

# A Fine Farewell as President Chester A. Arthur is Laid to Rest



In 1864, the president's father, Reverend William Arthur, purchased a plot for his family in this South Ridge area of Albany Rural Cemetery then known as Sunset Lawn.

The first burial here was that of William Arthur's wife, Malvina Stone Arthur who died in 1869. Her grave and later his were both marked with white marble headstones designed and carved by William Manson.

When Chester Arthur's wife, Ellen Herndon Arthur, died on January 12, 1880, she was buried here in the Arthur family plot where her son, William, and mother, Elizabeth Hansborough Herndon, were also interred. To mark his wife's grave, Arthur commissioned a white marble sarcophagus also by Manson.



Arthur's black sarcophagus monument was unveiled without ceremony on June 17, 1881. The \$10,000 monument was paid for by funds raised by the president's friends. Donations also came from children who sent in pennies to honor the late president. The sarcophagus was the work of Charles B. Garfield (who also built Grant's Tomb on Manhattan's Riverside Drive). Sculptor Ephraim Kayser was commissioned to create the bronze Angel of Sorrow extending a palm branch atop the sarcophagus, a symbol of peace and glory.

Manson was one of Albany's leading carvers whose works included elements of the New York State Capitol as well as the Colonel John Mills monument and D.D. Tompkins

Fire Company memorial at the Cemetery.

When Chester Arthur died in New York City on November 18, 1886, funeral arrangements were made by Mary McElroy who honored her brother's wish to be buried beside his wife here in the Albany Rural Cemetery. Following a funeral at the Church of the Heavenly Rest in Manhattan, Arthur's body was given a military escort to Grand Central Terminal and placed on a special train to Albany. The funeral train was met in Albany by William C. Doane, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Albany, Albany City Mayor John Boyd Thayer, and former Albany Mayor A. Bleeker Banks where they all boarded the train for the final journey to



Ellen Lewis Herndon

Albany Rural Cemetery.

As President Arthur's funeral procession reached the Cemetery, the prepared gravesite was veiled by an arrangement of palms and ferns and the casket was carried from the hearse by an honor guard. A wreath of white chrysanthemums sent by President Grover Cleveland was placed prominently nearby as the service was conducted by Bishop Doane with President Arthur's family, friends, dignitaries, and a large crowd of mourners in attendance. That following spring, on April 20, 1887, President Grover Cleveland attended a second memorial service which was held for Chester Arthur at the Cemetery.



BELOVED WIFE "NELL" REMAINS AT HIS SIDE

Chester Arthur proposed to Ellen Lewis "Nell" Herndon in Saratoga Springs. Nell was a refined Southern belle from a prominent Virginian family. They were married in 1859. She died young at 42 yrs-old in 1880 of pneumonia before Chester's presidency. She bore three children; son William (died at 2 1/2 yrs-old), son Chester (Jr.), and daughter Ellen "Nellie" Hansbrough.

A flag slab of marble adjacent to Ellen Arthur's Gothic sarcophagus covers the small vault containing the remains of the president's son, Chester Arthur II, his son's second wife Rowena Dashwood, and their son, Chester Arthur III.

With the tragic passing of Chester's wife Ellen, the president's sister Mary Arthur McElroy was recognized as the unofficial First Lady. Mary Arthur McElroy (1841-1917) acted as "Mistress of the White House" serving proudly as hostess for Arthur's presidential social activities and setting the standard for official social events for decades to come. She also took an active role in raising his daughter, Nellie.



Mary Arthur McElroy 1885

Upon retiring, Chester Arthur returned to his home in New York City, a brownstone still standing at 523 Leasington Avenue, currently operating as a spice store.



Memorial Day Ceremony at Chester A. Arthur's gravesite with rifle salute, 1945.

A bronze statue of Arthur stands in Madison Square Park in New York City.

The 21st president was honored on the 21¢ stamp in the 1938 Presidential series.



## IN THE GRAVE

The Body of the President Arthur Laid At Rest.

EMERSON FUNERAL SERVICES

Simple Services in the Church of Heavenly Rest.

## THE PRESIDENT'S TRIBUTE

Metropolitan Edition, Cohoes and Clifton Press.

## THE JOURNEY TO ALBANY

In European Rivers Crossed in Rural Country.

## LAST SAD RITES.



## TIMELINE OF A LIFE LIVED FULLY

### 1829 - 1860 Early Life, Education and Local Connections

- Born in Fairfield, Vermont, October 5, 1829
- Spent parts of his childhood in Greenwich, Lanesborough, and Schenectady, N.Y., as well as the Loudonville/Newtonville area just north and west of the Catskills

- Chester Arthur's father, the Reverend William Arthur, moved to a Newtonville home with his family in 1855. This home is still located on Route 9 just north of Maxwell Road—about a mile from here. Rev. and Mrs. Arthur was pastor of the Newtonville Baptist Church from 1855 to 1870. This former church is now the Newtonville Post Office.
- Graduated from Union College, Schenectady in 1848
- Taught school in Schaghticoke and Cohoes, N.Y. and North Plowville, Vermont

### 1848 - 1860 Legal Profession

- Attended the now defunct State and National Law School, Ballston Spa, N.Y., admitted to the bar in 1854
- Joined law firm of Calver, Parker & Arthur in New York City, 1854
- First case was a successful defense of Elizabeth Jennings, a black woman, in a dispute with the Third Avenue Railroad Co. in Brooklyn, 1854
- Defended several runaway slaves

### 1861 - 1865 The Civil War Years

- Bestowed the rank of Brigadier General, serving as NYS Quartermaster General (pictured here), 1861
- Supplied all NYS volunteers with accoutrements and pay
- Performed his duties with efficiency and scrupulous honesty
- Earned a place in the NYS Republican organization after the Civil War

### 1864 - 1880 New York Politician

- Appointed Collector of the Port of New York by President Ulysses S. Grant in 1871
- Instituted policy to pass a written civil service examination for employment
- Performed political work for the NYS Republican Party under Roscoe Conkling
- Chosen as the vice-presidential running mate to James Garfield

### 1881 - 1885 The Presidency

- President Garfield assassinated, Arthur became the 21st U.S. president, September 19, 1881
- Ran an administration of moderate reforms
- Renovated the White House with his own funds and through the sale of many historic artifacts from the White House

- Prosecuted frauds uncovered during the Garfield administration
- Signed the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act of 1883

- Created the Civil Service Commission

- Presided over dedications of Washington Monument and Brooklyn Bridge

- Advocate of reform of the Navy, earned the title "Father of the American Navy"

- Lost nomination for a second term as president

### 1885 - 1886 Retirement and Death

- Retired from political life in 1885
- Died of nephritis (kidney failure), November 18, 1886

Funding for this sign was provided by a generous grant from the Bander Community Foundation, 2021.

Historical information provided here based on research by Paula Lendro, Historian, Mark Bodnar, and Michael Radlick, Trustees of the Albany Rural Cemetery. Signage design by design for a small planet. Special photo source: Courtesy of the Library of Congress: Arthur Civil War uniform: 1861, LC-USZ62-04227; Ellen Lewis Herndon: LC-USZ62-17126; Mary Arthur McElroy: 1885, LC-USZ62-25795.

## TO LEARN MORE, PRESIDENTIAL CONNECTIONS

Visit the grave of Arthur's sister, Mary Arthur McElroy, who is buried in Section 19, Lot 5 here in ARC. Continue your presidential journey to the gravesite of John Van Buren (1810-1866) in Section 62, Lot 28. He was the son of the 8th president, Martin Van Buren. There is also a statue of President Arthur at Union College in Schenectady.

All are welcome to enjoy the Albany Rural Cemetery Grounds. Since 1841, ARC has been an important destination for city residents and tourists. Enjoy the beautiful landscape, streams, waterfalls and array of literary art and architecture. Still an active and prominent cemetery, ARC is proud of its continued heritage and provides a full range of burial services.



Visit online at [AlbanyRuralCemetery.org](http://AlbanyRuralCemetery.org)