

The Honest Reformer

The Newsletter of the Grover Cleveland Birthplace Memorial Association



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The Visitor's Center is Almost Ready!: Laura Franek, Superintendent, NJ State Park Service; Grover Cleveland Birthplace, Hopatcong State Park and Stephens State Park presents Grover Cleveland Birthplace Memorial Association President Dave Cowell the keys to the new Grover Cleveland Birthplace Visitor's Center.

Coming soon: Grover Cleveland Presidential Library & Museum!

By Louis L. Picone

The Grover Cleveland Birthplace Memorial Association (GCBMA) is excited to announce that soon a new Grover Cleveland Presidential Library & Museum will open on the grounds of the Grover Cleveland Birthplace Historic Site in Caldwell, New Jersey. The new historical and research facility will reside within a spacious new visitor center that is still under construction. A

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grand opening is planned for some time in the future (date to be announced). Funding for the visitor center and presidential library has been provided by the GCBMA, donations, membership fees, fundraising activities, and the state of New Jersey.

Grover Cleveland is the only president born in New Jersey and, being the only executive to serve non-consecutive terms, was *both* the 22nd and 24th president of the United States of America. He was a strong proponent of honest government, and his campaign slogan and political guiding principle was “A Public Office is a Public Trust.” The Grover Cleveland Presidential Library & Museum will be a source of both local pride and national significance. Many, but not all, American presidents have a library dedicated to preserving their legacy. Since Herbert Hoover every president’s library is managed by the National Archives, while those who served earlier have libraries administered by various public or private agencies. Both the location and administrators of the new Grover Cleveland Presidential Library & Museum are eminently appropriate: The birthplace home is the only historic site in the nation solely dedicated to Grover Cleveland, and the GCBMA was initially founded in 1913 to preserve the natal home and honor Grover Cleveland’s legacy. In addition, the GCBMA and the Grover Cleveland Birthplace Historic Site maintains one of the largest collections of Grover Cleveland papers and material archives in the nation.

The mission of the Grover Cleveland Presidential Library & Museum is to collect, preserve, and make available to researchers materials documenting the public and private life of Grover Cleveland (1837-1908). Manuscripts, artifacts, and exhibits will cover his life from his birth in Caldwell, to his presidencies in the White House, as well as his post-presidential years in Princeton, New Jersey. Inspired by Cleveland’s writings on “Good Citizenship,” a Learning Lab in the presidential library will focus on several of his main points on the topic. Cleveland encouraged all citizens to become educated voters, take on civic duties, insist on ethics in government, and for any who are up to the task, serve the country by entering politics; locally, or on the state or national level. Future leaders from any socio-economic background, race, religion, or identity can visit the Lab to learn how to become a more actively engaged citizen and to discover what “Good Citizenship” means for them personally. The library also includes archives related to First Lady Frances Folsom Cleveland (1864-1947).

In addition to the physical location, the Grover Cleveland Presidential Library & Museum will also have a digital presence on its website <http://GroverClevelandPresidentialLibrary.org>. For more information or media inquiries contact the GCBMA at <https://PresidentCleveland.org/> or board trustee and Presidential Library committee chairman Louis Picone at lpicone@optonline.net.

The Grover Cleveland Birthplace Memorial Association is very proud! Even with the pandemic, a closed birthplace, and an unfinished Visitor’s Center, the GCBMA has been a very busy organization. Check out the next pages on how we have been keeping our activities going. Stay tuned for big news in 2022.

The Grover Cleveland Birthplace Memorial Association Continues Activities in 2021

- The **Grover Cleveland Museum Gift Shop** continued to sell merchandise at the Caldwell Street Fair in early October, the Historical (Ghost) Tours in late October, and the Holiday House Tour in December. Tremendous thanks to Akiko Axe and Adele Meyer for their efforts! Top sellers were antique Caldwell map hand towels and Grover Cleveland socks. (We also had the First Lady of New Jersey, Mrs. Phil Murphy drop by the gift shop booth at the street fair.)
- **“Social Media”** continues to be a major form of communication to promote the Grover Cleveland Birthplace with the public. Akiko Axe (Social Media Handler) reports that we have 1,261 followers on Facebook and 40 followers on Instagram.
- During **“Grover Cleveland Week”** in March, Board Member Louis Picone held a “Zoom” Question and Answer session about his book, “Grant’s Tomb”. There were 30 participants at the question and answer session.
- With **“Guest Speakers”** spotlighted at our “Zoom Board Meetings” at the end of 2020 and during 2021, our Board has been “brainstorming” ideas for programs. Guest speakers have come from Liberty Hall at Kean University, the Montclair History Center, Morven, the William McKinley Birthplace in Ohio, the William McKinley Presidential Library in Ohio, and the Yogi Berra Museum and Education Museum at Montclair State. We are very grateful to our fellow museums and history institutions for sharing their programs.
- In July, the GCBMA held a day long **“workshop/retreat”** in order to make immediate and 5 year plans with the opening of the new Visitor’s Center. Plans were made for the Presidential Birthplace/Museum, Public Relations, Programs/Education/Tours, Storage, and Interior Display/Gardening/Landscaping. Stay tuned!
- On Friday October 22nd, the GCBMA held a **“Historical Tours with Ghost Stories”** event. 7 historical tours were led by James Gardner (who led two tours), Dave Cowell, Greg Crump, Evan McLaughlin, and Paul Maloney. Additional help was given by Akiko Axe, Caretaker Sharon Farrell, Bob Farrell, Adele Meyer, Roxanne Douglas, and Marjorie Jameson. Special treats were provided to all participants from Mike Guerriero of “Gelato by Mike” and Ryan Dorchek from “Cloverleaf Tavern”. (See related pictures on the next page.)
- **Membership Chairperson** Don Stevens arranged for laminated membership cards to be physically mailed to all currently paid members and lifetime members.

The Grover Cleveland Birthplace (a New Jersey Historic Site), 207 Bloomfield Ave., Caldwell, N.J. 07006, 973-226-0001 is currently open by appointment only. It is normally open year round, Wednesday-Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to noon and Wednesday-Sunday from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. It is open to the public free of charge and is closed for all State and Federal holidays. The address of the Grover Cleveland Birthplace Memorial Association is PO Box 183, Caldwell, N.J. 07006. For more information, please visit www.PresidentCleveland.org and our Facebook site - www.facebook.com/ClevelandBirthplaceAssociation. Your membership (join-renewal) form is included in this hardcopy mailing of the newsletter or visit our website www.presidentcleveland.org/membership to join digitally. Questions about membership? Please contact Membership Chairperson Don Stevens at drerj5@hotmail.com or call 973-226-0001.



Beautiful Evening for Historical Tours and Ghost Stories– October 22, 2021

Top Left: Costumed Trustee Greg Crump ready for his tour. Top Right: Trustees Dave Cowell, Evan McLaughlin, and Paul Maloney waiting for their tour groups. Bottom Left: Trustees Roxanne Douglas and James Gardner showing off their “Gelato by Mike” and “Cloverleaf Tavern” Tickets. Bottom Right: A great evening photo of the birthplace and a tour starting. (See mention of the tours under article on the previous page.)

(Photos by Akiko Axe.)

Holiday House Tours: A Big Hit!

By Akiko Axe, Marjorie Jameson, and Sharon Farrell

The Essex County Holiday Tour of Historic Homes was held the weekend of December 4th and 5th.. Our own Grover Cleveland Birthplace was proudly featured on this annual tour.

Decorated in the style of the 1830's, the home was resplendent in its holiday finery.

Trustees Marjorie Jameson, Frank Godlewski, Beverly W. Crifasi, and caretaker Sharon Farrell decorated the home for the holiday season with period appropriate decorations.

The West Essex Regional High School National Honor Students served as docents for the home alongside Trustees Don Stevens and James Gardner. Trustee Paul Maloney portrayed President Grover Cleveland and gave a historical account of the Cleveland's first electrified White House Christmas Tree. (See article on pages 7 and 8.) The Culinary 2 honors students at West Essex Regional HS made molasses gingerbread cookies from a recipe from the 1830's. Copies of the recipe were available at the event alongside individually wrapped beautifully decorated cookies. The sweet smell of hot mulled cider filled the crisp air and local deer roamed the grounds to add to the pastoral holiday scene.

The weekend's tours were completely booked for both days! We welcomed over 80 guests with reservations, about 40 drop-in visitors, and sadly, had to turn away about 15. All tour leaders really went all-out squeezing in as many tours as possible within covid protocols of distancing and mask wearing.

Our compliments to GCBMA Trustees Roxanne Douglas and Beverly W. Crifasi for leading the tours at the Zenas Crane Homestead in West Caldwell during the same weekend. The Crane House was also part of the Essex County Holiday House Tours.



Left: Trustee Marjorie Jameson as “gatekeeper”. Right: No, they’re not reindeer. They are just some “Presidential History Enthusiasts” who were frustrated they weren’t getting cookies and cider. (Photos by Akiko Axe and Sharon Farrell.)



Marjorie Jameson, Frank Gerard Godlewski, and Beverly W. Crifasi decorating the birthplace. “Grover Cleveland” giving an account of the first White House “Electric Lights” Christmas Tree, (See article on the next page.) Photos by Frank Gerard Godlewski and Akiko Axe.

The Board of Trustees of the GCBMA: Akiko Axe, Dave Cowell, Greg Cowell, Beverly W. Crifasi, Greg Crump, Roxanne Douglas, James Gardner, Frank Gerard Godlewski, John Hamilton, Marjorie Jameson, Bunny Jenkins, Paul Maloney, Janet Markman, Evan McLaughlin, Adele Meyer, Louis L. Picone, Matt Rollins, Don Stevens, and Caretaker Sharon Farrell thank all Grover Cleveland Birthplace Memorial Association Members for their support this past year. Vice President Bunny Jenkins writes, “Thanks to all on the Board of Trustees for their good work and support in this year of Covid”.

Grover Cleveland and the First Electric Christmas Lights in the White House

By Louis L. Picone

(Editor's Note: This article was originally published in last year's Annual Newsletter. We liked the article so much, it's being published again. This year, "Grover Cleveland" was on hand at the Holiday House Tour to tell the "lights" story himself. Special thanks to Trustee Louis L. Picone.)

On Christmas Day 1894, President Grover Cleveland celebrated in the White House with his family, cabinet members and their families. The generous president gave each of his friends a "fat turkey" and for his servants he offered "substantial gifts of money," surely welcome as the country was suffering through one of the worst economic downturns in its history. ¹ Certainly everyone had a wonderful time; counting their blessings and perhaps offering a toast for a return to prosperity the next year. While the adults socialized, the children enjoyed a "pretty little luncheon." After the guests departed, the president sat for dinner with his family; his two daughters, his wife and her mother. They dined on fresh duck, recently killed by the president himself on a hunting trip.²

When Grover Cleveland was in office, Christmas in the White House was not the grand national event it is today, but rather, each president celebrated the holiday and decorated the Executive Mansion in their own way. Cleveland entered office in 1885 as a bachelor and while he was married in 1886, the couple did not have children during his first term and therefore did not erect a Christmas tree in the White House. But by 1894, the Clevelands were blessed with two beautiful daughters, three-year-old Ruth and one-year-old Esther (the only child of a President born in the White House), and placed a tree in the Second Floor Oval Room, located in the family quarters and then used as a parlor and library.

The small Christmas tree was of particular interest and a reporter from the Los Angeles Express extolled, "Mrs. Cleveland added the finishing touches to the tree which, while not of great proportions, was beautifully trimmed and decorated." However, the young First Lady also included a touch of modernity into the otherwise "old-fashioned" event when she replaced traditional wax candles with "tiny parti-colored electric lamps."³ Grover Cleveland is the president of many firsts. He was the first Democrat elected since the Civil War; first to be elected to non-consecutive terms, first president to be married in the White House and the first to have a child while president, and now he could add one more: This was the first time electric lights were ever hung on a Christmas tree in the White House.

By this time Christmas lights were already over a decade old as they had been invented by Thomas Edison in his Menlo Park laboratory in New Jersey in 1880. Two years later his partner at Edison's Illumination Company, Edward H. Johnson, improved the design when he "hand-wired 80 red, white and blue light bulbs and wound them around his Christmas tree."⁴

Just like many White House traditions, the Christmas tree has evolved over the years from its humble beginnings. It was his predecessor, Benjamin Harrison, who is credited with erecting the first Christmas tree for his young grandchildren in 1889. Harrison was enthusiastic about the holidays and even dressed as Santa Claus (no fake beard necessary!) for the youngsters. But

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while electric lights were first installed in the White House two years later, Harrison and his wife Caroline were afraid of the invention and “refused to operate [the switches] for fear of a shock.”⁵ It is therefore unsurprising that the Harrisons preferred the real risk of a fire from wax candles rather than use electric Christmas tree lights. Frances, our youngest First Lady and thirty-two years junior to Caroline Harrison, apparently had no such fears and exuberantly added modern technology with classic Christmas traditions.

Today Christmas at the White House is a grand event in which the country is invited to participate either as one of the fortunate few invited guests, among the thousands who tour the White House during the holiday season, or the millions who peek inside the home virtually through online or televised events. In 2019, the White House featured an official Christmas tree in the Blue Room that towered over eighteen feet tall as well as dozens of smaller trees decorated in various themes such as a “cherished Gold Star Family Tree” and four “star-spangled trees.”⁶ While the décor on the trees varies, one thing they each have in common are strings of electric Christmas lights, a tradition that started in 1894 by President Grover Cleveland and First Lady Frances Cleveland.

The author, Louis L. Picone is a Trustee on the Board of the Grover Cleveland Birthplace Memorial Association. He is the award-winning author of Grant's Tomb: The Epic Death of Ulysses S. Grant and The Making of an American Pantheon as well as The President Is Dead! The Extraordinary Stories of the Presidential Deaths, Final Days, Burials, and Beyond and Where the Presidents Were Born: The History & Preservation of the Presidential Birthplaces. He holds a Masters in History and also teaches American History at William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey. Louis is a member of the Authors Guild, and the American Historical Association.

1 “Grover’s Tree,” Express (Los Angeles), December 25, 1984.

2 “Think Melania’s red forest is kooky? Consider the Christmas tree once hidden in a White House closet. White House Christmas decorations through the years,” Washington Post, November 27, 2018.

3 “Grover’s Tree,” Express (Los Angeles), December 25, 1984.

4 “Who invented electric Christmas lights?,” Library of Congress, Published November 19, 2019. <https://www.loc.gov/everyday-mysteries/item/who-invented-electric-christmas-lights>.

5 “In what year was electricity installed in the White House?,” The White House Historical Association, Accessed October 13, 2020. <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/questions/in-whatyear-was-electricity-installed-in-the-white-house>.

6 “First Lady Melania Trump Unveils Christmas at the White House 2019,” White House, Issued December 2, 2019. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/first-lady-melania-trumpunveils-christmas-white-house-2019>



Influenced by Louis Picone's research and article, GCBMA President David Cowell and Caretaker Sharon Farrell arranged this Christmas Tree display during last year's and this year's holiday season and Visitor's Center construction. At the display, the following is written: "Frances and Grover Cleveland, with two young daughters, resided at the White House during the 1894 Christmas Season. A table-top tree decorated by Mrs. Cleveland with 'parti-colored electric lamps' occupied the second floor Oval Room. Gifts filled the room for toddler, Ruth Cleveland, and baby sister, Esther. The sparkling tree was put on view for a short time on Christmas Day for children of Cabinet members. Christmas dinner was an intimate gathering for the President's small family, with the only added guest being the First Lady's mother. Though private, the meal was brimming with festive Christmas favorites, including duck that the President had brought in from a recent hunt".

Grover's House

By Ian McIntyre

(Editor's Note: Many on the GCBMA Board found Ian McIntyre's poem on a couple of Caldwell pages on Facebook. We asked Ian if it could be reprinted for our newsletter. Thank you Ian!)

Grover's House.

We'd sit on the stone wall and raised front yard, right on the corner of Arlington and Hatfield.

We were 15, 16 years old, in Caldwell, New Jersey, in 1962.

We boys, Greg Newman, the Long brothers, Eric and Jimmy, Walt Johnson, maybe Rodney Brower and somebody would say,

"Let's go down to Grover's house, and play football".

Greg would get a football from his house, and we would go, door by door,

And rouse enough boys for a game.

The gang of us, romping down Arlington Avenue toward Bloomfield Ave,

Dodging and running ahead, throwing the ball to each other.

This day;

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The brisk winter wind cutting our faces and making tears flow from our eyes.

Girls came, too, bunched together on the sidewalk, talking, hands in pockets of their car coats,

Looking at the boys, heading to the same place.

Grover Cleveland's house.

He was born there, and lived there until he was about 4, and now, it was a museum.

The house, the second oldest in the town, was built in 1832.

We did not care much about that.

Only two things held our attention, about the place.

The huge, grassy side yard, big and flat,

And the wedding cake.

The sidewalk of Arlington Avenue flowed down into the Cleveland yard,

And it was a perfect field for a game.

The slope gave the girls a place to sit, and watch us play.

We felt more heroic having them there.

This day, we played in the cold, and it was overcast, grey shadows on the field.

After a time, the girls got up, and walked home.

They were too cold, they told us.

"Stay", we said, but they walked up the hill, and away.

Our game was one of the best, breathless boys running,

Passing the ball, tackling each other, scoring.

We were all lost in the game.

It began to snow.

Lightly at first, then it began to come down heavy. We played on.

A wet snowfall, the flakes would stick to our faces,

Feeling good, brushing our cheeks with our long sleeves,

As the snow began to build on the now slick ground.

At last, we grouped together and called the game.

I can't recall who won, but we all did.

These boys, a dark clot upon the landscape of Grover's side yard,

An amusement to the motorists going cautiously by on Bloomfield Avenue,

Huddled together, talking in the falling snow.

"Let's go see the cake!", said someone.

We trooped, all 10 or 11 of us, around to the front of the house.

It was called “The Manse”, by the townspeople.

We piled in the front door, laughing at the warmth in the old place.

Some ladies, came out to check on the fuss.

They were nice; they were unconcerned, strangely,

At our group.

They would have seen us playing in the yard, but they never chased us off.

“We came to see the cake!” The explanation was offered up.

We knew where it was, and moved to the glass case, unimpeded

There it was.

The oldest piece of cake in the United States, a fruitcake of course.

A piece of Grover Cleveland’s wedding cake.

The cake was in a box, by Tiffany, of course.

Some of it had been eaten.

A Boy Scout was said to have taken a bite on a dare at one time.

We just wanted to look at it.

We needed to pay tribute.

Who would keep a piece of cake for 80 years?

The Methuselah cake.

We had our look, and went out of the house, talking of the cake, the ladies following us to the front door.

“Come back and see us.”, said one.

They were nice.

The snow was sticking, and coated the side yard, clumping on our wet sneakers, as we crossed it to the street.

Cars went by, their tires making the wet noise, along the Avenue.

We walked up the hill to our homes, happy.

(Note: I owe a huge debt of gratitude to Nancy Friedlander, my Journalism teacher at JCHS, (James Caldwell High School). Nancy, a true renaissance woman, taught me to love words, and honed my writing over a very formative two years. She insisted upon the best from her students, and brooked no excuses. Nancy has a continuing effect on me, to this day, and I am grateful that I was in the right place, at the right time, to experience her wonderful lessons.

Editor’s Note: With this Facebook posting, the two classic pictures at the top of the next page were provided.



Classic “snow” Carriage House picture. Picture of the Cleveland Wedding Cake.

The Role of Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt With the Beginnings of the Annual Army-Navy Football Game

By Paul Maloney

The debate about the safety of playing football is a current topic for the 21st Century. However, this debate was a concern over 130 years ago with a decision made by Grover Cleveland’s second term’s cabinet and a change with this decision by Theodore Roosevelt.

In the 1800’s, football was becoming more popular, especially on the college level. In 1890, the first Army Navy Game was played. According to Brian Cronin of the Los Angeles Times, this first game was mostly a pick up game and viewed by only 500 people. Claire Barrett in History.Net reports that the game was so rough, both Navy’s Captain Red Emrick and Army’s Quarterback Kirby Walker were both knocked unconscious.

With the 1893 game (during Cleveland’s second administration), over 8,000 people attended the game. The increased number made the competition more intense. For example, Barrett discusses how a rear admiral and brigadier general came close to having a post game “duel” after Navy defeated Army 6-4. Ironically, it was at this game that introduced the invention of a “safe” football helmet. Jimmy Stamp in Smithsonian Magazine describes how Joseph Mason Reeve (later a well known Admiral) was warned by a doctor that being kicked in the head so many times playing football could lead to “instant insanity”. Reeve had a shoemaker design a moleskin hat with earflaps. Later on, this so called “helmet” was used by paratroopers during World War I.

In February 1894, Cleveland had a special cabinet meeting in order to discuss the intensity of the recent Army-Navy Game. Cronin discusses that by the end of the meeting, Secretary of War David Lamont (with influence by Cleveland) and Secretary of the Navy Hillary A. Herbert agreed to end the games and did so in an unusual way. Both Secretaries ordered that all Army and Navy games against other teams could only be played on their respective

fields. Therefore, as college football became more popular, Army and Navy could not play each other.

By 1897, then President William McKinley's Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt wrote a letter to Secretary of the Navy John Davis Long asking to bring the game back. Cronin writes that it was decided that Franklin Field in Philadelphia become a "neutral" field where the game will take place. By the time Roosevelt became President in 1901, he started the tradition where the President watches the first half of the game on one side of the field and the second half of the game on the other side of the field. This was in order to avoid looking partial.

With the annual Army Navy Game now resumed, the "violent nature" of the game continued as well. Many college players died while playing and there was a movement to end collegiate play altogether. Cronin writes that Roosevelt called the academic leaders of Army, Navy, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale to address concerns. With Roosevelt's influence, the academic leaders formed the Intercollegiate Athletic Association and its policies made college football safer. This Association soon became the National Collegiate Athletic Association, (NCAA).

As Cronin's title asks, "Did the annual Army-Navy Game draw two U.S. Presidents into the planning of the game and the future of football itself?". One wonders how much Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt may have had an influence on the popularity and safety of football with the events surrounding the beginnings of the Army Navy Game. If Cleveland and Roosevelt were not involved, how would football in the United States be different today?

For further reading and research:

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Stamp, Jimmy, "Leatherhead to Radio-head: The Evolution of the Football Helmet". Smithsonian Magazine. October 1, 2012. Accessed January 2, 2022. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/leatherhead-to-radio-head-the-evolution-of-the-football-helmet-56585562/>



Grover Cleveland Birthplace Visitor's Center: "Grand Opening" in 2022.

