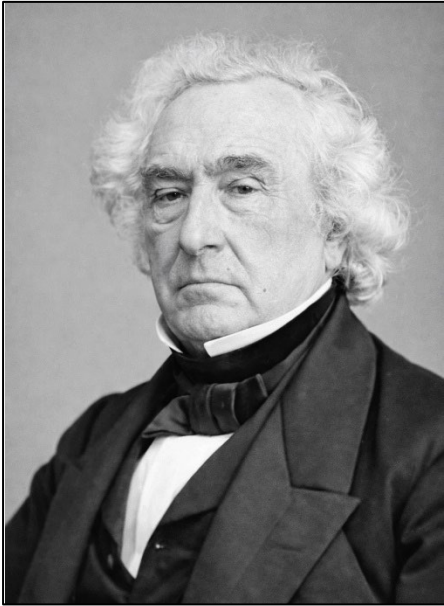


FRANCIS GRANGER

Postmaster General

March 6, 1841 – September 18, 1841



Francis Granger (1792-1865)
Postmaster General during 1841

As the nation's tenth postmaster general, Francis Granger holds two distinctions. He is the only postmaster general whose father was also a postmaster general. His other distinction is that he was appointed postmaster general by the first U.S. president to die in office.

Just one month after his marathon inaugural address, William Henry Harrison succumbed to pneumonia. Harrison's presidency is remembered more for its brevity than its achievements. As the nation navigated the death of its leader, John Quincy Adams captured the moment with a single stroke: *"the administration of Harrison is a blank, a page on which nothing is written."*¹ Into that blank space, the name of Francis Granger was briefly penciled in.

Early Life and Education

Francis Granger's story began in Suffield, Connecticut, on December 1, 1792. His father, Gideon Granger, had already carved a place as the nation's longest serving postmaster general under presidents Jefferson, Madison and Monroe. Francis followed in his father's

footsteps, graduating from Yale in 1811 before moving with his family to Canandaigua, New York. There, amid the Finger Lakes, he studied law, was admitted to the bar in 1816, and began a career that combined ambition with disappointment.

Political Career

As a young lawyer, he quickly found himself drawn into the rough-and-tumble of New York politics. He served in the state assembly, ran unsuccessfully for lieutenant governor, and twice failed in bids for the governorship. Yet setbacks did not deter him. By the mid-1830s, Granger was in Congress, a Whig voice in a turbulent era.

In 1836, he was William Henry Harrison's running mate as the Whig party's vice-presidential nominee. Martin Van Buren won the presidential race, but for vice president there was no clear winner.² Virginia's electors defected, throwing the vice-presidential contest into the Senate under the 12th Amendment—the only time in American history this safeguard has been invoked. In the chamber's hushed vote, Richard M. Johnson triumphed with 33 ballots; Granger received 16.³

Postmaster General

Four years later, Harrison ran again, this time victorious, but with John Tyler as his running mate. Granger was appointed Postmaster General on March 6, 1841, the culmination of a lifetime of striving. Yet the triumph was fleeting. Southern senators bristled at his antislavery views.⁴ Before Granger could leave a mark, Harrison was dead. The longest inaugural address in history had given way to the shortest presidency. Granger found himself serving in a cabinet already unraveling. His tenure lasted all of six months, most of which time First Assistant Postmaster General Selah Hobbie ran the department.⁵

The Cabinet Crisis

Harrison's death triggered a presidential succession crisis. The Constitution simply wasn't clear about what should happen and that ambiguity sparked a genuine constitutional debate. John Tyler's succession only deepened the dissention. The Whigs expected a caretaker; instead, Tyler vetoed their cherished bank bills. He made clear that he was, in his own words, "*neither to be hoodwinked nor bullied*."⁶ That defiance defined his presidency. Tyler repeatedly exercised the veto against Whig legislation, most notably bills to establish a new national bank, and refused to bend to Henry Clay's pressure.

In September 1841, the party revolted. After Tyler's second veto, nearly the entire cabinet resigned in protest. Granger, loyal to Clay and the Whigs, had no choice but to join them. To stay would have been betrayal; to leave was political oblivion. Tyler, derided as "His Accidency," replaced Granger with Charles Wickliffe, who was more palatable to Southern interests.

Aftermath

Granger returned briefly to Congress, but the rupture ended his national career. The son of a Postmaster General, elevated to the same office, he presided over nothing—his legacy defined not by accomplishment but by absence, a man forever linked to a presidency remembered only for its brevity.

Later Life and Legacy

Granger returned to Congress briefly, and in 1861 he joined the peace convention that sought to stave off civil war—a last attempt to preserve the Union he had served for decades. His personal life bore tragedy: his wife, Cornelia Rutsen Van Rensselaer, died in childbirth in 1823, along with their infant daughter. Two children survived adulthood, carrying forward the family line.⁷

On August 31, 1868, Granger died in Canandaigua, the town that had shaped his life. He was laid to rest in Woodlawn Cemetery.⁸ His legacy is unusual, even poignant: the only Postmaster General whose father also held the office, a man whose career was forever linked to a presidency remembered for its brevity. In the sweep of history, Francis Granger's story is less about accomplishment than about proximity to moments when the nation itself stood at a crossroads—when death, politics, and constitutional uncertainty converged.

HISTORIAN

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¹ John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, vol. 10 (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1874), 469.

² Daniel Y. Meschter, The Postmasters General of the United States X. Francis Granger, 1841-1841, *La Posta*, November 2003, 27.

³ "Electoral College Proceedings, 1836," National Archives, <https://www.archives.gov/electoral-college/1836>.

⁴ Allen Johnson, ed., *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 483.

⁵ Meschter, "Francis Granger," 28.

⁶ John Tyler, "Veto Message Regarding the Fiscal Corporation Bill," September 9, 1841, in James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897), 65.

⁷ "Francis Granger — Family," *American Aristocracy*, <https://americanaristocracy.com/people/francis-granger#family>.

⁸ "Granger, Francis," *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, <https://bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/G000376>.