

# Two Monuments for the Fifteenth President of the United States

by Homer T. Rosenberger

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Who knows when the idea of erecting a monument in honor of any President of the United States first evolved? No doubt some of Buchanan's fond admirers conceived within his own lifetime that a monument of some sort should be erected in his honor. Regardless of who may have been the first to think that Buchanan should thus be honored, it was his niece, Harriet Lane Johnston, who carried the torch, year in and year out, in behalf of a lasting memorial.

## Early Attempts to Establish A Park and Monument at Buchanan's Birthplace

The *Mercersburg, Pennsylvania Journal* for May 31, 1901, announced that Mrs. Johnston would be visiting Mercersburg the next week and that the visit would be her first to the town "in a number of years," stating that "Her last visit here was for the purpose of purchasing ground above Foltz, at the birth place of her uncle, President Buchanan, and erecting a suitable monument to the memory of her distinguished relative." The *Journal* continued, "Owing to some difficulty as to acquiring title to the ground her laudable intention was, very unfortunately, never carried out."

A letter from J. Fraise Richard of May 10, 1886, addressed to Mrs. Johnston in Baltimore is preserved by The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. In the letter Richard states that he is writing the history of Franklin County, Pennsylvania, and asks "Would I be unreasonable in asking of you a brief account of the negotiation, some years ago to establish a monument on the site of the old log house in the Cove, in which you were a principal agent?" Three days later Mrs. Johnston wrote to a Mr. Cooper.

116, Park Street

Dear Mr Cooper

I have thought for sometime of writing to you, in regard to the purchase, etc. of the Buchanan birthplace. Is there any hope of this

being accomplished on reasonable terms — & for arrangements being made for its being perpetually kept in good order—in any of the various ways suggested some years ago?

The enclosed letter [undoubtedly J. Fraise Richard's of May 10, 1886] came a day or two ago — & I have taken the liberty of referring the gentleman (whom I do not know) to you — for an account of the "negociation" — as you will best know, what had better be told, & what withheld, in case there is still any hope of the purchase, & proper arrangements being made.

I trust your own health is good, & that your family are all well & prosperous!

Hoping to hear from you — believe me —

Very truly yours

Harriet Lane Johnston

May 13/86.

Baltimore.

This Mr. Cooper was John M. Cooper who had been a staunch admirer of James Buchanan for many years. He was editor of the *Valley Spirit*, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, when Buchanan was inaugurated as President of the United States. The *Valley Spirit* then had a circulation of 2,000 copies, large for those days. Cooper was a courageous person. His editorials in the *Valley Spirit* had the piercing ring of conviction. The eight large pages of his weekly paper carried a great deal of current political information about Pennsylvania and the nation. They also carried book reviews, short stories, and occasional news items about happenings in foreign countries. Cooper's *Valley Spirit* was a thoroughly high-type newspaper.

Five years later Mrs. Johnston wrote again to Mr. Cooper.

Rome — May 24  
1891.

Dear Mr Cooper —

A friend has been kind enough to send me your very interesting article on my dear Uncle & his birthplace. I write to thank you for the article — & also to see if another effort cannot be made from you — believe me

Yours very sincerely

Harriet Lane Johnston

C/o Drexel Harjes & Co

Bankers

Paris — France

Early in 1893 John Cessna of Bedford introduced into the Pennsylvania House of Representatives a bill for the erection of a monument at James Buchanan's birthplace. Cessna had a remarkable career as a lawyer, legislator, and political leader. He was active in the Democratic Party. After being elected Speaker of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives twice he was a Member of the Forty-First (1869-1871) and Forty-Third (1873-1875) Congresses. He was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1856 and 1860. In 1863 he became a Republican and was a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1868, 1876, and 1880. He was also a member of many State conventions in Pennsylvania. Cessna was President of the Board of Trustees of Franklin and Marshall College from 1865 until his death on December 13, 1893.

Even with the prestige of Cessna behind the bill it did not become law. However, it attracted attention, even in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, a place not intimately associated with Cessna, or with Buchanan's birth, childhood, or career. On February 21, 1893, the *Compiler*, a weekly newspaper in that town, carried a long article on the proposed memorial. The article commented as follows, in part.

If the bill introduced by Representative John Cessna, appropriating \$5,000 to purchase the site of the birthplace of President Buchanan and erect a monument thereon, passes the Legislature it will secure the consummation of a wish often expressed by the near friends and admirers of Pennsylvania's only President. Mr. Cessna has a deep personal interest in this memorial enterprise.

Approximately a month later Mrs. Johnston wrote to Mr. Cooper, from Washington, and probably a few months before she settled permanently on Eye Street.

1765 — Mass. Avenue  
Washington  
March 18, 1893

Dear Mr. Cooper —

I am most gratified to hear of the movement to purchase (by the State) my dear Uncle's birthplace. It is the proper way for it to be done — but if this should unfortunately fail — I hope your suggested amendment to the bill would be accepted — namely — "to authorize the Governor to accept the Birthplace for the Commonwealth if it should be marked & presented. I still hope the purchase will be made by the State — as it should be — but I have heard nothing of it since your letter.

Hoping for its success — & with many thanks to you — & to Mr Foltz & Mr Cessna — believe me —

Very truly yours,  
Harriet Lane Johnston

The letters of May 13, 1886; May 24, 1891, and March 18, 1893, are preserved by The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

### The Bequest

By the time Mrs. Johnston was in the process of making her will of 1895 she may have despaired of ever seeing a monument erected at the birthplace of James Buchanan. Perhaps if she would charge a group of trustees with the responsibility to use part of her estate to erect two memorials, rather than one, and involve the Congress of the United States, she might at last get action, after her death. And the plan worked, admirably. It produced two of the most attractive memorials that can be imagined, and each of a completely different type, and each in a completely different setting. One, at the birthplace of James Buchanan, is in a quiet, isolated mountainous spot less than a mile from a rather heavy stream of highway traffic. The other is located in the heart of the National Capital.

In her will of June 1, 1895, Mrs. Johnston bequeathed \$100,000 which was to be known as the "James Buchanan Monument Fund." Two men from Baltimore, William A. Fisher and Lawrason Riggs,

and two from Washington, Calderon Carlisle and E. Francis Riggs, were named by the will as trustees of the fund. They were to secure an acre or more of ground, by private negotiations or under Pennsylvania laws, at the Buchanan birthplace, and erect a monument with "proper inscriptions." The will suggested that the monument be a "huge rock or boulder in its natural state, except that proper surfaces or tablets should be prepared or provided for necessary inscriptions." She directed that the monument should be enclosed by an iron railing to protect it but that the remaining ground should be available for the people of Pennsylvania to enjoy. When the monument would be completed the trustees were to "secure the ownership of and control of said site and monument to the State of Pennsylvania to be preserved as a memorial of her distinguished citizen." This was, indeed, a splendid strategy.

The other half of the task of the monument trustees probably looked still more difficult to them than the first half. They were to obtain from the United States Congress, heavily Republican for many years, permission to erect a grand memorial to a Democrat, on land in the Federal City to be designated by Congress and approved by the trustees, with no part of the fund available for land. However, the trustees were authorized to procure designs or models for a bronze or marble statue of Buchanan, and submit them to Congress when making application for a suitable site within the city.

Mrs. Johnston stated in the will that Jeremiah S. Black's remark about James Buchanan, "The incorruptible statesman whose walk was upon the mountain ranges of the law," should be placed on the pedestal of the statue. Also, if the trustees would not succeed within fifteen years from time of her death in procuring "a site at Stony Batter, or to get the permission and consent of Congress to place said statue on an appropriate site in the City of Washington" acceptable to the trustees then the monument fund was to be paid to the Harriet Lane Home for Invalid Children.

These provisions for two monuments for the Fifteenth President of the United States must have seemed highly satisfactory to Mrs. Johnston. During the next eight years, when making the five codicils to her will of June 1, 1895, she revoked numerous provisions, made new bequests, and inserted additional requirements, but left the monument provisions untouched.

Upon Mrs. Johnston's death on July 3, 1903, eager eyes noticed that the dazzling sum of \$100,000 was available for the two monuments. The *Mercersburg, Pennsylvania Journal* for July 17, 1903, was quick to perceive that there might not be a Buchanan birthplace monument. It carried a front page headline:

### THE MONUMENT UNCERTAIN.

Will Does not Direct \$100,000 To  
Be Expended for The Purpose.

The article explained that the \$100,000 monument fund in Mrs. Johnston's will was for two monuments, one in Washington and one at the Buchanan birthplace, but that the money would go to a "school [the Harriet Lane Home?] in Baltimore" if the monument trustees would not be given suitable land in the District of Columbia and would not acquire one or two acres at Stony Batter, and any money left over would go to the school. The article said "... We are sorry that the whole fund is not for the birthplace; but regret much more that the sum was not given to Mercersburg Academy for the erection of a building to commemorate the memory of the testatrix's illustrious uncle. . . ."

A week later the *Mercersburg Journal* for July 24, 1903, carried a front page article as follows.

#### THE BUCHANAN MONUMENT.

The New York World, laboring under the mistake common to most newspapers of the country, makes the following editorial comment:

"The sum of \$100,000 left by the will of Mrs. Harriet Lane Johnston, mistress of the White House during President Buchanan's Administration, for the erection of a suitable monument to the memory of James Buchanan, at his birthplace near Mercersburg, Pa., assures a monument to the fifteenth President of the United States.

The memorial will appeal to posterity in behalf of one to whom his fellow-citizens in the stormy times preceding the civil war were scarcely just. . . ."

#### Mrs. Johnston's Trustees

The four trustees of Mrs. Johnston's "James Buchanan Monument Fund" comprised a remarkable group. William A. Fisher (Sr.) was a Baltimore lawyer, judge, and public-spirited citizen with broad interests. He was a leader in philanthropic work in Baltimore, being founder, officer and trustee of various welfare organizations such as the Maryland Institute for the Blind, the Thomas Wilson Sanitarium for Children, and the Gilman Country School. He was well known and was near the height of his career, having been born in 1837.

Calderon Carlisle was a prominent lawyer in Washington, D. C., who had already handled international cases for Spain and Canada, even though only forty-three years of age when Mrs. Johnston named him as a trustee.

E. Francis Riggs was educated in England, was a banker in Washington, D. C., and was associated with many activities in behalf of modernizing and beautifying the city of Washington. He too was forty-three years old when designated as a trustee of the James Buchanan Monument Fund, was head of Riggs & Company, the forerunner of Riggs National Bank of Washington, and had an international reputation as a banker.

Lawrason Riggs, a bachelor and son of a banker, was only 33

years old when Mrs. Johnston named him as one of the four trustees. She already had the ability to spot talent before it had proved itself. Her choice of Lawrason Riggs was exceptionally fortunate. The burden of carrying out her dream of two monuments fell on him. Judge Fisher and Mr. Carlisle both died in 1901. Mrs. Johnston left the task to Lawrason Riggs of Baltimore and E. Francis Riggs of Washington, D. C. The latter died on July 6, 1910. Most of the task fell upon Lawrason Riggs of Baltimore.

Lawrason Riggs was a remarkable person. He spent nearly all his life in Baltimore and was devoted to that city. Although a lawyer by profession he appeared in court only infrequently. He spent much time managing family investments and attending to community activities. He became brigadier general of the Fifth Regiment, Maryland National Guard, in 1896, and achieved distinction by maintaining order in Baltimore in 1904 when the militia guarded the downtown section of the city, which had been ravaged by fire.

General Lawrason Riggs was president of Baltimore's school board, president of its three-man police board, president of the board of the Maryland Training School for Boys, president of the Family Welfare Association, and president of the board of trustees of the Peabody Institute for twenty years. He was also a member of the board of the Baltimore Museum of Art, chairman of the municipal affairs committee of the Baltimore Association of Commerce, and director of the First National Bank and of the Mercantile Trust Company. One of his obituaries, in the *Baltimore Sun* for November 22, 1940, referred to General Riggs as a useful and a charitable citizen, but even more, the kind of man "who somehow communicated his own grace and his own dignity to the city at large." The obituary closed with these words: "Baltimore had more right to be proud of itself because it contained such a citizen."

This was the man, General Lawrason Riggs, who would carry out Mrs. Johnston's dream of two monuments for the Fifteenth President of the United States. There would be a long struggle in store for him, including the resistance of such men as Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, in winning Congressional approval to place the Buchanan Memorial on federal land in the District of Columbia. Because of the heroic efforts of General Riggs, Mrs. Johnston's dream was carried out admirably, in the face of numerous obstacles.

### Acquiring the Birthplace Site

In 1906 Oliver E. Shannon, Carrie R. Shannon, his wife, and William A. Shannon, all of Philadelphia, Miss Antoinette Shannon, and Mr. and Mrs. Christian F. Fendrick (Mrs. Fendrick had been Miss Virginia Shannon) sold to E. Francis Riggs and Lawrason Riggs, the surviving trustees of the James Buchanan Monument Fund, under Harriet Lane Johnston's will, an eighteen-and-one-half acre tract of land (eighteen acres and eighty perches) on which James Bu-

chanan was born. The immediate vicinity of this tract is known as Stony Batter. It is in Peters Township, Franklin County, Pennsylvania, approximately a mile and a half from the village of Cove Gap.

A general warranty deed dated July 18, 1906, was given for the James Buchanan Monument Tract in consideration of \$3000.00. This was a very large amount of money for such a small tract of mountain land in that part of Pennsylvania in 1906. The word had gotten around that a huge sum was available for the purchase of this particular spot, and that it was a historic site, although isolated and somewhat forgotten. Nevertheless, the site was an open field in the first decade of this century and may then have had some value as farm land. Even so, the Shannons could have been much more cooperative when Mrs. Johnston attempted to purchase the site, and they could have been much more liberal in 1906 when dealing with E. Francis Riggs and General Riggs. The birthplace site had been in the Shannon family since December 13, 1865, when D. M. B. Shannon and his wife Lena purchased twenty-two acres and eighty-eight perches from Mr. and Mrs. William McLellan for \$337.50, as recorded in Franklin County Deed Book, volume 40, page 167.

D. M. B. Shannon wrote to Buchanan the next year. The former President replied to Mr. Shannon as follows.

Wheatland, near Lancaster  
7 July 1866.

My dear Sir

I have received your very kind & acceptable letter of the 4th and am pleased to learn that you have purchased the place where I was born. It is a rugged but romantic spot, & the mountains & mountain stream under the scenery captivating. I have warm attachments for it & for Mercersburg; but do not expect, at least for the present, to pay you a visit . . .

This letter, to Mr. D. M. B. Shannon, Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, and the envelope in which it was sent are preserved by Mercersburg Academy. The letter has probably never before been published.

D. M. B. Shannon died in Mercersburg on December 22, 1900, and his widow died there on February 7, 1903. The tract of land then became the property of their four children, who sold the eighteen-and-a-half acres from it to the trustees of Mrs. Johnston's Buchanan Monument Fund.

The 1906 sale of this land to the trustees of Mrs. Johnston's Buchanan Monument Fund is recorded in Franklin County Deed Book, volume 143, page 86. The history of ownership of the tract from the late eighteenth century is found in *Record of Land Titles for Susquehanna Reservation*, Department of Forests and Waters, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, volume 102, pages 221-253. The volume consists of John E. Potter's abstracts of titles and other papers pertinent to some of the land acquisitions of the Pennsylvania Department of Forests and Waters.

The *Baltimore Sun* for December 9, 1906, stated: "Acting with

Judge William Rush Gillan, of Franklin County, Pennsylvania, in an advisory capacity, the trustees have acquired Stony Batter from the heirs of its late owner, Mr. D. M. B. Shannon, of Mercersburg. . . . An agent of the trustees is even now scouring the mountain range to find a native boulder, which it was the expressed desire of Mrs. Johnston should, with suitable inscriptions, mark the spot."

## Construction

The monument was designed by the same architectural firm that prepared the preliminary plans for the Harriet Lane Home for Invalid Children—Wyatt and Nolting, of Baltimore. The monument was erected on the eighteen-and-a-half acre tract,

The *Mercersburg Journal*, weekly, for October 11, 1907, reported as follows.

### BUCHANAN'S MONUMENT.

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#### WORK COMMENCED ON MONDAY MORNING

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#### THE LARGEST MONUMENTAL CONTRACT EVER LET IN FRANKLIN COUNTY.

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J. N. Forbes of Chambersburg  
the Contractor.

H. R. Forbes of Chambersburg, nephew of the contractor, for several weeks past has been superintending the clearing and preparing of the ground at Stony Batter, near Foltz, four miles from Mercersburg, for the erection of the Buchanan Monument.

The contract has been let to J. N. Forbes of Chambersburg and on Friday morning of last week J. N. Forbes, H. R. Forbes and E. C. McCune came to Mercersburg and were met here by Lawrason Riggs and M. G. Nolting of the firm of Wyatt & Nolting, architects, of Baltimore, Md. The party came in their \$10,000 touring car, having spent the night in Hagerstown [Maryland].

On account of part of the road being too rough for an automobile teams were procured and the party proceeded to Stony Batter, where a consultation was held regarding the most advantageous spot for the location of the monument. This being determined upon stakes were at once driven and all preliminaries arranged, after which the party returned to Foltz where a sumptuous dinner was awaiting them at the home of Mrs. Mary E. Seylar, where Mr. Forbes has the good fortune of stopping while superintending the work.

A force of 20 men were put to work on the job Monday morning and the work will be rushed to an early completion. Strohm and Bishop Rockwell of this place, the well known up-to-date men for this kind of work are doing the excavating with horses and plows and scoops. A railway will be built to bring stone from the mountain side to where the monument will be located.

The monument will be pyramidal in form: 38 feet square at the foundation line and 31 feet high from the foundation line. The entire





**THE JAMES BUCHANAN BIRTHPLACE SITE  
AS IT LOOKED IN 1928**

There is a magnificent serenity at the birthplace site. It is a quiet place in the forest, near Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. The monument is surrounded by a plantation of tall, straight Norway Spruce which have reached a height of nearly seventy feet in 1974. The stone monument rises to a height of twenty-six and one-half feet. The records of the former Pennsylvania Department of Forests and Waters show that 20,000 people visited the site in 1967.—From the Author's Collection.

structure will weigh 300 tons, including 50 tons of granite work. On the front will be a granite inscription tablet, sill, seat and cap. All will be of the best hammered American gray granite. The cap stone will weigh seven tons and other portions composing the front will weigh from three to five tons each. The rest of the monument will be constructed of the best native rubble masonry with mortar joint cut back of face, and all faces of stone exposed will show original weather surface.

The entire work will be under the supervision of E. C. McCune, assisted by H. R. Forbes, which is ample assurance that the job will be up to the high standard of work that has been turned out by this well known establishment for the past thirty years.

The next day, October 12, 1907, the *Franklin Repository*, published in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, carried a front page article reciting similar statements about the monument at Buchanan's birthplace.

The *Mercersburg Journal* for November 8, 1907, reported on front page that the monument "is going up rapidly," and that "there are some thirty-five men at work putting up the base, which is of native stone. No doubt some of these stone, Buchanan, while at play, hurled at a passing bear." The November 15, 1907, issue reported on its front page that the inscription had been cut on the Monument's Inscription Stone.

The *Mercersburg Journal* for Friday, December 6, 1907, stated on front page that in spite of inclement weather "quite a number of persons" visited the birthplace, apparently on the preceding Sunday. The monument was already attracting attention. The same newspaper for April 10, 1908, announced Buchanan souvenirs—ten postcards in a set showing James, his birthplace, the monument, nearby residences, and the like, for fifteen cents per set.

Very early in the Pennsylvania legislative session of 1911, an act quoted Mrs. Johnston's will concerning the birthplace monument and authorized the Commonwealth to accept from Lawrason Riggs, the surviving trustee, the eighteen-and-one-half acre James Buchanan Monument Tract and the monument that had been erected on it. The act specified that the land and monument would be placed in the custody of the Pennsylvania Department of Forestry, now the Bureau of Forestry. The act was approved on March 22 by Governor John K. Tener.

The State seemed somewhat ungrateful. The rock-ribbed Republican Pennsylvania of the early years of this century expressed little appreciation for the monument to its only son who had become President of the United States. A page-by-page search of the detailed minutes of the monthly meetings of the Pennsylvania Forestry Reservation Commission for the calendar years 1911, 1912, and 1913, did not reveal any reference to the gift. Similarly, the lengthy published biennial reports of the Pennsylvania Department of Forestry for the years 1908-1909, 1910-1911, 1912-1913, and 1914-1915, appear to be completely silent about the gift and the Department's custodial responsibility for the monument and park. Also, that dis-

tinguished and venerable journal, *Forest Leaves*, issued by the Pennsylvania Forestry Association appears to have made no mention whatsoever of the gift until the time of the October 1929 number. Then in an article "Sidelights of History In the Buchanan Forest District," W. L. Byers, District Forester, merely said that the Buchanan birthplace site and the stone marker "were a gift to the Commonwealth from Buchanan's niece, Mrs. Harriet Lane Johnston, who kept house for him while he occupied the White House." (Page 72).

## **The Buchanan Memorial in Meridian Hill Park**

Immediately after the Buchanan Birthplace Monument was accepted by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1911 the bulk of Mrs. Johnston's \$100,000 Buchanan Monument Fund was still available. What about a Buchanan monument for Washington, D. C.? Unless Congress would act by July 3, 1918, the remainder of the fund would go to the Harriet Lane Home for Invalid Children.

Meanwhile General Lawrason Riggs had been busy in behalf of the second monument. The necessary legislation did not gain approval easily in the United States Senate.

The early activity in behalf of the Buchanan Memorial in Washington is recited by William Sener Rusk, a native of Baltimore, and a distinguished art historian. Rusk states that Mrs. Johnston's monument trustees met as soon as "feasible" after her will was probated and decided to select a sculptor and an architect to prepare designs rather than conduct a competition. Hans Schuler and William Gordon Beecher, both of Baltimore, were selected. A well-known veteran architect of Baltimore, James B. Noel Wyatt, gave advice at time the preliminary sketch was prepared. Upon agreement of the sketch, General Riggs, Mr. Schuler and Mr. Beecher met with the National Commission of Fine Arts in Washington. The Commission approved the selection of Schuler and Beecher even though a competition had not been held. The Commission also tentatively approved the plan for the memorial and suggested that it be constructed in the south end of Meridian Hill Park. The design progressed gradually, "in close cooperation with" the Commission of Fine Arts. Herbert Adams, eminent sculptor in New York City, visited Schuler's Baltimore studio, examined the models from time to time, and gave the younger sculptor the benefit of his experience. (*American Magazine of Art*, January 1924, page 711).

From correspondence in the records of the Commission of Fine Arts in the National Archives it seems that the Buchanan Memorial was first proposed to Congress late in 1915 or early in 1916. The idea of a Buchanan Memorial in Washington was formalized by the introduction of Senate Joint Resolution 93 of the First Session of the 64th Congress. The resolution was dated January 31, 1916, and was introduced into the Senate by Blair Lee, a Democrat from Mary-

land. The resolution specified that the memorial should be located "in the southern portion of Meridian Hill Park, between Fifteenth, Sixteenth, W, and Euclid Streets, Northwest."

Meanwhile, House Joint Resolution 145 was introduced into the House of Representatives on February 8, 1916. Each of the two bills was reported favorably by the Committee on the Library of its House, as shown in Senate Report 166, 64th Congress, 1st Session and House Report 395, 64th Congress, 1st Session. Then House Joint Resolution 145 passed the House automatically and was placed on the Senate Calendar but remained dormant until the next Congress when reintroduced as Senate Joint Resolution 49 and House Joint Resolution 70. They were reported favorably in Senate Reports 205 and 318, 65th Congress, 2nd Session, and House Report 38, 65th Congress, 1st Session.

In the 64th Congress the resolution was modified by deleting the portion that specified the site for the memorial. Some Congressmen had misgivings because of this deletion. Might not a most undesirable site finally be assigned after the matter would be beyond the reach of Congress? Representative J. Charles Linthicum, a Democrat from Maryland, wrote to Colonel William W. Harts, Secretary of the Commission of Fine Arts. In the letter of May 6, 1916, Linthicum asked for details about the Commission's arrangements for the Buchanan Memorial. A portion of the immediate reply of Colonel Harts, dated May 8, to the Congressman, is as follows.

Mr. Lawrason Riggs of Baltimore, executor under the will of Harriet Lane Johnston, informed the Commission several years ago that his testatrix had set aside the sum of \$100,000 for a monument to President Buchanan in the city of Washington [for the monument in Washington and for the other monument in Pennsylvania]. He was much pleased with a possible location in the lower end of Meridian Hill park which had been suggested to him, and the Commission advised him that they saw no objection to this site for a monument of appropriate design provided Congress is willing to consent to its use for that purpose. As a preliminary to approaching Congress for permission to erect such a monument in that location, Mr. Riggs has conferred with the Commission numbers of times concerning plans and studies for the monument in that location; these have developed to such a point that the Commission feel that the memorial will be an ornament to the city of Washington. The designs were developed primarily to show the committees of Congress to whom the bill would be referred the form the memorial would take if erected at that location. The question of placing the site available for the purpose was then up to Congress.

On August 5, 1916, Senator Lee asked unanimous consent to take up the Senate Joint Resolution and moved that House Joint Resolution 145, also authorizing erection of a statue of Buchanan on public grounds in Washington, D. C., be substituted for the Senate Joint Resolution, and that the House resolution be passed. Senator George T. Oliver, Republican, of Pennsylvania objected to consideration of the resolution. No action was taken.

The Joint Resolution authorizing the erection of the Buchanan Memorial on public grounds in the District of Columbia that had

been passed by the House of Representatives had been buried in the Senate for months. Senator John Walter Smith, Democrat, from Maryland insisted upon bringing the Joint Resolution to a vote. Now the race narrowed to House Joint Resolution 70. In lengthy but not very able speeches in the Senate on June 14 and 17, 1918, Henry Cabot Lodge was caustic and persistent in opposing the Resolution. He attempted to make the point again and again that Buchanan was disloyal as President.

On June 14, Flag Day, Smith defended Buchanan eloquently in the Senate and recommended that the erection of the memorial on public grounds be authorized. Smith pointed to the tremendous problems which faced Buchanan and called Buchanan's virtues to the attention of the Senate. Smith commented as follows.

Buchanan was confronted with enormous difficulties when President. Mexico then, as recently, was a source of deepest concern; likewise Cuba. Every indication pointed to a disruption of the country, to a civil war, that any President must have strained every nerve and energy, compromised in any honorable way, to avoid. Imagine the responsibility! Imagine anyone, whatever his ability, postponing indefinitely, much less averting entirely, that strife! Omnipotent power, omniscient skill alone could have warded off the Civil War. Of course Buchanan made mistakes. Anyone would. Of course he failed. Anyone would. Of course he displeased and disappointed many people, many powerful factions. Anyone would. Of course he was subjected to vile, harsh abuse. So was Washington, and so, indeed, was every President.

But none can say he did not act in good conscience, from pure motives, and in accord with the moral standard, the idea of law and rights that then obtained among the majority of the American Nation.

He did that which his conception of his oath, the law, and his duty required of him always.

Mr. Buchanan was not the greatest of our Presidents, nor yet the least. In patriotism, in moral character, and intellect he measured above the average by far. His perplexities were terrible. We are not just if we censure him for failing where no finite genius could succeed, as we now well know. . . .

Slavery, secession—both dead! Why not let the discussion of the painful memories, the dark history of their period, die? . . .

Then Senator Smith was soon speaking of Harriet Lane Johnston.

Mrs. Johnston, his [Buchanan's] niece, a philanthropist, who has endowed a great hospital in Baltimore for the treatment of little, suffering children and also helpful in other charities, honored and respected Buchanan. Her philanthropies, however, were not in Baltimore alone. She did many other philanthropic acts, among which is included the presentation to the Smithsonian Institution of her large and magnificent collection of paintings to form a nucleus of a national art gallery. She was the hostess and mistress of the White House during his administration. No man who was unworthy could have held until death the love and respect of a woman of such culture and intellectuality. Why deny to her the opportunity to pay this last service affection bade her pay to the memory of her beloved uncle?

Few men in America have done what Buchanan did for his country. From 1814 until 1861 he was in public life. He served in the Legislature of Pennsylvania in 1814. For 10 years he was a Representative in Congress, and in 1832 he was appointed an envoy to Russia

by President Jackson, and rendered signal service in negotiating a commercial treaty with that country. He sat for three terms in this Senate, and declined the Attorney Generalship of the United States, offered him by President Van Buren. He served with success and distinction as Secretary of State under President Polk, and was appointed our minister to England by President Pierce. His was a long, honorable, and most useful career. Never in his long political life did the breath of scandal touch him. Only for his openly held and courageously expressed political views was he assailed. (Page 7787, *Congressional Record*, June 14, 1918).

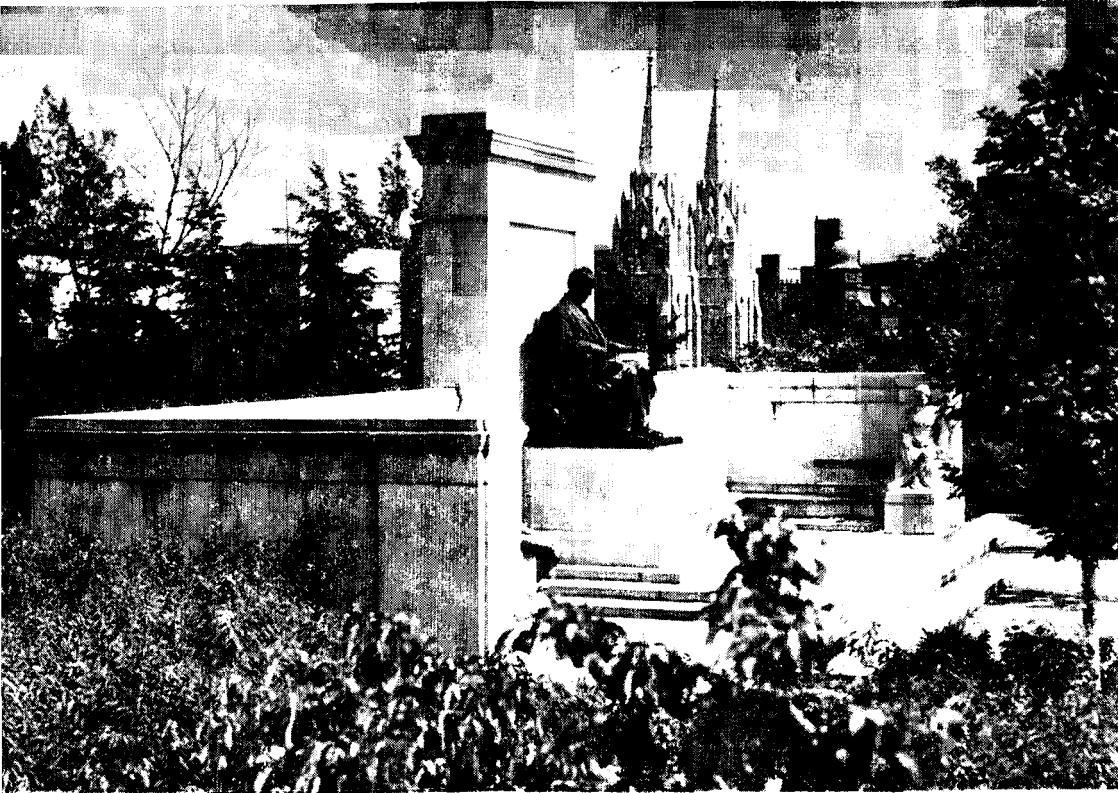
Senator John Walter Smith was a veteran politician. He had been Governor of Maryland 1900-1904 and had been a member of the United States Senate since March 25, 1908. At least in this instance he was a match for the powerful Republican Senator from Massachusetts. The vote in the Senate on the Joint Resolution was fifty-one yeas and eleven nays. After much lethargy on the matter on Capital Hill the Resolution was approved on June 27, 1918, in the hectic days of World War I, and thus met Mrs. Johnston's fifteen-year deadline by six days. It authorized and directed the Chief of Engineers, United States Army, to grant permission to Mrs. Johnston's trustees to erect a memorial to Buchanan on public grounds in the southern part of Meridian Hill Park, between Fifteenth, Sixteenth, W, and Euclid Streets, Northwest. However, the design and location and the plan "for the treatment of the grounds connected with its site" were to be approved by the Commission of Fine Arts. Furthermore, the United States was not to pay any of the cost of the memorial or its erection. (Volume 40, Part 1, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 632).

The Buchanan statue was erected at Sixteenth and Euclid Streets in the south end of Meridian Hill Park. That park was an excellent location for the memorial. The generous amount of land made available for the memorial was developed into an attractive spot, with the statue in the midst of a charming combination of simplicity and elegance.

Meridian Hill Park, itself, is a place of much interest, being the only public park in Washington designed in the formal European tradition. After Congress authorized the purchase of its twelve acres, in 1910, an architect, George Burnap, and a young man who became a widely-known architect, Horace W. Peaslee, were appointed architects for the new park. It was named Meridian Hill Park because of being on sloping ground that included the meridian of Washington.

Burnap and Peaslee went to Italy and France in 1914 to study parks and formal gardens. Then they drew the plans for Meridian Hill Park. The upper part is patterned after French parks. The slope and lower part reflects Italian planning. Both men were captivated by a park in Switzerland and incorporated into their creation some of its details. The staircase fountain on the slope of Meridian Hill Park has thirteen basins much like the fountain of the Villa Collona near Rome. Burnap and Peaslee would make this park a place of unique beauty in the Nation's Capital.

An entry for February 8 in the "Chronicler's Report for 1915,"



### THE BUCHANAN MEMORIAL IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

This view shows the stone panel and one of the carved figures. Approached by a mall surrounded by ornamental planting, the Memorial is a beauty spot in the Nation's Capital.—Photograph courtesy National Park Service.

published in the *Records* of the Columbia Historical Society states: "Work commenced on Meridian Hill Park. It is contemplated to erect a memorial to President James Buchanan in the park with the \$100,000 bequeathed by Mrs. Harriet Lane Johnson [Johnston] for that purpose." (Page 222, volume 19).

World War I brought delays. Even in the 1920's the development of Meridian Hill Park proceeded only slowly, while the architect and the sculptor of the Buchanan Memorial were developing the south end of the park. One statue had been placed in Meridian Hill Park before World War I, "Serenity," and two others in the 1920's, "Dante" and "Joan of Arc." Five years after the Buchanan Memorial was completed a finely sculptured large armillary sphere, serving as an unusually accurate sundial, was installed in the park.

## The Sculptor and His Work

Mrs. Johnston's memorial in Washington to the Fifteenth President was designed by Hans Schuler, noted sculptor, and William Gordon Beecher, architect. Both were from Baltimore, Maryland. It is possible that Mrs. Johnston knew Schuler, or knew of him. He was twenty-nine at time of her death, and, in 1894, nine years before her death, had been graduated from the Maryland Institute, School of Art and Design, in Baltimore. In 1898 he was graduated from the Rinehart School of Sculpture in Baltimore. Schuler developed the Buchanan Memorial during the years 1912-1930, while carrying on other significant art projects.

From Colonel William W. Harts' letter of May 8, 1916, to Congressman J. Charles Linthicum, it seems that Hans Schuler and William Gordon Beecher had been selected as sculptor and architect to develop the memorial before General Riggs approached the Commission of Fine Arts. Probably at no point did the Commission enter the matter of selecting those who would produce the memorial. The Commission would wait and pass judgment on the final design, since the work was financed privately.

There were various delays. General Riggs did not push the work to a speedy completion, apparently being more interested in the production of a truly fine memorial, regardless of length of time this might require. In this instance, like St. Gaudens, Schuler created a full-size model of the monument. This he did in a stoneyard in Baltimore. Thus the monument could be studied from the viewpoint of its ultimate appearance to the visitor.

The memorial grounds, from sidewalk to the ornamental planting which forms a backdrop for the statue and the carved stone surrounding it, are 111 feet long and 52 feet wide, a rather large tract in one of the most expensive land areas of the city.

The statue rests on a pedestal in front of a spacious stone panel eighty-two feet long with two seated carved symbolic figures, representing the law and diplomacy respectively; appropriate, indeed for Buchanan. The profile figures are each 9 feet six inches high. The lines of the architect's design are severely simple. The memorial area has its own mall, flanked on both sides by artistic planting.

A plaster model for the bronze statue and the carvings in stone is exhibited at Wheatland. The model is approximately thirty inches high.

Schuler had already become a distinguished sculptor before he started work on the Buchanan Memorial, which, upon completion, represented his mature style. Born in Morange, Lorraine, Germany in 1874 he was brought to the United States in 1880. After 1898 he was back in Europe, being graduated from Julian Academy in Paris, with all honors, in 1900. In 1901 his "Ariadne" won a gold medal





**FOCAL POINT OF THE BUCHANAN MEMORIAL  
IN WASHINGTON, D. C.**

**This bronze statue by Hans Shuler, nine and a half feet high, looks out on a mall that is flanked by delightful landscaping.—Photograph courtesy National Park Service.**

at the Paris Salon. It is in Walter's Art Gallery in Baltimore. Schuler's "Paradise Lost" won an envied place in the Salon of 1903 and his "Aphrodite" was executed in 1904. During his long career he won seven awards, including a silver medal at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, in 1904. He produced numerous important works, including "Memory" (1904), "Life is But the Turning of a Leaf" (1908), and numerous other tomb figures; portrait statues of Samuel Smith, Pinkney White and other persons; and portrait busts of Walter Reed and Dr. William Osler. After completing the Buchanan Memorial Schuler executed the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," now in Walter's Gallery, a statue of "Freedom of Conscience," at St. Mary's City, Maryland, a monument to Johns Hopkins, a heroic statue of Martin Luther, in Baltimore, and many other significant sculptures.

Schuler was a remarkable person and a versatile artist. He was widely recognized because of the cumulative effect of his teaching, his artistic skill, and his high professional standards. He gave of his time freely for civic ceremonies and celebrations. He lived until 1951, long enough to note the continued enthusiastic response to the Buchanan Memorial and other works which he produced.

No doubt it was mainly because of geography that Mrs. Johnston's surviving monument trustee selected a sculptor who in a sense was associated with the man who carved the likenesses of Mrs. Johnston, her husband, and their youngest son. Hans Schuler held a Rinehart scholarship in Paris 1900-1905. The Johnstons, Rinehart, General Riggs, and Schuler were all intimately connected with Baltimore.

### The Architect

As to the architect of the Buchanan Memorial, William Gordon Beecher, little is known about his life and work. He was a member of the American Institute of Architects from about 1921 to 1934. In *Century of Baltimore Architecture* by Wilbur H. Hunter, Jr., and Charles H. Elam, published by The Peale Museum, 1957, there is a reference to the fact that Beecher, Friz and Gregg designed a Kelly Buick garage in Baltimore in 1906 at Charles and Mount Royal Street.

William Sener Rusk tells us that Beecher worked closely with Schuler and two other sculptors, Miller and Berge, for some years. In 1924 Rusk said that Beecher's designs for severely simple die-blocks and pedestals form the background for all but a few of the bronzes of mayors, generals, and educators that came from the studios of these three sculptors. He also said that Beecher rescued the fine Tudor Franklin Street Church in Baltimore with restraint and simplicity. (*American Magazine of Art*, January 1924, page 714).

## Unveiling Ceremonies in 1930

At long last, on June 26, 1930, the Buchanan Monument in Washington was unveiled and presented to the United States. An attractive four-page printed program was available for the occasion. Major General U. S. Grant, 3rd, then a Lieutenant Colonel, and Director, Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, presented the Chairman of the Day, Mr. Lawrason Riggs, the surviving trustee of the James Buchanan Monument Fund.

The monument was unveiled by Mrs. Francis H. Denny of Blue Ridge Summit, Pennsylvania, who, as Miss Mary Clark Speer, had been one of Mrs. Johnston's companions during the First Lady's last ten years. Honorable Roland S. Morris of Philadelphia, who had been United States Ambassador to Japan 1917-1921, acted for Governor John S. Fisher of Pennsylvania, and made the presentation. President Herbert C. Hoover accepted the monument in the name of the United States and made a brief address. Wreath and testimonials were then presented. Music was furnished by Pietro Gentile of Los Angeles, and by the United States Marine Band and by the Lancaster Newsie Cadets Band.

The Washington, D. C., *Post* for June 27, 1930, carried a headline, "Hoover, At Statue, Praises Buchanan As Public Servant," and a three-column picture of soldiers at the Buchanan Memorial. Several weeks later the Paris edition of the New York *Herald* carried a headline "Statue of James Buchanan Is Dedicated in Washington," and a three-column picture of people at the Memorial.

An article by William A. Millen in the *Sunday Star*, Washington, D. C., July 13, 1930, was entitled "Monument to America's First Bachelor President." The article closed with these words:

The Washington of tomorrow will gaze with wonder upon this monument, the work of the sculptor Hans Schuler, and the architect William Gordon Beecher. In the east end of the lower garden the great bronze statue of Buchanan will sit, listening, as it were, to the tumbling of the water down the cascade into the pleasant pool, below—but in reality, perhaps, thinking of Clay, of Calhoun, of Webster and of Fort Sumpter and Appomattox, but, above all, of a golden-haired lass of the 'sixties—Harriet Lane.

Through the intelligent and devoted service of General Lawrason Riggs, Mrs. Johnston provided the Nation's Capital with one of the finest and most loved memorials yet erected. It is truly a beauty spot in a beautiful city, an act of graciousness from one great American to another.

Thanks to Mrs. Johnston, tens of thousands of people have had an enjoyable visit in the Buchanan Memorial area of Meridan Hill Park in Washington since June 26, 1930. Also, because of her, a countless number of Americans and foreign visitors have been inspired by the Buchanan Birthplace Monument and Park in Pennsylvania.



**THE JAMES BUCHANAN BIRTHPLACE SITE AS IT  
LOOKED IN 1908**

Another picture of the monument, surrounded by snow, as it looked at about time of completion, probably in the winter of 1907-1908. The iron fence specified by Mrs. Johnston in her will had not yet been placed around the monument. The picture was photographed by Mrs. J. C. Etter, Lemasters, Pennsylvania.—Photograph courtesy of Mr. Eugene Etter, son of Mrs. J. C. Etter.