

APS UNIT 28

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EMPIRE STATE
POSTAL HISTORY
SOCIETY

MILLARD FILLMORE, COMPTROLLER

By Maris Tirums

Millard Fillmore became the thirteenth president in 1850 after Zachery Taylor died in office. Fillmore was the New York State comptroller when he was elected vice president in 1848.

The illustrated folded letter sheet, addressed to “Honorable M. Fillmore [sic], Comptroller’s Office, Albany,” was postmarked GENESEO, JAN 5, N.Y. and bears hand-stamped markings PAID and 5 to show the postage was prepaid in Geneseo. The half ounce letter rate, effective July 1, 1845, was five cents for delivery under three hundred miles. This conforms with Fillmore’s stint as comptroller from 1848–1849. As the FLS has no enclosure, it is impossible to determine whether it was mailed in 1848 or 1849.



Fillmore had the misfortune to be president during the turbulent years before the Civil War when the federal government was in an acrimonious struggle over slavery, particularly in emerging states and territories. His endorsement of the Compromise of 1850, which among other things, strengthened federal fugitive slave procedures, tarnished his reputation.

Born in the Finger Lakes region in 1800, Fillmore’s political career began in 1829 when he was elected to the state legislature. He served in the US House of Representatives from 1833–1835 and 1837–1843. In 1848, he was the first elected New York State comptroller. The same year, Zachery Taylor and he were elected president and vice president as Whig Party candidates.

Taylor and Fillmore never met until just before their inauguration. They were paired by the party to achieve geographical balance in the ticket. When they met, they disliked each other and generally disagreed on many policy matters. Taylor died in 1850, and Fillmore served out the remainder of his term. In those days, the vice president’s vacancy went unfilled.

Fillmore was the last president who was not affiliated with either the Democratic or Republican parties. After his term in office, the Whig party adopted a number of generally unpopular policy positions which lead to its dissolution. The Whig candidate in 1852 won no states and no Electoral College votes. Fillmore had tried to get the Whig Party nomination for president in 1852, but was rejected.

As president, Fillmore appointed Daniel Webster as secretary of state. His former law

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