



Finding Aid

Chester A. Arthur Statue Committee Records, 1887-1888
Catalog Number: GEGR 624

National Park Service
Manhattan Sites
General Grant National Memorial

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*This finding aid may be accessed electronically from the
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SUMMARY

Creator: Chester A. Arthur Statue Committee

Title: Chester A. Arthur Statue Committee Records

Date: 1887-1888

Extent: .21 linear foot (1 legal-sized half-width document box)

National Park Service Accession Number: GEGR-00098

National Park Service Catalog Number: GEGR 624

Historical Statement:

The Chester A. Arthur Statue Committee was established in 1887 with the mission to raise funds up to \$30,000 in order to erect a statue of Arthur, the 21st United States President, in New York City. The membership included many prominent men including William W. Astor, Andrew Carnegie, Charles A. Dana, Chauncey M. Depew, Frederick D. Grant, J. Pierrepont Morgan, Elihu Root, Theodore Roosevelt, William L. Strong, Charles L. Tiffany and Cornelius Vanderbilt.

Scope and Content Statement:

This collection contains the correspondence of the Chester A. Arthur Statue Committee from 1887-1888. The correspondents include the officers of, membership of and subscribers to the committee. The materials are largely handwritten, consisting of original letters, drafts of responses and subscription pledges.

Processing Information:

This collection was processed as part of the Manhattan Sites Archives Project in 2011 by Archives Technician Margaret Bausman, with the assistance of Project Archivist Tobi Adler and Lead Archivist Mimi Bowling.

Funding Source:

Processing of this collection was made possible by a generous donation from the Leon Levy Foundation to the National Parks of New York Harbor Conservancy.

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PROVENANCE NOTE

These records were found in the late 1970s among the records of the Grant Monument Association stored at the General Grant National Memorial (Chester A. Arthur served as the first Chairman of the Grant Monument Committee from 1885 until his death in 1886). Along with other archival materials, they were subsequently moved to the Federal Hall National Memorial.

The records were transferred to the National Park Service's Northeast Museum Services Center in Charlestown, Massachusetts in August of 2001. They were processed in 2001 and 2002, and the original finding aid was issued in 2002.

Upon completion of processing, the collection was returned to Federal Hall. As of May 2011, the records, together with most other archival holdings of the Manhattan Sites, are housed at Fort Wadsworth, Staten Island, New York.

HISTORICAL NOTE

In 1880, Chester Alan Arthur (1829-1886) became the Vice-Presidential nominee of last resort on the Garfield ticket. Contention within the Republican Party had led to a ticket of compromise - one which few, especially James A. Garfield, would have made as their first choice. Nevertheless, the unlikely running-mates prevailed, winning the White House by a slim margin. Within months, Garfield succumbed to wounds he received during an assassination attempt and Arthur became the 21st President of the United States. Despite his oblique entry into the Presidency, upon his departure in 1885 Arthur had achieved a popularity and respect perhaps even more surprising than his ascendancy.

A prominent lawyer, abolitionist, aspiring politician and member of the Stalwart Republicans, Arthur had supported the spoils system. His political advancement in New York City through the 1870's was likely due in large part to the patronage of political boss Roscoe Conkling. Appointed by President Grant to the post of Collector of the Port of New York, Arthur was removed from this significant position by President Hayes under accusations of corruption. Yet the hallmark of the Arthur presidency was the passage of the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act which required that advancement in civil service positions be merit-based rather than driven by cronyism and patronage. His steady, responsive presidential comportment along with his dapper style and travels within the social elite of Washington, DC earned him the nickname "Elegant Arthur" and a degree of popularity with the American people.

Arthur, who had struggled with progressive kidney disease throughout his Presidency, died in New York City on November 17, 1886. Friends and supporters mobilized to raise funds for a modest monument, costing no more than \$10,000, to his burial site in the Rural Cemetery, Albany, New York. Tellingly, not only were funds in excess of the budget quickly proffered but many of those intent upon contributing had yet to do so. Thus, on May 6, 1887, the Chester A. Arthur Statue Committee was officially established with the mission to continue subscription up to an additional \$30,000 in order to erect a statue of Arthur in New York City. The statue that was the eventual product of this fund-raising was erected in Madison Square Park and was dedicated in 1899. The protracted history of its construction involved the City's refusal to accept an 1892 statue created by Ephraim Keyser, the designer of the Arthur memorial in Albany. The existing statue, completed in 1898, was designed by George Edwin Bissell. Perched on a Barre granite pedestal, the 15-foot bronze statue was cast by Henry-Bonnard Bronze Company.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains the correspondence of the Chester A. Arthur Statue Committee from 1887-1888. The correspondents include the officers of, membership of and subscribers to the committee. The materials are largely handwritten, consisting of original letters, drafts of responses and subscription pledges. This apparently fragmentary collection documents the inception of the Arthur Statue Committee and the initial subscription efforts through 1888. Outside of a few references to design plans, the collection lacks documentation regarding the outcome of the committee's efforts.

The records include an undated, unsigned draft of a letter (now in four pieces) to Judge John H. Starin outlining the genesis of the committee; examples of the printed letter sent to those nominated to serve on the committee; letters both accepting and declining the nomination; correspondence between members and officers, in particular Cornelius N. Bliss and Secretary James C. Reed; newspaper accounts of the formation of the committee; and pledge sheets and remittance requests.

The contents of this collection shed light on the inner workings of committee work during the Gilded Age, and its professional, social and personal meaning to the membership. The documents reveal the variable functions of membership contextualized by social status. For example, on May 5, 1887 William W. Astor writes to accept nomination to the committee, reversing his decision in his letter of April 23 when he declined the nomination. He relates that in the interim the nature of membership was clarified, and given that he need not attend meetings or solicit subscriptions, he is pleased to lend his name to the cause. Col. Frederick Grant is asked specifically to suggest names of potential subscribers outside New York whom the officers of the committee will then approach. Correspondence from John H. Inman who raised \$800, relates: "This list chiefly embraces gentlemen who are associated with me in cotton and railroads". Likewise, Henry W. T. Mali raised \$245, \$100 of which is from his own pocket and \$15 of which appears to be donated by family members.

The collection's contents illuminate an ethic around subscription in which each is expected to give fairly according to his means. On one hand, in a series of heartfelt letters, Benjamin Harris Brewster relates that his current circumstances preclude a donation equal to the esteem in his heart for the cause. Secretary James C. Reed acknowledges Brewster's subscription dilemma by assuring him the committee does not desire him to give in excess of his resources. He offers the names of others and their pledged amounts to allay Brewster's misgivings. Likewise, Robert Todd Lincoln offers a preliminary subscription and seeks advice as to the appropriate amount. In this case, Reed quite clearly responds that an increase of Lincoln's pledge would be appropriate. Again, he offers examples for Lincoln's consideration, and the latter does then send additional funds. In comparison to both, Cornelius Vanderbilt simply sends a check for \$1000.

The letters in this collection make clear that their respective writers had significant personal connections to Arthur. Brewster and Lincoln served in Arthur's Presidential administration. At Arthur's funeral, both served as pallbearers along with Charles L. Tiffany and Cornelius Vanderbilt. This is evidence that committee service during the Gilded Age was not merely an extension of social status or duty but also an expression of connectedness to one's associates and to the world.

ARRANGEMENT NOTE

The Chester A. Arthur Statue Committee Records are arranged in two series: Correspondence and Newspaper Clippings, and are chronological within each series.

CONTAINER LIST

Series I. Correspondence

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	1	Correspondence	1887 April 20-21
1	2	Correspondence	1887 April 21-23
1	3	Correspondence	1887 April 23-May 5
1	4	Correspondence	1887 May 5-31
1	5	Correspondence	1887 June 1-21
1	6	Correspondence	1887 June 21-1888 April 3, undated

Series II. Newspaper Clippings

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	7	Newspaper Clippings	1887, undated

RELATED MATERIALS NOTE

The Grant Monument Association. "The Grant Monument Association Records, 1885-1980." Catalog Number GEGR 622. National Park Service, Manhattan Sites.

Chester A. Arthur Papers, 1843-1960. Library of Congress.

http://findingaids.loc.gov/db/search/xq/searchMfer02.xq?_id=loc.mss.eadmss.ms009139&_faSection=overview&_faSubsection=did&_dmdid=d35534e6

SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbott, Philip. "Accidental Presidents: Death, Assassination, Resignation, and Democratic Succession." Presidential Studies Quarterly 35.4 (December 2005): 627-645.

Calhoun, Charles W. "Reimagining the "Lost Men" of the Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Late Nineteenth Century Presidents." The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era 1.3 (July 2002): 225-257.

New York City Department of Parks and Recreation: Madison Square Park. n.d. 14 April 2011
<<http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/madisonsquarepark/monuments/55>>.

New York City Statues: Frozen in Time, Often Covered in Poop - Chester A. Arthur. Undated (accessed 14 April 2011) <<http://newyorkcitystatues.com/chester-a-arthur/>>.

The White House. About The White House: Presidents. n.d. April 2011
<<http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/chesterarthur>>.

ADDED ENTRIES/ACCESS POINTS

- Personal Names: Arthur, Chester Alan, 1829-1886
 Bliss, Cornelius Newton, 1833-1911
 Brewster, Benjamin Harris, 1816-1888
 Grant, Frederick Dent, 1850-1912
 Hawley, Joseph R. (Joseph Roswell), 1826-1905
 Lincoln, Robert Todd, 1843-1926
 Reed, James C.
 Tiffany, Charles Lewis, 1812-1902
- Corporate Names: Grant Monument Association (New York, N.Y.)
- Subjects: Statues--New York (State)
 Fund raising