

Chester A. Arthur: 21st President of the United States

By Charlie McBriarty

The recent Republican Party dissonance is not a new phenomenon. When the "Grand Old Party" (GOP) was just 16 years old, it faced division and internal disagreement 146 years ago in the 1870s. The issue of patronage, which might also be called the spoils system or cronyism, created this early schism within the GOP. Whatever euphemism is in vogue, it amounted to the absolute control of appointments to government jobs by the incoming president and his party leaders. One segment of the GOP, the Stalwarts, clung to this practice. The other part, identified as Half-Breeds, argued for a new merit-based system of employing government workers.

This intra-party squabble became a major problem during the 1880 Republican National Convention. Each side had its own favorite to become the GOP's standard bearer. The Stalwarts supported fellow Stalwart and former two-term president, Ulysses S. Grant. On the other hand, the Half-Breeds pledged their support to Senator James Blaine from Maine. Each side stubbornly clung to its position through long hours of debate and argument and at least 35 ballots. A compromise was finally presented to end the stalemate. A Half-Breed senator from Ohio, James A. Garfield, who had been a longtime supporter of civil service reform, agreed to run for president and reluctantly accepted the well-connected New York Stalwart Chester A. Arthur as his vice president. The 36th and final ballot affirmed their selection.

The campaign that followed pitted this GOP ticket against the Democratic Party's Winfield S. Hancock, a former Union commander during the Civil War, for president and William H. English from Indiana for vice president. The voter turnout for this election was huge with 79.4% of the eligible voters casting ballots. (That turnout remains today the fourth largest ever recorded.) The GOP ticket of Garfield and Arthur won the popular vote by a slim margin of one-tenth of one percent but bested the Democratic ticket electoral vote 214 to 155.

On March 4, 1881, Garfield was inaugurated as the 20th President of the United States. Just 121 days after his inauguration, his tenure as an active president was abruptly concluded on Saturday, July 2. On that July day Garfield was shot by a mentally unstable self-proclaimed Stalwart who had failed to gain a position in the government. It is reported that as he shot the president twice, the assassin proclaimed: "I am a Stalwart of Stalwarts, and Arthur is president now."

The still-conscious president was quickly moved to a place where a preliminary examination of his wounds was performed by several attending physicians. After the examination it was revealed the two shots that hit the president were likely not fatal and Garfield was given a good chance of recovery. However, within a few days one of the wounds became infected and his health worsened. During the remainder of July, all of August and much of September he was bedridden.

Pine Knoll Shores

VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT

Our *vision* is to provide a quality environment in which all residents and visitors are safe and secure, where individual talents flourish and everyone enjoys the natural resources of our area.

It is the *mission* of the Town of Pine Knoll Shores to provide for the safety and well-being of all residents and visitors in an efficient and well-organized manner, and to develop and implement plans for the continuous improvement of the town, its services and its beach, and to encourage the participation of residents in service to the town and community.

Wrap Up the Holidays

By Sue Warren

Open house and book sale

On Sunday, December 4, from 1 to 4 p.m. Friends of the Bogue Banks Public Library will host an open house and book sale event at the Book Nook, located at 320 Salter Path Road, Suite Z, in Pine Knoll Shores.

The Book Nook, around the corner from the Bogue Banks Public Library, has over 3,000 gently used books for sale, with prices ranging from \$.50 to \$3. There will be door prizes, refreshments and free gift wrapping for Book Nook purchases. This event is open to the public.

The words of the assassin did not serve Vice President Arthur well for a number of reasons. His political enemies quickly initiated rumors linking Arthur to the assassination attempt. Since the process of ascendancy from vice president to the presidency was not as clearly delineated as it is today, the lag time between the shooting and the president's death also affected Arthur.

Arthur found himself in a state of limbo. During this waiting period Vice President Arthur decided he should maintain a low profile, best accomplished by leaving Washington and traveling to his home in New York. It was not until the evening of September 19 that Arthur received word from Garfield's attending physician that the president had died that day. Following the announcement of Garfield's death, arrangements were made for a member of the New York Supreme Court to go to Arthur's home to administer the oath of office. At 2:15 a.m. on September 20 he was sworn in, and later that day he returned to Washington.

On September 21, due to questions regarding the validity of being sworn in by a state judge, a second swearing in was supplied by the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. On that September day Chester A. Arthur officially became the 21st President of the United States. Arthur was the second vice president to ascend to the presidency as the result of a president's assassination and he was the fourth of just five presidents never inaugurated.

The new president faced a number of obstacles as he assumed office. Since Arthur had not been included in any part of Garfield's administration, he had little, if any, knowledge of his predecessor's goals, objectives or plans. Also looming was the lingering reputation he had acquired as a political hack and a virtual pawn of the New York Republican Party machine. His continued alliance with the Stalwarts exacerbated the wedge that separated him from members of the cabinet and most of the rest of Garfield's administration.

The intra-party barrier between the Half-Breeds and the Stalwarts remained a festering issue of the GOP itself. Additionally, Garfield's assassination had intensified the public outcry for reform of the existing system of hiring government employees. Arthur's political opponents even postulated that he could not be president because he had not been born in the United States. They claimed that he was born in Canada, a claim that was without merit. Adding fuel to the fire was one of his earliest decisions as president to immediately refurbish the "shabby" interior of the White House before he took up residence.

In the next issue of *The Shoreline* I will discuss what was accomplished by President Arthur during his three-plus years in office. Also explored will be the road he traveled to be in a position to be considered as vice president. Finally, additional issues which emerged during Arthur's political life will be revealed which may serve as a reminder of more recent events. Until then be grateful that the Union has survived yet another presidential election, and let us hope that your New Year is good to you and yours.

CORRECTION: A reader noted an error in "Van Buren's Road to the White House" on page 11 in the November issue of *The Shoreline*. The article stated: "The only other vice president to be elected president occurred in 1988. That was accomplished by George H.W. Bush." Two sources did indeed confirm this assertion; however, additional sources revealed that in fact there were two additional seated vice presidents who were elected president. They were John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. *What the author learned:* two sources are not sufficient if there are others available. Thanks for calling this to my attention, John C.