



MAYOR JAMES BUFFINGTON

First Mayor of City Had Active Career In Public Service

James Buffington, the first Mayor of Fall River, led an active and colorful public life. His political career carried him from the office of Selectman to the halls of Congress.

He was born in the section that is now known as French's Hill on March 16, 1817. His parents moved to Swansea, where he began his formal schooling, but they returned to this city shortly afterwards.

Frank B. Williams, who several years ago delivered an address before the Fall River Historical Society about the city's first mayor, said his mother "was careful in the training of her youngest born as well as of her other children, to instill in his mind the love of truth and virtue and lay the foundation for principles of honesty and uprightness which were to govern his life."

Mr. Buffington attended public and private schools until he reached the age of 15 at which time he was sent "for two or three terms" to what is now known as Moses Brown School in Providence. After he left school he began to study medicine, but lack of funds made him turn to teaching.

Made Whaling Voyage

He taught school in the Westport and Dartmouth areas and became friendly with many of the area's fishermen. His acquaintance with these men led him to sail aboard a whaling vessel as ship's doctor. On his return he opened a pharmacy on South Main Street in this city.

In 1839, he married Sarah Perkins, a former Taunton resident, who operated a millinery store on South Main Street. He added a line of dry goods to the store and he and his wife conducted the business until he was elected to Congress.

Between 1840 and 1854 he was elected to various public positions in the Town of Fall River. These included the offices of Fire Warden, Chief Engineer of the Fire Department,

President. In this session also he was on the Committee of Military Affairs.

Served During Civil War

In 1858, he spoke in the House of Representatives against admitting Kansas as a slave State. Re-elected in 1859 he again served on the Committee of Military Affairs.

In 1861, when the nation was under the leadership of Abraham Lincoln and the Union was going through a critical stage, Mr. Buffington was re-elected and once again was a member of the Military Affairs Committee and was on the Committee of Accounts.

At the outbreak of the Civil War he returned home and helped to raise a company of volunteers. He enlisted as a private in the Seventh Massachusetts Regiment, but his constituents insisted that he return to Congress and his subsequent resignation was accepted by the Army.

Friend of Lincoln

Congressman Buffington was a good friend of Abraham Lincoln. When Clinton V. S. Remington visited Congressman Buffington he said that they called on the President. Lincoln, Remington said, greeted Buffington with "Hello, Jim" and Buffington replied "Hello Father Abraham."

The redistricting of Congressional Districts in 1862 resulted in placing Buffington and Congressman Thomas D. Eliot of New Bedford in the same District. He announced that if Eliot ran for Congress he (Buffington) would refuse any nomination. Eliot, who at first said that he would not be a candidate, reversed his decision and declared himself a candidate.

After the 37th Congress Buffington became a Special Agent for the Treasury Department. He held this post until the death of Eliot, at which time he was again elected to Congress. He was re-elected to the 42nd and 43rd sessions of Con-

gress, but Congressman Buffington died March 7, 1875, shortly after the adjournment of the 43rd Congress. He was eulogized here and in Washington for his efforts in behalf of his constituents during his long career as a conscientious public servant.

Williams related that "it was his boast that during his long congressional career he had never been absent from a roll-call * * *"

Mayor Davenport, in addressing the Board of Aldermen after the Congressman's death, said "By his death the community has lost a valued and respected citizen and the government a long tried and faithful officer."

Grime Made Improvements

The three years George Grime served as Mayor, from 1901 to 1904, saw many changes and improvements come to the administration of the city government. His experience as City Solicitor and as Special Justice of the Second District Court gave him the necessary background to guide the great changes.

After a referendum, public works were vested in a Board of Commissioners of five. Grimes petitioned the Legislature and had cemeteries come under the jurisdiction of the board. Later a Board of Park and Cemetery Commissioners was appointed. South, North, Ruggles and other smaller places were transformed from rubbish heaps to beautiful sites.

Grime took the cemeteries out of politics and abolished railroad crossings at grade.

He was the last Mayor under the old charter of bi-cameral government, consisting of nine Aldermen and 27 Councillors, and the first under the new charter calling for biennial elections.

History notes that friction prevailed and interpretation of the new charter was sought from the Supreme Court.

Public works was placed under a department, a commission of three took over control of the Fire Department and large tracts were acquired near the North Watuppa Pond domestic water supply for protection.

A definite policy of street improvements was begun, street car sprinklers were introduced, granite block paving resumed, and granolithic sidewalks replaced tar.

Many of the city departments as they now exist were established during Mayor Grime's reign.

Coughlin Urged More Industry

Depressed conditions in the textile industry here from time to time over the period of the city's history led Mayor John T. Coughlin as early as 1904 to call for greater diversification.

In his first inaugural address Coughlin said:

"Our principal industry which yields a livelihood to our people and the large part of the public income, owing to unfortunate circumstances, has undergone serious depression."

"* * * Every public spirited citizen should cooperate in a movement to attract to our city more diversified industries and every act of the public authorities should be directed to a similar end."

This statement of Mayor Coughlin's has been repeated in more recent years time and again and political leaders almost half a century later declare it is the most pressing problem facing this community.

gress. Between 1840 and 1854 he was elected to various public positions in the Town of Fall River. These included the offices of Fire Warden, Chief Engineer of the Fire Department and Selectman. He was elected Selectman in 1851 and re-elected in 1852 and 1853.

When the town received its city Charter in 1854 he was elected its first mayor "by a majority over all opponents of 331 votes in an aggregate of 1,261." When the results became known Mayor Buffington was honored by a 50-gun salute and a band serenaded him at his home.

Shortly after his inauguration the city was hit with an epidemic of Asiatic Cholera. Williams said that "together with Father Murphy of Saint Mary's Church, another wonderful personage, he went among the sick comforting them and ministering to them, removed the sick and dying to the hospital provided by the city for their comfort and care and in a great many instances prepared the dead for decent burial."

Resigns to Enter Congress

In 1855, Mr. Buffington was re-elected mayor and in the Autumn of that year he was elected to the 34th Congress, representing the Second District. He resigned his mayoralty before leaving for Washington in December of 1855 and was succeeded by Edward P. Buffinton.

Franklin Pierce was President of the United States and Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks of Massachusetts was Speaker of the House of Representatives when Buffington began his Congressional duties.

It was during this session of Congress that Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner was attacked by South Carolina Congressman Preston H. Brooks in the Senate chamber after the former had denounced the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. Buffington and General Banks, hearing of the assault, rushed to the Senate Chamber and found the bleeding Senator on the floor.

Williams, in his address, stated that "at that time so great was the feeling in Washington against the abolitionists that when General Banks and he (Buffington) called to some of the hack drivers to come up to the doorway and carry Mr. Sumner to his home, they all refused until finally Mr. Buffington told one that if he did not drive them downtown he (Buffington) would throw him off his seat and drive the carriage himself. The driver capitulated and Mr. Buffington attended Mr. Sumner faithfully until he was out of danger from the effects of blows upon his head."

He served on the Committee of Military Affairs and on the Committee of Accounts while the 34th Congress was in session. He was re-elected to Congress in 1857, at which time James Buchanan was

Treasury Department. He held this post until the death of Eliot, at which time he was again elected to Congress. He was reelected to the 42nd and 43rd sessions of Congress and served on numerous committees during these years. During the 43rd session of Congress, he was

political leaders almost half a century later declare it is the most pressing problem facing this community.

LEGAL VOTERS

The number of legal voters in Fall River in 1840 was 1,113.

Seal of Fall River Tells Story of Its Progress

The Fall River Seal depicts the Taunton River, textile mills, the year the town was founded, the date it was incorporated a city, the motto, "We'll Try," and a general background of the city.

This is a graphic explanation of the city's history and growth.

The Taunton River, which had an integral part in the development of the city, is in the foreground of the seal. In its early years the city, isolated and limited in overland routes, conducted its major commercial traffic by water. The river, therefore, was used extensively until the inauguration of railroads and highways. The numerous buildings pictured along the waterfront bear out the fact that the river was the chief means of transporting goods to other parts of the world.

The different ships pictured on the river represent the various stages of growth. Sailboats and steamboats are shown in front of

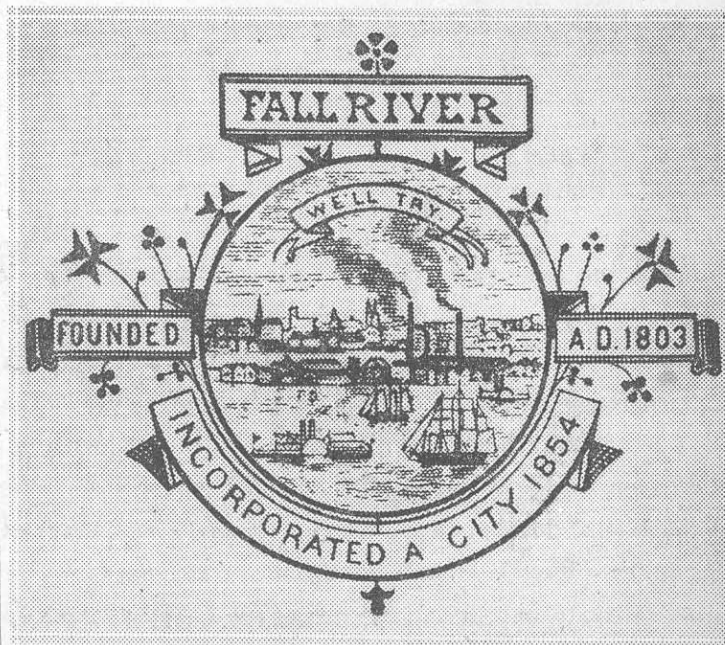
the city. Both types of craft carried cotton, lumber, iron and other products to and from the growing city.

The textile mills pictured in the seal convey the fact that this city was, at one time, the largest cotton center in the world. Since that time, many diversified industries have been established in the city, but it is still an important textile center.

In the background are church steeples which represent the spiritual growth of the city. The various steeples signify that churches were springing up in the city to care for the spiritual needs of the growing population.

The motto, "We'll Try," was conceived shortly after the great fire of 1843, when a group of citizens placed such an inscribed banner amid the ruins of the city's center.

The overall picture gives an impression of activity and constant development in the stages of civilization.



YOUR CITY'S SEAL: Imprinted on all official municipal documents is the seal depicting historical milestones in the growth of Fall River. The portrait in the seal combines the elements for which this city is known.