

Gideon Granger Comes to Canandaigua

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On March 8, 1815, the recently resigned (and still longest serving) Postmaster General posted a letter from his temporary home in Whitesboro (Oneida County), New York to Mr. J. H. Pierson at Ramapo (Rockland County), New York, in the lower Hudson Valley.

"I am about to build myself an extensive and expensive seat at Canandaigua which will require a great quantity of nails and brads of all kinds & I am anxious to procure them on the most reasonable terms, nor is this all, though I am strong in realty I am deficient in money, at the same time I trust that my obligation is & ever has been considered perfectly safe; but I want as much extension of credit, as to time, as I can procure..."

"My carpenter is absent & I cannot at this moment state what I want, but the amount must be very considerable."

"Yours very respectfully,"

Gideon Granger¹

While Granger was opening a new chapter in his life it was a lengthy transition.

After long engaging in political intrigues; supporting the DeWitt Clinton faction in the Republican Party; Gideon Granger was forced to resign his position as Postmaster General in February, 1814.² His largely covert opposition to President

¹ Letter from Gideon Granger to J. H. Pierson. Quoted from Arthur S. Hamlin. *Gideon Granger. Canandaigua, NY. The Author. 1982. pp. 53-54.*

² "As postmaster general, Gideon Granger had the authority to appoint postmasters without presidential oversight. During his tenure in office he used this privilege to appoint political allies. When the Philadelphia post office became vacant early in 1814, Granger selected Senator Michael Leib, who was openly unfriendly to the Madison administration. Madison responded by

James Madison had been part of a largely northern opposition block in the old party of Thomas Jefferson that disliked Jefferson's successor.

Facing fierce opposition by northeastern Federalists, the dissenting Republicans were annoyed by the "Virginia dynasty" and frustrated by what they perceived as James Madison's ineptitude. In turn, the dissenting Republicans that included Gideon Granger were increasingly irritating to Madison. Granger's appointment and staunch support for Pennsylvania Senator, Michael Leib, as the new Postmaster of Philadelphia, prompted the president to terminate Granger's long tenure running the national mail system. Leib had been one of five senators consistently voting against administration measures. Having Granger, a known, but largely covert opponent, and partisan of the DeWitt Clinton faction, use his power to appoint an openly hostile Republican senator brought president Madison to the breaking point.

In fact, Gideon Granger had been on a collision course with the Madison administration for several years. He supported New York Governor, George Clinton's candidacy for president in 1808, opposing that of Madison. He was sometimes accused of using his office as Postmaster General to further the political careers of his allies.³ Gideon Granger proved his usefulness to Jefferson when he used his access to postmasters and the mails to provide information on the intrigues of Aaron Burr.⁴

removing Granger and nominating in his place Return J. Meigs (ca. 1765–1825), who was confirmed as postmaster general on 17 Mar. 1814. Madison's 25 Feb. nomination of Meigs was his first notification to Congress that Granger had been dismissed. A 7 Mar. 1814 resolution that Madison be asked to "inform the Senate whether the office of Postmaster General be now vacant, and if vacant, in what manner the same became vacant" failed by one vote (Brant, *Madison*, 6:243–5; *JEP*, 2:499, 504, 511)." National Archives. Founders on Line. "James Madison to Thomas Jefferson. 13 February 1814." On the Internet at: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-07-02-0121> (Accessed Oct. 7, 2013); J.C.A. Stagg. *Mr. Madison's War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic. 1783-1830.* Princeton, NJ. Princeton Univ. Press. 1983. p. 365.

³ National Archives. Founders on Line. "To James Madison from Caleb Atwater." 20 December 1809. On the Internet at: <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/03-02-02-0166> (Accessed Oct. 7, 2013).

⁴ Aya Katz. "Gideon Granger, a Postmaster General with an Intelligence Gathering Mission." On the Internet at: <http://www.historiaobscura.com/gideon-granger-a-postmaster-general-with-an-intelligence-gathering-mission/> (Accessed Oct. 7, 2013); In 1814, Granger reminded Jefferson of his service in the Burr affair. See: National Archives. Founders on Line. "Gideon Granger to Thomas Jefferson, 22 February 1814." On the Internet at:

Granger and Madison, however, had little use for each other in a relationship that grew worse through Madison's first term. When Gideon Granger petitioned President Madison for an appointment to the Supreme Court in 1809, Madison declined to elevate Granger to the high court, appointing the controversial quasi-Federalist, Joseph Story instead.⁵

Madison wrote to Thomas Jefferson outlining his reasons for declining to support Gideon Granger. They included his lack of recognized legal experience, but most especially, his controversial support of New England plaintiffs in the Yazoo land claims in Georgia. Madison also called into question Granger's health. Finally, Madison wrote, "Granger has stirred up recommendations [for the appointment] throughout the Eastern States," he wrote to Jefferson. "The means by which this has been done are easily conjectured and outweigh the recommendations themselves."⁶

In March, 1810, barely two years into Madison's first term, Granger wrote to George Clinton's nephew, young DeWitt Clinton, expressing support for his bid to become president in 1812. While historians question the sincerity of Granger's support of Clinton then, his feelings about the "Virginia dynasty" were unmistakable. Besides, Granger was more and more a practical Republican in the mold of the young New York Mayor—looking to the future, to infrastructure, commerce, and western development.⁷

http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-07-02-0131#print_view (Accessed Oct. 7, 2013).

⁵ Henry J. Abraham. *Justices, Presidents, and Senators: A History of the U.S. Supreme Court Appointments from Washington to Bush II*. 5th ed. Lanham, Md. Rowman and Littlefield. 2007. pp. 71-71.; "Joseph Story." Wikipedia. On the Internet at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Story (Accessed Oct. 7, 2013).

⁶ James Madison to Thomas Jefferson [no date provided.]. Quoted in Arthur S. Hamlin. "Gideon Granger." Canandaigua, NY. The Author. 1982. p. 44; Library of Congress. *The Writings of James Madison*. Edited by Gaillard Hunt. James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, October 19, 1810. On the Internet at: [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mjmttext:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(jm080045\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mjmttext:@field(DOCID+@lit(jm080045))) (Accessed Oct. 7, 2013); National Archives. Founders on Line. "James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, 7 December 1810." On the Internet at: http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-03-02-0175#print_view (Accessed Oct. 7, 2013).

⁷ Steven Edwin Siry. "The Sectional Politics of "Practical Republicanism: DeWitt Clinton's Presidential Bid, 1810-1812." *Journal of the Early Republic*. v. 5. no. 4. Winter 1985. pp. 441-462 [See p. 454, in particular.]

Clinton ran for president as the candidate for both the Federalist Party and a small group of anti-war Republicans, mostly New Englanders. Gideon Granger held decidedly New England views and he was a practical Republican from the heartland of Federalist strength.

In the close election of 1812, Clinton was defeated by President Madison. Clinton received 89 electoral votes to James Madison's 128. It was the strongest showing of any Federalist candidate for the presidency since 1800 (Clinton ran as both a Federalist and as the candidate of a dissident block of Republicans). Had the votes of only one or two states changed, Clinton would have been elected. In particular, the 29 electoral votes of New York were critical to both sides in that election, but for different reasons.⁸

Gideon Granger had always supported the foreign policy efforts of Thomas Jefferson and the embargo he declared in 1807, unpopular though it was in New England. Using the pen name, "Algernon Sidney," Granger published (1809) "An Address, to the People of New England," outlining the reasons New England residents should support Jefferson's embargo and its continuance by Madison.⁹ Granger's opposition to war with Great Britain stemmed from his fears for the destruction of New England trade; the proximity of a mighty foe; and his feeling that the Madison administration was not capable of seeing the struggle through successfully.¹⁰

Granger also feared that victory might be dangerous for the federal union. Taking Canadian land could result in a regional imbalance that might destroy the union of the states. "We shall doubtless acquire the Canadas and other northern British possessions, which are of great importance to Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Pennsylvania and all the States to the east. But will not the

⁸ Wikipedia. "United States Presidential Election, 1812." On the Internet at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_presidential_election,_1812 (Accessed Oct. 7, 2013)

⁹ Algernon Sidney. [Gideon Granger]. "An Address to the People of New England." 1809. Available from Internet Archive at: <http://archive.org/details/addresspeopleo01gran> (Accessed Oct. 7, 2013). [The 1809 republication of this rare publication can be downloaded in pdf format free of charge.]

¹⁰ Benjamin J. Lossing. *Pictorial Field Book of the War of 1812*. New York. Harper and Brothers. 1869. P. 218-219. Just a generation removed from the conflict, Lossing was a highly respected chronicler of the war. He offers plain evidence of Republicans lack of faith in Madison's ability to make war.

addition of these Territories accelerate a dissolution of the Union? Or can it spread securely over the continent? I fear, I doubt," Granger wrote to John Todd, Madison's secretary and stepson¹¹

War did come on June 18, 1812. The war decision in Congress was far short of unanimous and reflected great national divisions.¹² As Gideon Granger feared, the war did not go well for the United States through 1813. The following year, the tide began to turn with a few victories, particularly along the Niagara frontier.

Then, at the height of the ultimate struggle in 1814, Gideon Granger was dismissed as Postmaster General. Within two years he was admitted to the New York bar, and moved to the New York frontier with which he was already familiar. It was a dangerous place. Why did he take those actions if his health, and that of his wife Mindwell, was in serious question?

There is no more succinct answer to that question than the one published by Arthur Hamlin in his 1983 biography of Gideon Granger. "From earlier correspondence we know that Granger had the strongest feelings against returning to his native Suffield, Connecticut, that he owned extensive lands in Ohio and had a strong attraction for the frontier life, but that he had taken the precaution of being admitted to the bar in New York State, where his many friends had told him that he was assured of making a good living. We know that Granger was wealthy in his land holdings but was short of ready cash. We can surmise that his need to earn money as an able practicing lawyer in a somewhat settled though rapidly growing area, together with his wife's frail

¹¹ Alan Taylor. *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, & Indian Allies*. New York. Alfred A.Knopf. 2010. p. 138. Taylor quotes a letter from Gideon Granger to John Todd. Dec. 26, 1811. Taylor credits that letter to the Granger Papers, Library of Congress. Todd was Dolly Madison's son by her first marriage to John Todd, Sr. The son served as President Madison's secretary until 1813. While he had a scandalous reputation, Madison defended and protected him. For Gideon Granger to confide in Todd that way is remarkable and raises many questions. See: Wikipedia. "John Payne Todd." On the Internet at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Payne_Todd (Accessed Oct. 9, 2013)

¹² United States Senate. "Declaration of War With Great Britain, 1812." On the Internet at: http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/history/h_multi_sections_and_teasers/WarDeclarationsbyCongress.htm (Accessed Oct. 8, 2013); Library of Congress. Memory. "A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774 – 1875. Annals of Congress. House of Representatives, 12th Congress, 1st Session. On the Internet at: <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llac&fileName=024/llac024.db&recNum=228> (Accessed Oct. 8, 2013).

health, may have dictated his choice of New York State rather than the wilds of Ohio. But why Canandaigua?"¹³

Largely, the answer to that second question can be answered by two words, Oliver Phelps. Granger had been in Canandaigua briefly in the late summer of 1812. He came here to confer with Phelps' family and sign some papers relating to the Oliver Phelps estate and "to work out [its] complexities," as Arthur Hamlin put it.¹⁴ Phelps, a fellow Republican also from Suffield, Connecticut, died with tangled finances in 1809 and was buried in Canandaigua.¹⁵

Granger arrived in Canandaigua again sometime prior to June 27, 1814. That day the County Clerk recorded an extensive transfer of lands from Nathaniel Gorham, Jr. to Gideon Granger. Among other parcels, they included the land upon which the Granger Homestead now stands.¹⁶ It is interesting to note that the Granger title was not clear for some time as a result of the early demise of the Phelps-Gorham land company.¹⁷

The final battles along the Niagara were just taking place when Gideon Granger arrived in 1814. A British expeditionary force was even then headed for Chesapeake Bay, Washington and Baltimore; and another was getting ready for an attack on Plattsburgh. The outcome of the war, as Granger had feared, was still an open question.¹⁸ It took considerable courage to travel near the seat of war and then start building a family seat.

Granger's move to Canandaigua was largely in response to the rapid development of the village itself and how it met Gideon Granger's needs so well

¹³ Hamlin. 1983. p. 50.

¹⁴ Hamlin. 1983. P. 52-53.

¹⁵ Wikipedia. "Oliver Phelps." On the Internet at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Phelps (Accessed Oct. 8, 2013).

¹⁶ Ontario County. Land records. Liber 21. pp. 306-308; Hamlin. p. 53.

¹⁷ See: Ontario County. Land records. Liber 29. p. 343 In particular. That deed included the land under Canandaigua Lake and several other waterways including the Genesee River. Those titles were vacated by the New York State Court of Appeals in the case of *Granger v. City of Canandaigua* (1931).

¹⁸ The battle of Lundy's Lane took place little more than 100 miles distant on July 25, 1814. Washington was attacked on August 24, 1814. The battle at Plattsburgh took place on September 11, 1814.

summarized by Arthur Hamlin. A good description of the village is found in Spafford's *Gazetteer* published in 1824, shortly after the death of Gideon Granger. Planned as a shire town by Oliver Phelps, Spafford reported that "Canandaigua is the seat of a great deal of business, and wealth, [exclusive of its Banks, which really add nothing to the capital of any place, and which are rather a curse than a blessing in any but great commercial places,] and though it may be eclipsed by some rival Towns on the Canal, will continue to be a place of business, and one of the pleasantest in the United States." The village had two land offices (one for the agent of the State of Connecticut); three churches; four printing offices; three *Gazettes*; 40 stores; 80 mechanics shops; 35 offices; a brewery; several elegant inns;" but, "by far too many taverns and groceries."¹⁹ Of signal importance was the fact that the village was incorporated by the state legislature on April 18, 1815.²⁰

Gideon Granger appears to have returned from Canandaigua to Whitesboro sometime in August, 1816, after a stay of many months. At Whitesboro he collected the members of his family that would move to Canandaigua. Construction of the family homestead continued through that summer and into the fall, perhaps beyond.

It must have been an interesting summer for many reasons. Mount Tambora, a volcano in the Dutch East Indies [present Indonesia] erupted with historic violence on April 10, 1815. More than 71, 000 people eventually died as a result of the explosion that brought on a volcanic winter in much of the world—including North America. At the time, Canandaigua residents knew only that 1816 was the year there was no summer.²¹ Certainly Gideon Granger's farms and crop production suffered like those of others.

The American economy began to change in 1816 as our relationship with Europe changed; the new Bank of the United States reined in speculation,

¹⁹ Horatio Gates Spafford. *A Gazetteer of the State of New York*. Albany, NY. The Author and B. D. Packard. 1824. [Reprint Interlaken, NY. Heart of the Lakes Pub. Co. 1981.] pp. 81-82

²⁰ Ch. 254 Laws of New York 1815. "An ACT to vest certain powers in the freeholders and inhabitants of the Village of Canandaigua."

²¹ Wikipedia. "Mount Tambora." On the Internet at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Tambora (Accessed Oct. 7, 2013); Lee Foster. "1816—The Year Without Summer." On the Internet at: http://www.erh.noaa.gov/car/Newsletter/htm_format_articles/climate_corner/yearwithoutsummer_if.htm (Accessed Oct. 7, 2013).

monitored state bank notes, and became a political power; and sectional controversies over tax policy became more common and problematic.²² Gideon Granger and his sons would find the changing economy challenging their goals and giving new focus to their political ambitions.

By the fall of 1816, President Madison was actually mending fences with his political foes, particularly those in his own party. At New Orleans, the war concluded on a positive note for American arms and Madison's supporters had begun laying the foundation for a new "American System" they hoped would tie the nation together with common bonds of marketing and transportation. Madison even supported a return to a central bank, cornerstone of the old Federalist policy, and signed the law creating a Second Bank of the United States.

In November of that year, Madison's Secretary of State, James Monroe was elected to take his place. He would be the last of the "Virginia dynasty" and not a man well-liked by Gideon Granger. As his Secretary of State, Monroe had been Madison's right hand. However, Monroe began his administration by taking steps to end the rancor that had bound American politics for nearly two decades.

Just months after his election, Monroe began an extensive tour of the nation, focusing on New England; the heart of the Federalist secessionist country. Making appearances in Boston and on Bunker Hill; and visiting the much reviled John Adams; Monroe's tour was hailed by Benjamin Russell, the editor of the powerful Federalist newspaper, the *Columbian Centinel* as the start of an "Era of Good Feeling." His words were echoed in other regional papers as well—most notably in Connecticut.²³

The good feelings would not last long; just long enough to see the Erie Canal begun, fulfilling the dreams of DeWitt Clinton, Gideon Granger, and many more.²⁴ From the foundations laid in those critical years after the War of 1812, the Granger family would build a local dynasty in land, politics and public

²² Wikipedia. "Panic of 1819." On the Internet at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panic_of_1819 (Accessed Oct. 7, 2013).

²³ Patricia L. Dooley. (ed.). *The Early Republic: Primary Documents on Events from 1799 to 1820*. Westport, Ct. Greenwood Press. 2004. p. 298.

²⁴ Hamlin. pp. 61, 63. The author plainly states Granger's support of the Erie Canal project. A perusal of contemporary local newspapers fully supports the author's statements.

affairs. Like the nation itself now, they would cast their eyes to the west—to a new family seat in Canandaigua; investments in Ohio and Kentucky; and the new political alliances forming around John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, and Andrew Jackson.

Gideon Granger did not live long enough to really enjoy that “extensive and expensive seat at Canandaigua” that required a great quantity of nails. However, his posterity would for nearly a century. And the legacy of Gideon Granger’s actions in that critical time is with us still.