas” issue dominated domestic politics. The long-simmering conflict was finally coming to a head.

On August 1, 1856, leadership in the House of Representatives refused to seat either pro-slavery or Free State Kansas territorial delegations. Later that month, House Republicans were unsuccessful in their attempt to alter the Pierce Administration’s Kansas Policy by adding a proviso to the 1856 Army Appropriations bill that would have prevented the further use of Federal troops in aiding the pro-slavery legislature in Kansas. Meanwhile, incidents of violence between the opposing camps continued, with an estimated 200 casualties and property damage totaling \$2 million in just the 14 months between November 1855 and December 1856.

House	Senate
Majority Party: Opposition (100 seats)	Majority Party: Democrats (34 seats)
Minority Party: Democrats (83 seats)	Minority Party: Opposition (21 seats)
Other Parties: Americans (51 seats)	Other Parties: Americans (1 Seat); Republican (1 seat)
Speaker of the House: Nathaniel Prentice Banks	President Pro Tempore: Jesse D. Bright; Charles E. Stuart; James M. Mason

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

Pierce, Franklin. [Message from the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the third session of the Thirty-fourth Congress.](#) Senate, Dec. 31, 1855. 34th Congress, 1st Session, H.exdoc.1/1. (Pr14.1/1:855) ProQuest Congressional, 840 H.exdoc.1/1

Pierce, Franklin. [Message from the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the third session of the Thirty-fourth Congress.](#) Senate, Dec. 2, 1856, 34th Congress, 3rd Session, S.exdoc.5/1 (Pr14.1/1:856) ProQuest Congressional, 875 S.exdoc.5/1

War or Peace?

Bleeding Kansas

As the question of slavery in the newly organized territories of Nebraska and Kansas was being debated in the Congress, activists on both sides of the debate began settling in the territories in hopes of skewing the issue in their respective favor. After the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which determined that the issue would be decided by plebiscite in each of the territories, thousands of pro-slavery, so-called “Border Ruffians” streamed into Kansas from neighboring Missouri to vote on the issue. This gave the pro-slavery side the numbers to prevail in the referendum, though the result was immediately rejected by the opposing side on the grounds that thousands of non-residents unduly influenced the final tally. The newly elected, pro-slavery assembly passed a series of laws designed to stymie the Free Soil movement, while the opposition Free-Staters organized a shadow government based in Topeka and drafted the Topeka Constitution, which banned slavery in the territory.

Despite the irregularities that tainted the result, President Franklin Pierce openly supported the result and recognized the Democratic Party-dominated pro-slavery legislature. Emboldened by administration support, pro-slavery activists entered the town of Lawrence, Kansas, targeting the Free State Hotel and the abolitionist *Kansas Free State* and *Herald of Freedom* newspapers on May 21, 1856. In response, on the night of the 24-25 May, a posse comprising members of the anti-slavery Pottawatomie Rifles militia and the abolitionist John Brown went to the homes of prominent pro-slavery settlers in Franklin County, Kansas ordering the men to come with them and summarily murdered them. In all, five men were killed in what was to become known as the Pottawatomie Massacre. On July 4, President Pierce ordered 500 soldiers to Topeka to bring the Free-Staters to heel. Then, in August, a group of several hundred armed Border Ruffians attacked the abolitionist settlement of Osawatimie intent upon destroying the settlement. Though John Brown was not initially present in the settlement, his 26-year old son Frederick met the group as it advanced. The group ordered Frederick to halt his advance, but he persisted and was shot through the heart and killed. Informed of his son’s murder, John Brown advanced on the town with as many supporters as he could gather. Though they initially fought to push back the Border Ruffians they were badly outnumbered and were ultimately forced to retreat. The marauding Missourians then aimed their fury at the settlement, setting fire to homes and buildings and looting until virtually the entire settlement was reduced to a smoldering ruin.



President Pro Tempore
Jesse D. Bright



President Pro Tempore
Charles E. Stuart

Yakima War

During this period, the already fragile status quo between settlers of the newly organized Washington Territory and the Native American tribes of the region was pushed to the breaking point by the discovery of gold in the Yakama territory. Prospectors eager to get a piece of the action arrived in the Washington territory, often encroaching into the recently defined tribal lands. When two prospectors suspected of raping a Yakama woman were killed in retaliation in 1855, a Bureau of Indian Affairs agent, Andrew Bolon, traveled to the territory to investigate. Turned away by the Yakama chief Shumaway, who judged the mission too dangerous, Bolon joined a group of Yakama who were riding in the same direction. One of the party, Mosheel, the son of Shumaway, decided to kill Bolon over the objections of many in his party.

Following this incident, the situation in the Washington Territory quickly devolved further. The final months of 1855 saw a series of skirmishes and smaller battles as the situation continued to worsen. In early 1856 a party comprised of thousands of members of the Klickitat, Takoma, Walla-Walla, and other neighboring tribes, attacked the Seattle settlement in the Washington territory, but were swiftly defeated in what became known as the First Battle of Seattle.

Foreign Affairs

Elsewhere, in February 1855, the gunboat *U.S.S. Water Witch*, which was conducting surveys of river systems in South America, was fired upon by the Paraguayan military at Fort Itapirú, resulting in the death of one sailor. Meanwhile, with the Crimean War in Europe ending in early 1856, shipping and trade between the U.S. and European nations was opened once more. Despite the mended relations between most European powers, President Pierce stated that some adversity lingered “which has arisen out of the negotiations with Great Britain in reference to Central America.” A treaty between the United States and Great Britain was meant to neutralize either’s dominion over Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and other regions of Central and South America. However, Great Britain remained a governing party in these regions and the continued British occupation of the region put strain on U.S.-British relations.

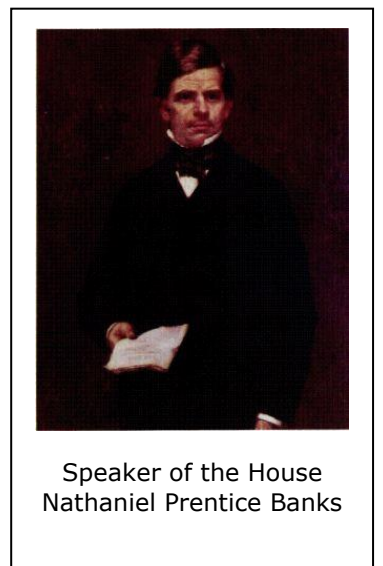
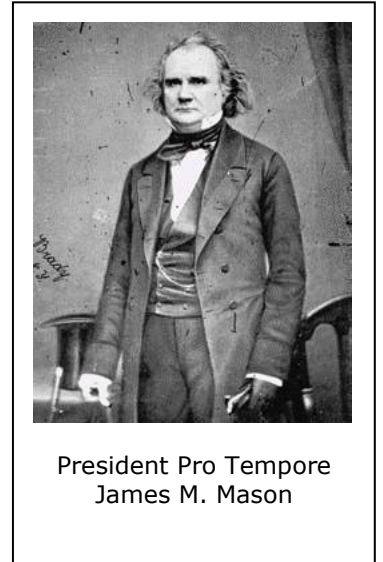
Sources:

Allison, John. [*Expenses of Indian War with Oregon and Washington*](#), Committee on Military Affairs. House, June 24, 1856. 34th Congress, 1st Session, H.rp.195. ProQuest Congressional, 868 H.rp.195

Pierce, Franklin. [*Message of the President of the United States, communicating a report of the Secretary of the Interior relative to the Indian disturbances in the Territories of Washington and Oregon*](#). Committee on Military Affairs. Senate, Mar. 5, 1856. 34th Congress, 1st Session, S.exdoc.46. ProQuest Congressional, 821 S.exdoc.46

Pierce, Franklin. [*Message from the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the third session of the Thirty-fourth Congress*](#). Senate, Dec. 31, 1855. 34th Congress, 1st Session, H.exdoc.1/1. (Pr14.1/1:855) ProQuest Congressional, 840 H.exdoc.1/1

Pierce, Franklin. [*Message from the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress*](#).



[at the commencement of the third session of the Thirty-fourth Congress](#). Senate, Dec. 2, 1856, 34th Congress, 3rd Session, S.exdoc.5/1 (Pr14.1/1:856) ProQuest Congressional, 875 S.exdoc.5/1

Economic Trends and Conditions

Land sales continued to be a major source of economic prosperity during the 34th Congress. In 1855, word of the 1852 discovery of gold in the Columbia River near Fort Colville in the Washington Territory reached the rest of the country. As a result, prospectors, including many unsuccessful participants in the California gold rush, began arriving in large numbers in Washington, often encroaching on recently reserved tribal lands, and ratcheting up tension between the tribes and the Territorial government.

The end of the Crimean War also allowed for growth in overseas trade, especially in Great Britain with the passing of a treaty concerning the right of fishery on the British North American coast. Blockages and privateering concerns were quelled in negotiations with the French, British, Austrian, Prussian, Sardinian, Ottoman, and Russian governments. Because of the increase in foreign trade and the budget surpluses enjoyed during this period, President Pierce pleaded with Congress for a reduction of duties on imports. New opportunities for trade in Sicily, Nicaragua, and Hawaii also contributed to this drive for lower tariffs, which resulted in the Tariff of 1857.

The Pierce administration was greatly concerned with the reduction of public debt and equal distribution of taxation in this period. At the start of the fiscal year of July 1, 1856, the public debt was over \$40 million. President Pierce recommended during this Congress that revenue laws be revised in order to prevent financial mismanagement of public money.

Sources:

Guthrie, James. [Report of the Secretary of the Treasury, on the state of the finances, for the year ending June 30, 1855](#), Senate, Dec. 3, 1855, 34th Congress, 1st Session, S.exdoc.2. (T1.1:855) ProQuest Congressional, 814 S.exdoc.2

Guthrie, James. [Report of the Secretary of the Treasury, on the state of the finances, for the year ending June 30, 1856](#), Senate, Dec. 1, 1856, 34th Congress, 3rd Session, S.exdoc.3. (T1.1:856) ProQuest Congressional, 874 S.exdoc.3

Julius Bien & Co. 'Map of a part of Washington Territory east of Cascade Mtns. showing topography of the mines region &c.' in [Message of the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress at the commencement of the third session of the Thirty-seventh Congress](#). House, Dec. 1, 1862. 37th Congress, 3rd Session. H.exdoc.1/17. ProQuest Congressional, 1160 H.exdoc.1/17, map 1

Pierce, Franklin. [Message from the President of the United States to the two Houses of Congress, at the commencement of the third session of the Thirty-fourth Congress](#). Senate, Dec. 31, 1855. 34th Congress, 1st Session, H.exdoc.1/1. (Pr14.1/1:855) ProQuest Congressional, 840 H.exdoc.1/1

Pierce, Franklin. [Message from the President of the United States to the two houses of Congress, at the commencement of the third session of the Thirty-fourth Congress](#). Senate, Dec. 2, 1856, 34th Congress, 3rd Session, S.exdoc.5/1 (Pr14.1/1:856) ProQuest Congressional, 875

Landmark U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

Murray's Lessee v. Hoboken Land and Improvement Co., held that the federal government did not violate due process of law guarantee of the Fifth Amendment in recovering and disbursing money embezzled from it through nonjudicial procedures, 59 US 272 (1856)

Sources:

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

1855 Events

- **Jan. 23:** The first bridge over the Mississippi River opens in what is now Minneapolis, Minnesota
- **Jan. 28:** The first locomotive runs from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean on the Panama Railway
- **Feb.:** The gunboat *U.S.S. Water Witch* is fired upon by the Paraguayan military at Fort Itapirú, resulting in the death of one sailor
- **Mar. 2:** Aleksandr II Romanov becomes Tsar of the Russian Empire
- **Mar. 27:** [Abraham Gesner patents kerosene](#)
- **June 17:** *Crimean War* - [Heavy French and British bombardment of Sebastopol, Crimea, more than 2,000 killed](#)
- **July 4:** [In Brooklyn, New York, the first edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is published](#)
- **Aug. 9:** Battle of Acapulco during Mexican Liberal uprising
- **Sep. 3:** [Indian Wars in Nebraska, 700 soldiers under American General William S. Harney avenge the Grattan Massacre by attacking a Sioux village, killing 100 men, women, and children](#)
- **Sep. 25:** *Yakima War* - [Bureau of Indian Affairs agent Andrew Bolon is killed by a member of the Yakama tribe while attempting to investigate the deaths of two gold prospectors accused of raping a Yakama woman, marking the beginning of the Yakima War](#)
- **Oct. 17:** [Bessemer steelmaking process patented](#)
- **Nov. 17:** David Livingstone becomes the first European to see Victoria Falls in what is now Zambia and Zimbabwe

1856 Events

- **Jan. 26:** *Yakima War* - [Battle of Seattle: A war party comprised of several hundred members of the Klickitat, Takoma, Walla-Walla, and other neighboring tribes invaded the settlement of Seattle in the Washington Territory, but were quickly repelled](#)
- **Jan. 29:** Victoria Cross established to acknowledge valor in the face of the enemy (United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries)
- **Feb. 29:** *Crimean War* - Hostilities in Russo-Turkish War cease

- **Mar. 30:** *Crimean War* - Russia signs Peace of Paris, ending the Crimean War
- **Apr. 11:** [Costa Rica defeats William Walker's invading Nicaraguans in the Battle of Rivas](#)
- **May 21:** *Bleeding Kansas* - [Lawrence, Kansas, is captured and sacked by pro-slavery forces](#)
- **May 24-25:** *Bleeding Kansas* - [Pottawatomie Massacre: a group of followers of radical abolitionist John Brown kill five homesteaders in Franklin County, Kansas](#)
- **July 4:** *Bleeding Kansas* – President Franklin Pierce orders 500 soldiers to Topeka, Kansas to bring the shadow Free-Stater government to heel
- **Aug. 1:** *Bleeding Kansas* – [The House of Representatives refuses to seat either the pro-slavery or Free-Stater territorial delegations](#)
- **Aug. 1:** *Bleeding Kansas* – [Battle of Osawatomie: Border Ruffians from Missouri lay siege to the abolitionist stronghold settlement at Osawatomie, ultimately burning virtually the entire settlement and killing Frederick Brown, the son of abolitionist firebrand John Brown](#)
- **Oct. 8:** The Second Opium War begins with the Arrow Incident on the Pearl River

Sources:

Buchanan, James. [Message from the President of the United States, communicating a letter from the Secretary of State to the effect that the government of Nicaragua had made no complaint against the government of the United States on account of the arrest of William Walker and his followers.](#) Committee on Foreign Affairs. House, Jan. 7, 1858. 35th Congress, 1st Session. ProQuest Congressional, 950 H.exdoc.26

Committee on Elections. House; Committee to Investigate the Troubles in the Territory of Kansas, Select. House. [Kansas Affairs.](#) GPO, Mar. 27, Apr. 14, 18, 23-26, 28 - May 3, 5-10, 12, 14-17, 19-24, 26-31, Jun. 2-7, 9-10, 12, 17, 26-28, Jul. 1, 4, 11, 1856. 34th Congress, 1st Session. ProQuest Congressional, HRG-1856-ELH-0001

Cullom, William. [Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the year 1856.](#) Patent Office, Department of the Interior, Feb. 17, 1857. 34th Congress, 3rd Session. (I23.1/1:856/[pt.1]/v.1) ProQuest Congressional, 902 H.exdoc.65

Dickins, Asbury. [Report on military operations of English, French, and Russian armies in the Crimea.](#) Department of War, June 16, 1860. 36th Congress, 1st Session. (W1.2:Eu7/2) ProQuest Congressional, 1037 S.exdoc.60

[Executive minutes of the Territory of Kansas, from the 1st July, 1855, to the 30th day of December, 1855. -- Received at the Department of State 13th May, 1856.](#) Senate, Dec. 1, 1856. S.exdoc.5/3. 34th Congress, 3rd Session. ProQuest Congressional, 875 S.exdoc.5/3

Howard, William Alanson. [Kansas affairs.](#) Committee on Elections. House; Select Committee Investigating Election Fraud in the Kansas Territory. House, July 2, 1856. H.rp.200 (Y4.K13:R29) 34th Congress, 1st Session. ProQuest Congressional, 869 H.rp.200

["Kansas Contested Election."](#) Congressional Globe 25 (1856) pp. 1859-1873. 34th Congress, 1st Session. ProQuest Congressional. CG-1856-0801

[List of manuscripts, books, portraits, prints, broadsides, and memorabilia in commemoration of 120th anniversary of birth of Walt Whitman, May 31, 1819–1939.](#) Library of Congress, Jan. 1, 1939. 76th Congress, 1st Session. (LC1.2:W59) ProQuest Congressional, LC1.2..W59

Pierce, Franklin. [*Council with the Sioux Indians at Fort Pierre. Message from the President of the United States, communicating minutes of a council held at Fort Pierre with the Sioux Indians, by General Harney, &c.*](#) Committee on Indian Affairs. House, July 24, 1856. 34th Congress, 1st Session. ProQuest Congressional, 859 H.exdoc.130

Pierce, Franklin. [*Message from the President of the United States, transmitting report in regard to Indian affairs on the Pacific.*](#) House, Feb. 14, 1857. H.exdoc.76. 34th Congress, 3rd Session. ProQuest Congressional, 906 H.exdoc.76

[*Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the year 1855.*](#) Patent Office, Department of the Interior, Dec. 3, 1855. 34th Congress, 1st Session. (I23.1/1:855/[pt.1]/v.1) ProQuest Congressional, 816 S.exdoc.20

Major Acts

Army Appropriations, Fiscal Year 1857, attracted attention as a result of a Republican rider attached August 18, 1856, forbidding the use of Federal troops in support of pro-slavery activities of the Kansas State Legislature. The rider was defeated and the bill enacted without its provisions. Approved Aug. 30, 1856. ([11 Stat. 147, Chap. 29](#))

Tariff of 1857, modified the Tariff Act of 1846, by increasing the amount of goods that could be imported without being subjected to tariffs and reducing the duties on many imported goods in response to the Federal budget surpluses of the mid-1850s. Approved Mar. 3, 1957. ([11 Stat. 192, Chap. 98](#))

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

Copyright©2018, ProQuest LLC. All rights reserved.