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Signature Henry Clay Tour

Henry Clay Timeline

1777 – Born: Hanover County, Virginia (April 12)

1781 – Death of his father, Rev. John Clay

1783 – Remarriage of his mother, Elizabeth Hudson Clay, to Henry Watkins

1792 – The Watkins's move to Kentucky, leaving Henry in Richmond to study law. Begins working for George Wythe.

1796 – Studies law under Robert Brooke

1797 – Admitted to bar; moves to Kentucky

1799 – Marries Lucretia Hart

1803 – Elected to state legislature

1805 – Law professor at Transylvania University

1806 – Sent to U.S. Senate at age 29 to fill unexpired term

1807 – Elected to state legislature and Speaker of the House

1809 – Fights duel with Humphrey Marshall

1810 — Again appointed to complete unexpired term in U.S. Senate

1811 – Elected to U.S. House of Representatives and Speaker of the House

1814 – Peace Commissioner at Ghent, Belgium negotiating the treaty to end the War of 1812

1816 – Presides at formation of American Colonization Society

1820-21 – Missouri Compromise sponsored by Henry Clay

1824 – Runs for Presidency and is defeated by John Quincy Adams. Adams appoints him Secretary of State (1825-1829)

1826 — Fights duel with Virginia Senator John Randolph

1828 – Rejects offer of appointment to Supreme Court



1829 – Is sued by Charlotte Dupuy, a woman he enslaved to serve as cook and nursemaid to his children, for her freedom.

— Ends his term as Secretary of State and returns to Lexington to farm and practice law

1831 – Elected U.S. Senate; nominated for Presidency

1832 – Campaigns for Presidency and is defeated by Andrew Jackson.

1833 — Authors Compromise Tariff Act

1836 – Elected President of American Colonization Society

1842 – Resigns as U.S. Senator

1844 – Nominated for Presidency and is defeated by James K. Polk

1849 – Returns to U.S. Senate

1850 – Authors Compromise of 1850

1852 – Dies in Washington D.C. (June 29); buried in Lexington Cemetery on July 10th

The Great Compromiser

Did you know that differences between the North and South nearly caused civil war in the United States on three separate occasions before The Civil War started in Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861? Each time, one man – one statesman – forged a compromise. That man – that statesman – was Henry Clay of Kentucky.

Early in his life, Henry Clay came to Kentucky and was elected to Congress. A “War Hawk” (someone who supported going to war), Clay evolved into a diplomat, negotiating the Treaty of Ghent, ending the War of 1812. Clay was soon elected to the United States House of Representatives. Missouri petitioned for statehood in 1820 and the nation faced its first crisis over whether to admit a state from the Louisiana Purchase as a free state or slave state. Speaker of the House Henry Clay defused the crisis, which former president Thomas Jefferson as a “firebell in the night,” by crafting the Missouri Compromise.

A second time, the post-War of 1812 Tariff caused South Carolina to threaten to leave the Union. After months of rising threats of civil war, Senator Henry Clay introduced the Compromise of 1833, which calmed tensions.

Then, nearly twenty years later, the question of whether California would enter the Union as a slave or free state troubled Americans. At no time in its history had the American Republic been brought so close to civil war. For a third time, Senator Henry Clay skillfully fashioned a compromise – the Compromise of 1850 – helping America avoid a civil war for more than a decade.

Henry Clay was, indeed, the “Great Compromiser,” the “Great Pacificator.” Abraham Lincoln regarded Henry Clay as the greatest statesman the nation had ever produced, calling him “my beau ideal of a statesman.”



Without question, Henry Clay's ideals of statesmanship and compromise continue to be relevant and necessary in today's increasingly turbulent and divided world.

Guiding Questions

1. What factors were dividing the nation during Henry Clay's life?
2. Henry Clay was called "The Great Compromiser." Why were his compromises important and how did they help keep the Union together?
3. Where did Henry Clay's compromises fall short?

Vocabulary

1. **American System** – Henry Clay called his plan for the economy, "The American System." It included a protective tariff (taxes on goods imported to the U.S. from other countries), a national bank, and federal money for internal improvements (infrastructure/transportation projects). These internal improvements would be paid for by selling public lands in the West instead of giving them away to homesteaders. The goal of the American System was to strengthen economic development, by limiting dependence on goods from other countries (imports) and connect different regions of the growing country through bridges, roads, and canals.
2. **campaign** – An organized effort to gain support for a candidate in a political race. Henry Clay campaigned for President several times.
3. **chattel slavery** - An economic system where human beings were bought, sold, and owned as personal property.
4. **civil war** – A civil war is fought between citizens of one country. The American Civil War was fought between northern states and southern states.
5. **compromise** - An agreement where both sides give up something they want
6. **Compromise of 1850** - In September of 1850, five laws were passed known as the **Compromise of 1850**. These laws centered around slavery and territorial expansion. As part of the **Compromise of 1850**, the Fugitive Slave Act was amended and the slave trade in Washington, D.C., was abolished.
7. **Missouri Compromise** - To maintain the balance of power in Congress between slave and free states, Henry Clay engineered the Missouri Compromise which was passed in 1820. The Compromise admitted Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state. Except for Missouri, slavery was prohibited in the Louisiana Territory north of the 36° 30' latitude line.
8. **Secretary of State** - The Secretary of State is the head of the Department of State and is responsible for foreign affairs. Henry Clay was Secretary of State during John Quincy Adams' Presidency (1825-1829).
9. **Sectionalism** - Loyalty to a region or section of the country, rather than to the nation as a whole
10. **U.S. Senator** - Senators are elected officials who serve as members of the United States Senate representing their state.
11. **Speaker of the House** - The Speaker of the House leads the processions around debates and voting in the House of Representatives. They also are the spokesperson for the majority party.
12. **territory** - an organized part of the country that has not yet been given the full rights of a state



13. **Whig Party** - Henry Clay was a founding member of the Whig Party, an American political party formed in the 1830s in opposition to President Andrew Jackson and his Democratic Party. Other famous Whig Party members were William Henry Harrison, Millard Fillmore, Zachary Taylor, and John Tyler. The Whig Party ended in the 1850s and many of its members including Abraham Lincoln formed the Republican Party.

Activities

For Younger Students

1. What is compromise?
2. Think of a time you had to compromise. What did you get that you wanted? What did you have to give up?

ACTIVITY: Divide into pairs. Come up with a scenario where you both want something different. Come up with a compromise where you each get something you want and you each give up something.

Example: You are both at an amusement park. You only have one hour before you have to leave. Student A. wants to ride the Splash Ride and the Roller Coaster. Student B. wants to ride the Tilt-A-Whirl and the Ferris Wheel.

For Older Students

Triumph or Tragedy? The Compromise of 1850

[Henry Clay's Run for the White House](#)