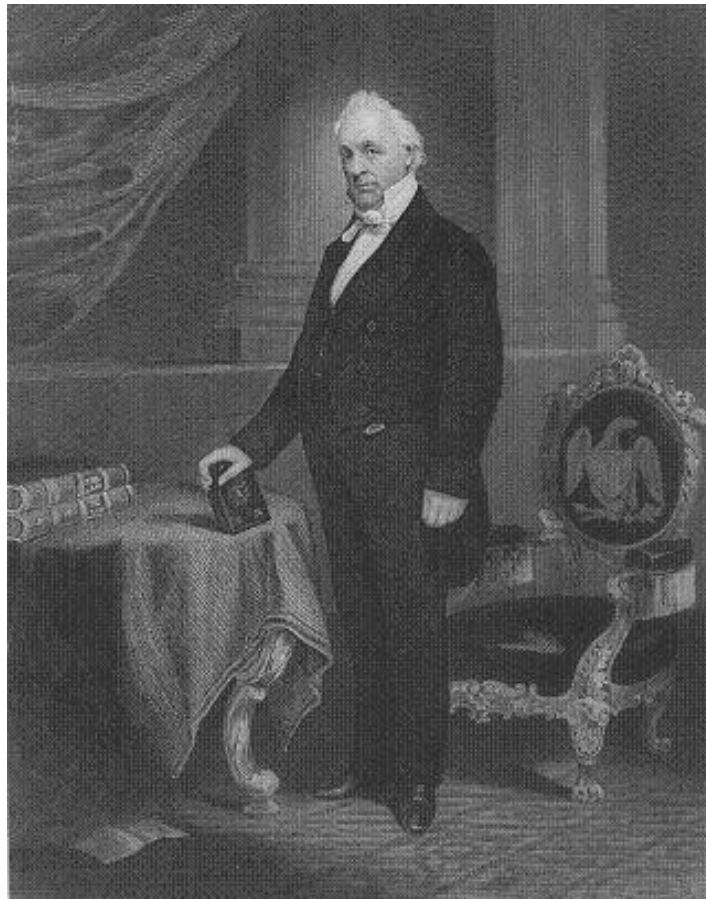


James Buchanan

Chief of the Copperhead Coalition

Fifteenth, 1857-1861



Nicknames: "The Sage of Wheatland", "Ten-Cent Jimmie", "Old Fogey"

Birth: April 23rd, 1791, in Cove Gap, near Mercersburg, Pennsylvania

Death: June 1st, 1861, at his estate "Wheatland" near Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Significant Events During Buchanan's Term: Mountain Meadows Massacre... Dred Scott Case ... John Brown at Harper's Ferry ... Pony Express ... Minnesota (#32), Oregon (#33), and Kansas (#34) become States

Quotes: *"I have lost the only earthly object of my affections, without whom life now presents to me a dreary blank. My prospects are all cut off, and I feel that my happiness will be buried with her in the grave."* -- James Buchanan, speaking of the death of his fiancé

"If you are as happy in entering the White House as I shall feel on returning to Wheatland, you are a happy man indeed." -- James Buchanan to Abraham Lincoln (#16) on March 4th, 1861

"All agree that under the Constitution slavery in the States is beyond the reach of any human power except that of the respective States themselves wherein it exists. May we not, then, hope that the long agitation on this subject is approaching its end...should the agitation continue it may eventually endanger the personal safety of a large portion of our countrymen where the institution exists. In that event no form of government, however admirable in itself and however productive of material benefits, can compensate for the loss of peace and domestic security around the family altar. Let every Union-loving man, therefore, exert his best influence to suppress this agitation."

-- James Buchanan, falsely claiming that slavery was protected by the Constitution

"All that is necessary to [settle the slavery question], and all for which the slave States have ever contended, is to be let alone and permitted to manage their domestic institutions in their own way. As sovereign States, they, and they alone, are responsible before God and the world for the slavery existing among them. For this the people of the North are no more responsible and have no more right to interfere than with similar institutions in Russia or in Brazil." -- James Buchanan

"My life is that of a galley slave." -- James Buchanan

"I believe [slavery] to be a great political and a great moral evil. I thank God, my lot has been cast in a State where it does not exist. But, while I entertain these opinions, I know it is an evil at present without a remedy...one of those moral evils, from which it is impossible for us to escape, without the introduction of evils infinitely greater. There are portions of this Union, in which, if you emancipate your slaves, they will become masters. There can be no middle course." -- James Buchanan, 1826

How his term ended: Unable to bring about a satisfactory solution to the slavery issue, Buchanan chose not to run for a second term.

Other Professions: Lawyer, Tavern owner, Soldier, Prizefighter

Worst Mistake: Buchanan felt slavery was rooted in the Constitution, and thus felt bound to uphold the "peculiar institution." Thus, he favored the Kansas-Nebraska Act (under which each new state would decide for itself whether it was to be slave or free), and favored the admission of Kansas as a slave, rather than a free, state.

In one of the quotes above, Buchanan spoke out for the maintenance of the Union (also Lincoln's chief aim, or at least one of his chief aims) and also said that continued "agitation" on the slavery issue (which had been smoldering for decades) would "endanger the personal safety of a large portion of our countrymen." But what about his countrymen of color? Was their personal safety, both of a physical and an emotional nature, not to be considered? Yes, the southern states should have been proactive and abolished slavery themselves; yes, most

of the framers of the Constitution as well as the previous Presidents had been slaveholders; but there comes a time when one must stand up for what he knows to be morally right, and against what he knows to be morally wrong, regardless of what anyone else says, thinks, does, or threatens to do.

Saving Graces: In spite of his equivocating regarding the issue, Buchanan apparently *was* personally against slavery (at least eventually), and “put his money where his mouth was” by purchasing some slaves in an area where buying and selling humans was legal (Washington, D.C.) and then giving them their freedom in his native Pennsylvania, a free state.

Buchanan also showed his empathy for at least some of his fellow humans when, in his will, he left part of his estate to his housekeeper and some of it to Lancaster, Pennsylvania's poor people.

Notes: Similar to Millard Fillmore (#13) and Franklin Pierce (#14) before him, Buchanan was what was then known as a Northern Democrat, a party that was sympathetic to the South's stance on the slavery issue.

Buchanan suffered from wryneck, or torticollis, which is an involuntary contracting of the neck muscles, causing the neck to be held at an angle, or cocked to one side. He also suffered from an odd physical anomaly regarding his eyes: one was set higher than the other, and he was nearsighted in one and farsighted in the other. For this reason, he always held one eye closed – if he was looking at something near by (such as, when conversing with someone), he held open his nearsighted eye; when viewing something in the distance, he kept just his farsighted eye open. This cock-eyed, cock-necked appearance was disconcerting to some people.

Buchanan was the only President to be a lifetime bachelor. Although early in life he had courted Ann Coleman, who was the daughter of wealthy parents and thus socially “above” him at the time, Buchanan was rejected by Ann's father as an unsuitable suitor for his daughter. Ann then broke off the engagement, explaining to Buchanan in a letter that she believed that he loved her money more than he did her. This idea may have been put into her head by her parents. Ann died under mysterious circumstances shortly after this; some say that, grief-stricken, she had committed suicide. The Coleman family did not allow Buchanan to attend their daughter's funeral, returning a letter he had sent them unopened.

Buchanan sealed up materials that explained the whole matter, ostensibly to be made public later, presumably upon his death. However, when that time eventually came, his executors found a note directing that the materials be destroyed unexamined (why Buchanan wouldn't simply destroy the materials himself, and leave the note in their place, is unknown and perhaps unknowable). The executors of Buchanan's estate complied, and the exact nature of the quarrel remains shrouded in mystery. Then again, there is always the possibility, of course, that the executors *did* read the materials and decided on their own to keep his explanations secret.

At any rate, Miss Coleman's death made an impact on future history, as prior to this Buchanan had intended to pursue the law as his career, not politics. After his fiancé died, though, Buchanan—primarily as a distraction from his grief—acquiesced to requests from others that he enter politics, first running for Congress.

Buchanan's orphaned niece, whom he raised, served as official White House hostess during his tenure in office.

Although he was a Northern Democrat/Copperhead while in the White House, Buchanan did ultimately support the Union in the Civil War.