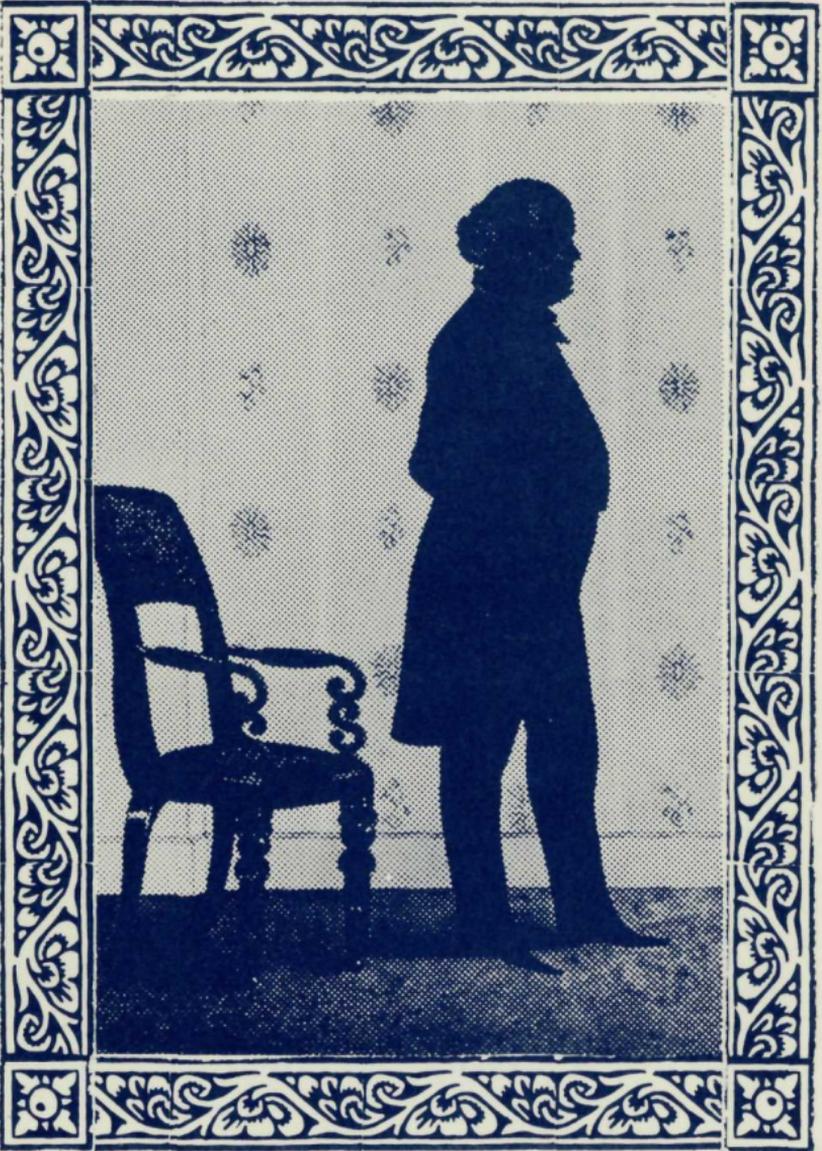


# MARTIN VAN BUREN



National Historic Site  
Kinderhook, New York

## THE PRESIDENCY

Van Buren became Chief Executive in 1837, as financial panic spread throughout the nation. Continuing his opposition to the bank system, he attempted to establish an independent Treasury which would divorce money-power from preferred factions of government. After bitter opposition, Congress finally passed an Independent Treasury Bill in 1840 which included most of the principles for the National Treasury System of today.

Controversy over the U.S. northeast boundary was an important issue during Van Buren's Presidency. Incidents on the Aroostock River in Maine and the Canadian attack on an American ship, the S.S. *Caroline*, provoked armed conflict between U.S. and Canadian citizens. By halting armed clashes, the President secured a continuing peaceful relationship with the Canadians and Great Britain.

His awareness of the exploitation of the nineteenth-century laborer led the President to set an example for private industry whose employees were generally forced to work a sixteen-to eighteen-hour day. In 1840, he issued an Executive Order which limited the work of all laborers on federal projects to a ten-hour day.

Unanimously renominated by the Democrats, Van Buren lost the election of 1840 primarily due to his positions in opposition to the extension of slavery and to the annexation of Texas. In 1848, he was nominated again for the Presidency by the antislavery Democrats, "Barnburners", and then by the "Free-Soilers". Failing to be reelected, he retired to Lindenwald, his home in Kinderhook.

Many historians today agree that Van Buren's greatest achievements in office sprang from his further development of Jacksonian Democracy, and his creation of a new financial system. His use of the Executive Veto, and his strengthening of the Supreme Court constituted a continuation of Jackson's principles.

However, Van Buren expanded the democratic doctrine. He consistently demonstrated his belief that government should be a useful instrument of public service, rather than a self-serving bureaucracy. He cautioned the nation against a strong, exclusive central government with a powerful judiciary, autocratic financial system, irresponsible bureaucracy, and high taxes. Van Buren implemented his philosophy by enforcing internal improvements through state government and by revising the Electoral College so that it could accurately represent the will of all voters. A political visionary, Martin Van Buren deserves national recognition for his personal contribution to the development of the democratic freedoms we enjoy today.



Throughout his retirement, he maintained an active interest in public affairs and wrote a political autobiography, published posthumously under the title *Inquiry into the Origin and Course of Political Parties in the United States, 1867*. In 1862, at the age of seventy-nine, Van Buren died and was buried on the grounds of the Kinderhook Cemetery.

## LINDENWALD

In 1839, at the height of his Presidential career, Martin Van Buren purchased his estate in Kinderhook, New York. Lindenwald originally belonged to the family of Van Buren's life-long friend, William P. Van Ness. It was William's father, Judge Peter Van Ness, who built the house in 1797. This date is engraved on the original knocker which remains today on the dutch front door.

Initially designed in the Federalist style, the house has undergone a number of architectural changes. The first alteration created a ballroom approximately 42 feet long by 15 feet wide in the Palladian style. Many of the original features remain in the ballroom, including the French wallpaper, "Paysage à Chasses" (Landscape of the Hunt).

Possibly no alterations were as great as those executed by Smith Thompson Van Buren, Martin Van Buren's son and heir. President Van Buren commented on the many changes to the house:

"What curious creatures we are, Old Mr. Van Ness built as fine a House here as any reasonable man could, . . . its taste of what was then . . . deemed the best. William P. came and disfigured everything his father had done. I succeeded him and pulled down without a single exception every erection he had made and with evident advantage. Now comes Smith and pulls down many things I had put up and makes alterations without a stint. The four operations will cost nearer fifty than forty thousand dollars for the buildings alone. What non-sense".<sup>1</sup>

The main portion of the house today comprises a brick, two and a half-story structure on a stone foundation. In 1849, Martin Van Buren convinced Smith to join him at Lindenwald with the promise that Smith could alter the house to accommodate his family. Soon afterward the Van Burens engaged Richard Upjohn to design the needed additions and alterations.

Upjohn designed a wing and a four story brick tower in the Italianate style to be added to the rear of the house. For the front of the house, he designed a porch, two dormers, and a central gable in the Victorian Gothic style. The interior additions combined Italianate touches in the arches and fireplaces with the earlier Federal trim and Palladian ballroom.

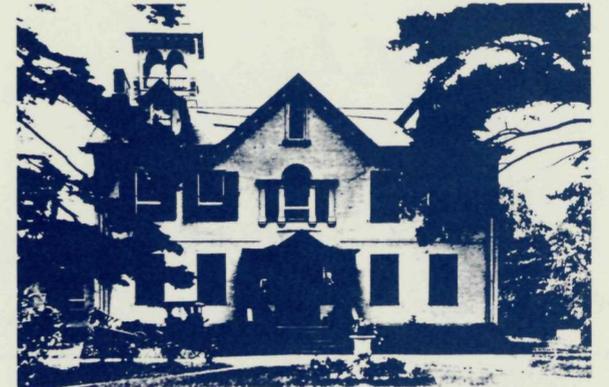
Smith's efforts to change the 1797 house resulted in enlarging the number of rooms to 36, establishing two family living zones, and including such then modern conveniences as kitchen ranges, bathrooms, and furnaces. Construction took over two years and, on several occasions, forced the Van Burens to live elsewhere.

Although the alteration process caused Martin Van Buren considerable inconvenience, interrupting his farming activities and daily routine, he accepted his son's plans and confessed to a friend, ". . . The old house, though associated with many pleasant recollections, had ceased to be comfortable and (we) owed it to the ladies to make the change."<sup>2</sup>

Although later owners were to make further minor changes, the house retains today much of its original dignity. Among such notable owners as the Van Ness and Van Buren families, its history includes owner Leonard Jerome, the maternal grandfather of Winston Churchill. Guests to the house included author Washington Irving and many statesmen who discussed matters of worldwide importance with President Martin Van Buren.

<sup>1</sup>Martin Van Buren to Gorham A. Worth, April 9, 1849. Library of Congress.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Van Buren to Gorham A. Worth, April 23, 1849. Library of Congress.



Lindenwald circa 1908

## YOUR VISIT

Martin Van Buren National Historic Site lies just southeast of Kinderhook, on highway 9H, in Columbia County, New York. Open daily 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., the site closes only for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's.

As the National Park Service acquired the area only recently, the site is in early stages of development. Although only limited portions of the area are now open to visitors, the National Park Service plans to open the whole facility by 1982. For your safety, please take care in walking through only the open portions of the mansion and over the grounds. For further information, contact Superintendent, Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, P.O. Box 544, Kinderhook, New York 12106 (518) 758-9689.

# MARTIN VAN BUREN

# EARLY YEARS

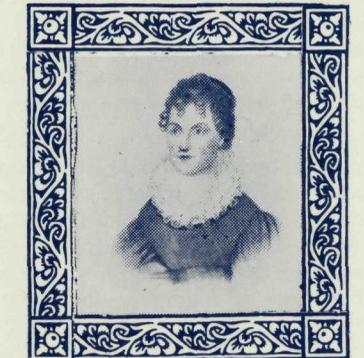
# POLITICAL STRUGGLES

Martin Van Buren, eighth President of the United States, was born in Kinderhook, New York, on December 5, 1782. Of Dutch ancestry, his parents Abraham and Maria Hoes Van Buren were frugal, respectable truck farmers and tavern keepers.

The boy's life in Kinderhook included seasonal attendance at the village school where he gained a working knowledge of English and Latin. While acquiring this limited scholastic training, Van Buren became known as a precocious youth. In 1796, at the age of fourteen, he was hired for a seven-year apprenticeship in the law office of Francis Sylvester, a Federalist. Although the young apprentice studied the necessary law books, he preferred to spend his time digesting Republican pamphlets, journals, and periodicals.

Martin and Hannah soon moved to Hudson, New York. There, as the newly appointed Surrogate (probate lawyer), he began an ambitious career. For thirty-three years, until his retirement from the Presidency, he continually held political office: County Surrogate, State Senator, State Attorney General, U.S. Senator, Governor of New York, Secretary of State, Minister to Great Britain, Vice-President, and President.

Van Buren's political genius lay in his ability to manipulate individuals and to organize groups skillfully. A true father of modern political science, he pitted faction against faction and molded consensus toward his own ends. Consequently, he earned the titles "Red Fox" and "Little Magician".



Mrs. Martin Van Buren



Sons of Martin Van Buren

circa 1843

By 1800, Van Buren had become a staunch Republican law clerk. Through his involvement in petty cases and extemporaneous debating, he gained a local reputation for clear thinking, clever presentations, and concise summaries. For his active support of Jefferson in the Presidential Campaign of 1800, the New York Republican party rewarded the young law clerk by sending him as a delegate to the Congressional Caucus at Troy.

In 1801, Van Buren left for New York City to continue studying law in the office of William P. Van Ness. There he met Aaron Burr and DeWitt Clinton among other leading statesmen, and became exposed to a broader political field. Licensed to practice law, he returned to Kinderhook and became the law partner of his half-brother, James Van Allen.

Four years later on February 21, 1804, he married a distant cousin, Hannah Hoes, his childhood sweetheart who bore him four sons.

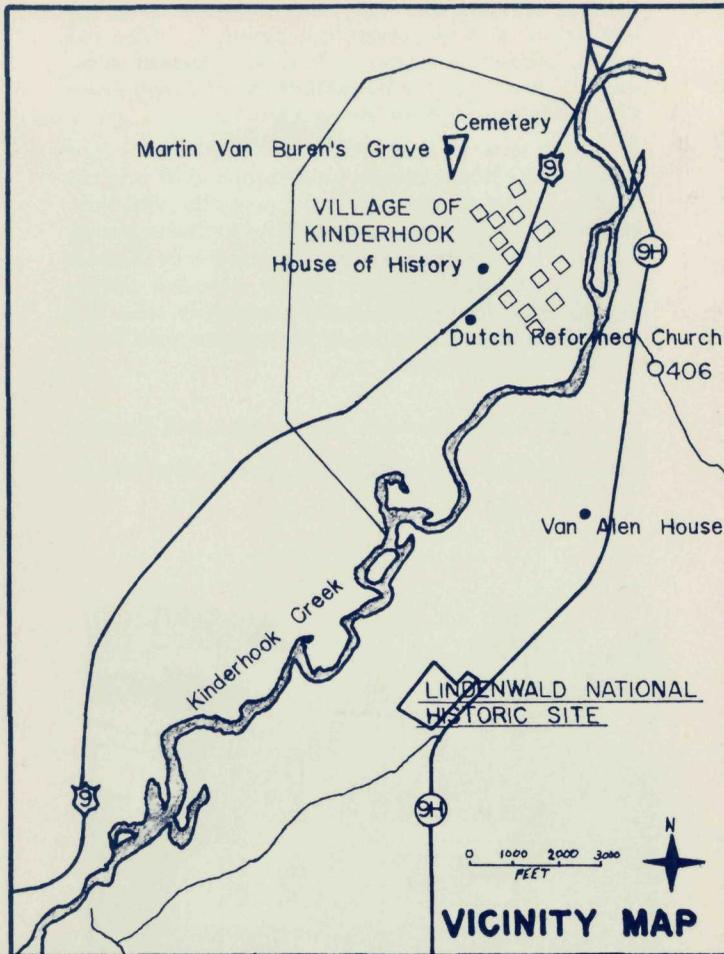
Regarding himself as a disciple of Thomas Jefferson, Van Buren opposed the Federalist concept that the Presidency should be formed from an elite corps of men by a voting aristocracy. In New York State, under his leadership, the Bucktail party revised the state constitution in 1822 to limit the power of upper class New Yorkers in the state legislature.

Suffrage was extended to include city worker and country farmer, more frequent elections were guaranteed, and the Governor was given veto power over all legislated acts. The greater part of monetary patronage was turned over to the state legislature for distribution, new courts were created, and the independence of the State Supreme Court was decreased.

Responding to his convictions of a need for the reinstatement of Jeffersonian principles, Van Buren organized dissident factions of the Republican Party to form the Democratic party. In 1828, the Democrats chose Andrew Jackson as their Presidential candidate.

Nominated for the Vice Presidency in 1832 by the first National Democratic Convention, Van Buren was elected with Jackson on a platform which primarily opposed the established bank system.

Jackson later handpicked Van Buren to be his Presidential successor. Martin Van Buren holds the distinction of being the nation's first President to have been born an American citizen and not a British subject. He was also the first of six Presidents from New York State.



## ADMINISTRATION

On October 26, 1974, President Ford signed into law the act establishing Martin Van Buren National Historic Site to be administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. When developed, the 22-acre site will include the mansion, gatehouse, outbuilding, and proposed visitor facility.

Photo Courtesy: Columbia County Historical Society

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This responsibility includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in Island Territories under U.S. administration.

**National Park Service**  
**U.S. Department of the Interior**



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