

Autumn 1970

VOL. XXXVIII No. 4



The PROCEEDINGS of the  
VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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Was he born in Fairfield, Vermont? Or in Canada—and therefore not eligible to be President of the United States? Why did he change his birth date?

## The Mystery of Chester Alan Arthur's Birthplace

By THOMAS C. REEVES

CHESTER ALAN ARTHUR, who served as this nation's Chief Executive from September 20, 1881 to March 4, 1885, is our most obscure President. In large part this was by design, for Arthur, a clever and at times unscrupulous machine politician, ordered the great bulk of his private papers burned the day before his death, and sent his son to oversee their destruction.<sup>1</sup> A single biography, published in 1934, a monograph on the foreign policy of Garfield and Arthur, and a mere handful of scholarly articles are all students have, beyond the primary sources, to investigate what was, in fact, a fascinating and important political career.

1. Interview with Chester A. Arthur III, July 26, 1969. Mr. Arthur is the 69-year-old grandson of the President. Mr. Charles Pinkerton of Mt. Kisco, New York, the 99-year-old son-in-law of President Arthur, told the author in an interview of June 6, 1970 that shortly after the turn of the century he talked with an officer of the New York Customhouse who had destroyed a quantity of Arthur papers in 1886 at the personal request of the dying President. See also Arthur H. Masten to Elihu Root, November 21, 1912, Chester A. Arthur papers, Library of Congress.

Arthur was unknown to most Americans upon receiving the Republican Vice Presidential nomination in June, 1880, and it was widely understood at the time that the nomination was a pawn to the Grant-Conkling wing of the party and had little or nothing to do with whatever strengths of mind or character Arthur may have possessed.<sup>2</sup> Arthur had been a New York party leader for a dozen years but had deliberately shunned publicity and newspapermen. The public got its first real glimpse of Arthur's background in a campaign polemic by General James S. Brisbin, a lively volume published shortly after the Garfield-Arthur nominations. Within a 23-page sketch of Arthur's life it was noted that he had been born at Fairfield, Franklin County, Vermont, October 5th, 1830.<sup>3</sup> Shortly, during the summer and fall of 1880, rumors spread of evidence that Arthur had been born in a foreign country (first it was Ireland, then Canada), was not a natural-born citizen of the United States, and was thus, by the Constitution, ineligible for the Vice Presidency. Much attention was paid to these stories after Garfield's assassination, an act which the assassin said publicly was designed to put Arthur into the White House.

The story of an Irish birthplace was clearly false and was not pursued by investigators, but Arthur's alleged Canadian origin attracted a concentrated inquiry. *The Sun*, a leading New York newspaper long associated with the Democratic Party, conducted an investigation in the summer of 1881, while Garfield lay mortally wounded, and concluded that the rumors were unfounded.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Samuel Tilden the scholarly leader of the Democrats in 1876, said, in April, 1882, that he was convinced by the evidence that Arthur had been born in Canada and was illegally occupying the Presidency.<sup>5</sup> A New York attorney named Arthur P. Hinman published a book in early 1884 entitled *How a British Subject Became President of the United States*.

After Arthur's failure to obtain the Presidential nomination in 1884 and his death in 1886 the matter fell from discussion and temporarily disappeared. George F. Howe (a native Vermonter) simply dismissed

2. See Herbert J. Clancy, S. J., *The Presidential Election of 1880*, Chicago, 1958, pp. 117-119.

3. General James S. Brisbin, *From The Tow-Path To The White House The Early Life And Public Career Of James A. Garfield . . . Including Also A Sketch Of The Life Of Hon. Chester A. Arthur*, Philadelphia, 1880, p. 538. Arthur's middle name was erroneously spelled "Allan," and several additional errors call into question the official nature of the book.

4. "Gen. Arthur's Birthplace," *The Sun*, September 21, 1881. See also "Gath," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 5, 1881. On the rumors of an Irish birthplace see "The Week," *The Nation*, XXXI (August 19, 1880), 123.

5. "Gath," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 8, 1882.

Hinman's book as myth in his 1934 biography of Arthur.<sup>6</sup> But the issue of Arthur's birthplace was revived in the *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society* in 1940 and 1941. First, a Mrs. Mary C. Westcot of Burlington, Vermont claimed that, on the basis of stories told by her great-aunt, Chester Arthur had been born in Waterville, not Fairfield, Vermont.<sup>7</sup> Then John Spargo of Bennington, Vermont used Mrs. Westcot's claim to support Hinman's book, and declared, "It is fairly well-known by students that in 1880, when Arthur was nominated for the vice-presidency, his friends worked desperately to hush up the charge that he was born across the line, in Canada."<sup>8</sup> Gilbert H. Doane, a native of Fairfield, Vermont, and Director of the Library at the University of Wisconsin, then published a scholarly but rather superficial analysis of the evidence surrounding the entire question, and concluded that Arthur had indeed been born in Fairfield, October 5, 1830.<sup>9</sup>

A new dimension was raised in 1948 when an historian preparing an article on Chester Arthur at Union College discovered that Arthur could not have been born in 1830 and have entered Union in 1845 at the age of 16, as the records say he did. "It is perplexing," he concluded.<sup>10</sup>

The following year, Chester A. Arthur III deposited the Arthur family Bible in the New York Public Library, a volume that shows conclusively that Chester Alan Arthur was born on October 5, 1829. The conclusion seems inescapable: from at least 1880 until his death Arthur lied about his age—and the false year of birth is even on his tomb. This raises the question of motive—and resurrects the long-forgotten rumors of Arthur's Canadian birth.

The historian studying the evidence today is first struck by three interesting facts. The town records of Fairfield, Vermont include no references to any of the Arthurs.<sup>11</sup> It was the unanimous opinion of those who remembered the birth of William Arthur's first son that the child was *not* named Chester Alan Arthur. Moreover, documents which

6. George F. Howe, *Chester A. Arthur A Quarter-Century of Machine Politics*, New York, 1934, pp. 5-6.

7. "Postscript," *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society*, VIII (March, 1940), 314-317. See also Mary C. Wilbur Westcot, *Log Cabin Days of Coit's Gore and Waterville*, Essex Jct., Vermont, n.d., pp. 22-26; and G. H. McFarland to Charles Moore, February 1, 1926, Chester A. Arthur papers, Library of Congress.

8. *Proceedings of the Vermont Historical Society*, VIII (December, 1940), 378-381.

9. Gilbert H. Doane, "The Birthplace Of Chester A. Arthur," *Ibid.*, IX (March, 1941), 3-13.

10. Frederick Lidell Bronner, "Chester A. Arthur His College Years," in *Chester Alan Arthur Class Of 1848*, Schenectady, New York, 1948, pp. 6-7.

11. See the card files at the Division of Vital Statistics in the Office of the Vermont Secretary of State. The author thanks Mrs. Virginia Howard of the Division for her assistance.

might tell us more about Arthur's age and birthplace—marriage records at the Calvary Church in New York and Arthur's military records—are curiously missing.

If the historian's primary task is the discovery of accurate history, it would seem appropriate to reexamine our 21st President. And no more likely place to begin with is his birth.

From surviving documents, including the Arthur family Bible, obituaries, and testimony given to investigators during the 1880's, it is now possible to reconstruct much of the history of William Arthur and his family from 1819 through 1834. The movements of the Arthurs throughout this period should be examined carefully before weighing the claims of the birth of an Arthur son in Canada.<sup>12</sup>

William Arthur was born December 5, 1796 near Ballymena in County Antrim in Northern Ireland. He graduated from Belfast College at the age of eighteen and emigrated to Quebec about 1819. He lived in East Stanbridge briefly and moved to Dunham, where he taught school and where, on April 12, 1821, he married 18-year-old Malvina Stone, the daughter of a Methodist clergyman.<sup>13</sup> Their first child, Regina Malvina, was born at Dunham on March 8, 1822.<sup>14</sup> By March 14, 1824, when their next child, Jane, was born, the Arthurs were in Burlington, Vermont, where William taught school and studied law.<sup>15</sup> They then moved to Jericho, Vermont, where the third daughter, Almeda Malvina, was born on December 22, 1825.<sup>16</sup> From there, in 1827, the Arthurs moved to Waterville, Vermont. The fourth Arthur daughter, Ann Eliza, was born there on January 1, 1828.<sup>17</sup>

By 1827 Arthur had become a Free-Will Baptist, and was licensed to preach for that sect.<sup>18</sup> He underwent a formal clerical examination by the regular Baptists in late April of 1828, and became a full-time Baptist preacher and missionary within that denomination.<sup>19</sup> Until his death in 1875, however, Elder Arthur, as he was called, was forced to supplement his clerical salary by teaching school. Students were often

12. The Arthur genealogy by Doane, see f. 9 above, has four errors and omits the month and day of the younger Malvina Arthur's birth.

13. See the Arthur family Bible; *The Sun*, September 21, 1881; A. P. Hinman, *How a British Subject Became President of the United States*, New York, 1884, pp. 40-42.

14. Arthur family Bible; Hinman, pp. 6-7, 40-43.

15. Arthur family Bible; *The Livingston Republican* [Geneseo, N.Y.], November 4, 1875; letter of April 25, 1826 by M. Chittenden, Charles Pinkerton papers [in the author's possession].

16. Arthur family Bible. Cf. Hinman, p. 9.

17. Arthur family Bible.

18. Certificate of November 8, 1827, signed by the clerk of the Baptist church of Waterville, Vermont, Charles Pinkerton papers; Hinman, p. 70.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 45; *The Sun*, September 21, 1881.

lodged in the Arthur home, and decades later several of them would be interviewed to secure facts about the first Arthur son.

In May, 1828 the Arthurs moved from Waterville to Fairfield, Vermont, where they would remain for four years. In May, 1830 Arthur became pastor of the new Baptist church in North Fairfield, and in October of that year traveled with his eldest daughter to East Stanbridge, in Canada, hoping to start a new school and commute to Fairfield on Sundays to preach. It appears that he traveled regularly between the two villages, both of which were close to the Canadian border, for about eighteen months, holding two jobs.<sup>20</sup> There was good reason for his activity, for a sixth child, the fifth daughter, was born in Fairfield on April 5, 1832, and she was named Malvina, after her mother.<sup>21</sup>

In 1832 the Arthurs moved to Williston, Vermont and in early 1833 they were in Hinesburg, Vermont. The second son, and seventh child, William Jr., was born there on May 28, 1834.<sup>22</sup> From this point the Arthurs traveled southward into New York State, and Elder Arthur served small churches in Perry, York, Greenwich, Schenectady, Albany, and Newtonville. Two more children were born, George in 1836 and Mary in 1841, while George died in 1838 and Jane in 1842.<sup>23</sup>

What has not been recognized to date is that there were two versions of the story that Chester Arthur was born in Canada. Each spread at approximately the same time and relied, in part, upon similar evidence. But their differences are more important than their parallels.

The first version was encountered by the unnamed yet highly capable reporter who was sent by *The Sun* to Vermont and Canada in 1881. He discovered the following rumor. The boy born to Malvina Arthur in Fairfield in 1830 was named Chester Abell Arthur. He died in Burlington, Vermont and his "body was given by the father to physicians to be dissected for scientific purposes." Then William Arthur went to East Stanbridge for a period of eighteen months, while Malvina and the children stayed with her parents, the Stones, at Meggs's Corners, in Canada. While Malvina was lodged in the Stone residence "she gave birth to the boy who is now President of the United States." In short, a second Arthur son assumed the identity of a first—at some unknown time and for some unknown reason.

The reporter interviewed a number of elderly citizens of northern

20. *Ibid.*, Hinman, pp. 45, 49, 58-59; Rev. Henry Crocker, *History Of The Baptists In Vermont*, Bellows Falls, Vermont, 1913, pp. 348, 371, 388.

21. Arthur family Bible. Cf. Hinman, pp. 13-14.

22. Arthur family Bible; Hinman, pp. 78-79; Crocker, *History Of The Baptists In Vermont*, p. 390.

23. Arthur family Bible.

Vermont and southern Canada to trace and verify the story. He augmented the verbal accounts with a study of church records and an account book belonging to the son of an Arthur neighbor in Fairfield. Five of the ten persons identified as being interviewed said that they were sure the boy born in Fairfield to the Arthurs had been named Chester Abell Arthur, rather than Chester Alan Arthur. (The other five apparently made no comment on the matter.) This number included Calvin Abell, the brother of the physician who delivered the boy at the Arthur parsonage. "Mrs. Arthur gave birth to a boy in North Fairfield. My brother attended her, and I remember the boy was named after him."

On the other hand, a prosperous physician named Chauncey Lee Case was interviewed and, to the reporter, appeared to destroy the tale of a Canadian birth, a story Case had obviously heard. Case's credentials were impeccable: he had been a member of William Arthur's Fairfield congregation, a student at his school in that village, a playmate of the Arthur children, and the nephew of the man who donated the lot on which the new Baptist parsonage in North Fairfield was built in 1830. While only eleven in 1830, Case knew the story of the Arthurs' move to Fairfield in detail. He remembered Regina's expressed desire to have a brother, and recalled how he first learned that the wish had been granted.

One day, early in October, my grandmother and mother were away all day, and were not home when it was time for me to go to bed. The next morning my mother told me that they had a little boy over at the Arthurs'. My grandmother came over from the Arthurs' soon afterwards, and said she had been dressing the boy. 'And think of it,' she said to my father in rather a reproachful voice, 'when I announced the boy to Elder Arthur he danced up and down the room.' Elder Arthur's dancing with delight was rather severely commented on by his flock. . . . The family remained in Fairfield until about 1832; at least until Chester was old enough to walk and talk, for I can remember perfectly well seeing him standing in the doorway, looking up at me with his large dark eyes.

Moreover, Dr. Case had visited with William Arthur several times between the latter's departure from Fairfield and his death in 1875, and the elderly clergyman had always expressed pride in his first son, often referring to him as the boy born in Fairfield when the Cases and the Arthurs were neighbors.

The reporter discovered that the only support for the story of a Canadian birth came from a 70-year-old resident of East Stanbridge, Lindal Corey, who said he "thought" that one Uncle Jack Baker had told him 52 years earlier that the Elder Arthur had sold the dead body

of a son to some doctors at Burlington. When the aged Mr. Baker was queried about this, he expressed his inability to recall having made such a statement. Moreover, Lindal Corey admitted having no personal knowledge of a child born to Mrs. Arthur in Canada. The reporter also found "several people" at Meggs's Corner who claimed that Malvina's parents had not moved into the area until after 1840. One J. H. Corey, perhaps a relative of Lindal Corey's, said that he remembered people talking about a boy being born to Mrs. Arthur at Meggs's Corners but knew nothing himself about the matter.

The reporter quite naturally found the story of Arthur's Canadian birth very unconvincing, and indeed in this form it was. The substantiating evidence was extremely superficial, and there were many unanswered questions. Where, for example, was the proof that a first son had died, or that a second son had been born, or that there had been a switch of identities, or that there could have been a motive for such a switch? And Dr. Case's testimony seemed to substantiate the account of the President's birth in the Republican campaign biographies fully.<sup>24</sup>

The story next appeared in print in Hinman's book—a fascinating and strangely overlooked contribution to the history of verbal political assassination. The volume has 90 pages and is divided into two parts. The first 37½ pages consist largely of Hinman's summary of the evidence supporting the book's thesis, and the remaining pages are filled with the evidence itself. In the summer of 1880 Hinman had professed to believe that Chester Arthur was born in Ireland. But by the winter of 1880 he was visiting Vermont and Canada conducting interviews and gathering evidence about the Canadian birth story. He shortly sent dozens of letters of inquiry in search of facts about the Arthurs. The replies and several of his requests were reprinted verbatim, along with several paraphrased responses, in the book. The author had no reservations about including evidence that sharply contradicted his thesis, apparently assuming that the sheer bulk of the documentation would convince most of his readers of the validity of his case. Hinman's effort was persistent and exhaustive; he uncovered more knowledge about the Arthur family prior to 1850 than has anyone else to this time. And much highly valuable information, such as that which came from Alvah Sabin, one of William Arthur's close friends and fellow clergymen, would surely have been lost to historians had it not been tapped by the New York attorney. In short, while Hinman's book is a very clever attempt to destroy a politician, when read by a careful historian it also sheds

24. *The Sun*, September 21, 1881.

much light on the early history of our least known President and his family.<sup>25</sup>

Hinman reveals himself only as an anti-Arthur Republican. He had an extraordinary knowledge of the darker side of Arthur's early dealings in politics, calling attention in the early pages of the book to Arthur's bargains with Boss Tweed and to his close friendship with the corrupt Tom Murphy. He also was not above an occasional libel, such as the charge that Arthur left the New York Custom House in 1878 with a personal fortune of \$3,000,000.<sup>26</sup> Of course, the main thrust of Hinman's effort was the story of Chester Arthur's alleged Canadian birth.

In this version of the tale Malvina Arthur's first son was born in mid-March, 1828, while she was visiting her parents in Dunham. The boy was named William Chester Alan Arthur. In November, 1830, Mrs. Arthur gave birth to a second son, this time in Fairfield, and he was named Chester Abell Arthur. This second son died in 1831 while he and his mother were visiting Burlington. In 1834, while the Arthurs were in Hinesburg, William Arthur, Jr. was born, and at this time and place the first son, born in Canada, dropped his first name and became simply Chester Alan Arthur. Years later, when nominated for the Vice Presidency, Arthur assumed the identity of the deceased Chester Abell Arthur to conceal his foreign birth.

The alterations in the story are prominent: now it is the first Arthur son who assumed the identity of the second, both sons now have names, and reference to the sale of a body in Burlington has been dropped.<sup>27</sup> The changes were probably made because of Hinman's rather sophisticated knowledge of the family and in response to the probe by *The Sun*. The author even takes a swipe at the credibility of Dr. Case by having a witness falsely claim that Case's mother was only 17 in 1830.<sup>28</sup> But the evidence upon which this version of the story lies, inserted amidst an abundance of valuable and useful correspondence, is as poor as that discovered by the reporter in 1881.

25. See Hinman, pp. 36-37, 48, 69-76. On Arthur and Sabin see *Proceedings Of The Fifth Annual Meeting Of The Baptist Convention Of The State Of Vermont . . . October 27 & 28, 1830*, Brandon, Vermont, 1830, *passim*; *Proceedings Of The Eighth Annual Meeting Of The Baptist Convention Of The State Of Vermont . . . October 17, 18, 19, & 21, 1833*, Brandon, Vermont, 1833, p. 4.

26. Hinman, pp. 24-25; "The Custom House Inquiry," *New York Times*, May 22, 1877; Doane, "The Birthplace of Chester A. Arthur," p. 4, f. 1.

27. Cf. Howe, *Chester A. Arthur*, pp. 5-6. Perhaps Hinman eliminated this part of the story as an overly crude way of accounting for a body. He chose only to report a rumor of William Arthur complaining a half century earlier "that he did not have money enough to bury the child." The source of the rumor was Uncle Jack Baker "and others." See Hinman, pp. 13, 62-63.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 12; Doane, "The Birthplace Of Chester A. Arthur," pp. 10-11.

The major source for the Canadian birth in Hinman's book was "a Mrs. Stevens," an 80-year-old resident of Dunham who claimed to have been a childhood friend of Malvina Arthur's. Mrs. Stevens recalled that as a neighbor of the Stones in Dunham in 1828 she took care of the infant son and helped name him. Her correspondence is paraphrased by Hinman rather than quoted.<sup>29</sup>

Another witness cited by Hinman as remembering the birth was L.I.H. Corey of Stanbridge. L.I.H. Corey was unquestionably Lindal Corey. His correspondence with Hinman reveals that he did not understand the most recent version of the Canadian birth story, and instead of supporting Hinman's thesis, argued for the death of the first Arthur son. Moreover, Lindal Corey denied knowing anything personally about a boy born to Mrs. Arthur in Canada when interviewed by the reporter from *The Sun*. He told Hinman that he was "a poor man," and openly attempted to acquire sums of money from the New York attorney to conduct investigations into the Arthur story.<sup>30</sup>

Hinman cited a third and last witness to the 1828 birth of William Chester Alan Arthur, a Mrs. Capt. John Chandler (spelled Chandlers at one point) of Stanbridge. Mrs. Chandler is not directly quoted, but her story, even when paraphrased, does not fit Hinman's thesis. She called the first son William Abell Chester Arthur, gave an incorrect version of Regina Arthur's full name, and claimed that the entire Arthur family lived in Dunham in 1830. Above all, Mrs. Chandler did not claim, as Hinman charged in the early pages of his book, to remember the birth of an Arthur boy in Dunham.<sup>31</sup>

A fourth correspondent, J.H. Corey, is quoted as being certain that C.A. Arthur was born in Canada and that a first son died in Burlington. This, of course, was not Hinman's assertion. Moreover, J.H. Corey's letter was forwarded to the New York attorney by Lindal Corey, who suspiciously apologized for the almost illegible handwriting. Of course, this same J.H. Corey told the reporter from *The Sun* that he had no knowledge about a boy born to the Arthurs in Canada.<sup>32</sup>

But what really shatters the theme of Hinman's book is the fact that he (and "Mrs. Stevens") overlooked the existence of Ann Eliza Arthur, who was born in Waterville, January 1, 1828—about two months prior to the alleged birth of William Chester Alan Arthur. This is an interesting mistake, for Hinman, in spite of all his painstaking

29. Hinman, pp. 8–10.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 62–66.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 58–59.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 58–63; *The Sun*, September 21, 1881.

research, seems never to have heard of Ann, an emotionally ill spinster who rarely appeared in stories about President Arthur. (Hinman made other sloppy errors: he referred to Gavin, rather than Alan, Arthur as William Arthur Sr.'s father; he overlooked William's education at Belfast College; and he said that Jane Arthur later became Mrs. "Marston" of Cohoes, when in fact it was Almeda Arthur who became Mrs. Masten of Cohoes.)<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, Hinman claimed that Chester Arthur, upon receiving the Vice Presidential nomination, was unable to name his birthplace, and secretly traveled to Montreal with a close friend to see if evidence existed of his Canadian birth. There is no documentation for this charge, and, in fact, the day after Arthur's nomination the *New York Times* cited his birthplace as "Franklin County, Vermont."<sup>34</sup> As early as 1871, when Arthur became Collector of the New York Customhouse, his birthplace was reported as Vermont.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, in the census of 1850, taken long before anyone could have guessed that Chester Arthur would be nominated for the Vice Presidency, his place of birth was listed as Vermont. And the family Bibles of William Arthur, Sr. and Chester Arthur, both of which antedate 1860, cite "Fairfield, Vermont" as Chester's birthplace.<sup>36</sup>

In summary, Arthur P. Hinman was a political hatchetman, who worked for almost four years to denigrate the reputation and hamper the political future of Chester Alan Arthur. As an attorney he may have been employed by others; the sale of his book surely did not cover all of the expenses incurred in his research. Hinman's original charge, that Arthur was born in Ireland, was made during the election of 1880 to hinder the Garfield-Arthur ticket. This plus the use of the story of the Canadian birthplace in 1882 by Samuel Tilden make it seem likely that if Hinman had employers they were Democrats.

Hinman capitalized upon rumors that began in mid-1880 when a number of elderly Vermonters recalled that the Chester A. Arthur born in Fairfield was "named after" the attending physician, which meant to them that his full name should have been Chester Abell Arthur. (As Hinman was doing research on this matter in the fall of 1880, one won-

33. Hinman, pp. 5, 8. One wonders too why Hinman failed to question Arthur's sisters. Even their refusal to respond might have been useful. In February, 1881, Arthur made a semi-humorous reference to the charge that he had been born in Canada. (Wayne MacVeagh later called it Arthur's "only recorded public speech.") See "Indiana's October Vote," *New York Times*, February 12, 1881.

34. "Gen. Chester A. Arthur," *New York Times*, June 9, 1880.

35. "The Custom House," *New York Evening Mail*, November 21, 1871.

36. "1850 Census of Hoosick in Rensselaer County, New York," roll 585, p. 354R, National Archives; Arthur family Bible.

ders how much he contributed to the spread of the rumors.) The close proximity to Canada of the villages Elder Arthur preached and taught in during the late 1820's and early 1830's added to the ingredients of a useful and hopefully believable story.

It is true that several Vermonters thought that Chester Arthur's middle name should have been Abell. But when the Arthurs left Fairfield in 1832, a half century earlier, their only son was under three years of age. His middle name could not have been used frequently, and there may well have been a misunderstanding. Dr. Chester Abell died in 1832, and he might have given the erroneous impression to his brother and others that the child inherited both of his names rather than simply the first, as Chester Arthur claimed.

The Arthur family chronology in William Arthur's handwriting says "Chester Alan Arthur." Chester used "Alan" as his middle name during college and in 1860; in 1864 he named his first son Chester Alan Arthur II.<sup>37</sup> And there is not a shred of sound evidence to support the contention that there were two Arthur boys before 1834, that one of them died, and that his identity was assumed by his brother.

Still, there remains the question why Chester Arthur sought to change the year of his birth from 1829 to 1830. It seems certain that he did, and this calls for further explanation.

There are three Arthur family genealogies extant. The first is in the hand of William Arthur, Sr., and appears to date from the mid-1820's when he became a Baptist (and ceased reporting the births of his children to civil authorities).<sup>38</sup> The second was written in large part by Chester Arthur, including the reference to himself, and seems to have originated in 1859, after his marriage.<sup>39</sup> The third is in the hand of Malvina Arthur Haynesworth, the fifth Arthur daughter, born in 1832. The last entry is 1869, the year in which Malvina wrote the second of her two diaries.<sup>40</sup> All three genealogies list the birth of Chester Alan Arthur as October 5, 1829.

37. *Ibid.*: Ruth Anne Evans [Assistant Librarian, Union College] to the author, November 7, 1969; the document from 1860 is a bank vault receipt made out to Chester Alan Arthur and is now in the author's possession.

38. This genealogy was part of an early 19th century Arthur family Bible, and was sent to Chester A. Arthur III approximately during the First World War by May McElroy, Mary Arthur McElroy's daughter. The current Mr. Arthur glued it into his grandfather's Bible shortly before depositing it in the New York Public Library. Interviews with Chester A. Arthur III, July 26, 1969, June 25, 1970. The last entry is dated 1855.

39. The volume was published in 1957. See Sam Henry, "The Ulster Background Of Chester Alan Arthur Twenty-First President Of The United States," in *Ulster-Irish Society Year Book, 1939*, Rutland, Vermont, 1939, pp. 35-47. Chester A. Arthur III inherited the Bible from his father in 1937.

40. This was discovered by the author on June 6, 1970 among the Charles Pinkerton papers.

The census of 1850 offers substantiating proof. (It was cited by Professor Doane to show Arthur's year of birth as 1830, but the research had been done by a second party, which led to confusion.) This count of the American people was completed "as of June 1, 1850." Chester Arthur's age was listed as 20. If born in 1829 he would have been 20; if born in 1830 he would have been 19.<sup>41</sup>

There is also a piece of correspondence quoted in Hinman's book in which one M. H. Bliss said that he boarded at the Arthur home in the winter of 1829 as a student. He remembered the male infant in the crib.<sup>42</sup>

The data from the Union College records is somewhat ambiguous but again point to 1829 rather than 1830. In September of 1845 Arthur claimed that he was 16, the minimum age for admission to the school. If born in 1829 he was only a month short of that age, and it seems more likely that the college would have waived one month than thirteen.<sup>43</sup>

The only cogent evidence we have for the 1830 birthplace, beyond Arthur's own public contention, is the statement by Dr. Chauncey Case to the reporter from *The Sun*. The physician, who had heard the rumor of Arthur's Canadian birth, was explicit about October, 1830 as the date of the birth in Fairfield. But in his letter to Hinman he said that he was a boy of ten when the child was born—which would have been 1829.<sup>44</sup> And in his first account of the Arthur birth, published in the Rutland [Vermont] *Herald* in June, 1880, Dr. Case noted only that Chester Arthur had been born in the log cabin parsonage in Fairfield, while the Arthurs awaited the construction of a new home. The new parsonage, according to the testimony Case later gave to the newspaper reporter, was completed in the summer of 1830.<sup>45</sup>

All that can be said with assuredness is that at some time between 1870 and 1880, possibly in 1880 after Mrs. Arthur's death, Chester Arthur changed the year of his birth for a personal reason which in no way could have affected his legal, military, or political careers.<sup>46</sup> Arthur reached his legal maturity in 1850, two years before casting his first Presidential ballot, four years before becoming an attorney, nine years before getting married, a decade before serving in the Civil War, and two decades before becoming prominent in politics.

The most obvious explanation for Arthur's attempt to appear one year

41. See f. 36 above; Doane, "The Birthplace Of Chester A. Arthur," pp. 6-8.

42. Hinman, p. 52.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 80-82.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51; Doane, "The Birthplace Of Chester A. Arthur," p. 10, f. 19.

45. Crocker, *History Of The Baptists In Vermont*, pp. 445-446; Hinman, p. 50; *The Sun*, September 21, 1881.

46. U.S. Census Reports, 1860, Roll 813, p. 891; 1870, Roll 1050, p. 404R; 1880, Roll 889, p. 625R.

younger is no doubt the correct one: simple vanity. Chester Arthur was one of the most vainglorious men of the Gilded Age. He was known to reserve a substantial part of every week for his tailor, and seldom wore a pair of trousers more than once. His bill for *hats* from February 13 through October 28, 1875 was \$123.25.<sup>47</sup> He was our most fastidious President, and even refused to move into the White House until its interior was thoroughly remodeled. The desire to be youthful is almost a basic drive of western man, and not a few otherwise respectable citizens, male and female, with and without birth certificates, have been known to lie a bit about their age.<sup>48</sup>

When fate suddenly catapulted Arthur to national fame in 1880 and made him President the following year the innocent change of birthdate assumed dynamic proportions. Should Hinman find out about the alteration he would surely have structured his charges to fit the discovery. And there was nothing Arthur wanted more to avoid after Garfield's assassination that a further contribution to the raging controversy over his qualifications for the Presidency.

While the reporter for *The Sun* was making inquiries into the Canadian birthplace story he was introduced to a "gentleman intimately acquainted with the President's life and family, and of so high political position that his reputation is more than national. . . . This Gentleman says he has seen in the Arthur family Bible and in William Arthur's handwriting this record: Chester Allan [sic] Arthur, born in Fairfield County, Vt. Oct. 5, 1830."<sup>49</sup> Only recently could it be known that the date in that statement was false.

Vermonters have long been proud of Calvin Coolidge, but have harbored doubts about the other native son who reached the white House. The signs directing tourists to the replica of the Arthur home in Fairfield express uncertainty about the history of the location, and as late as 1954, when the State dedicated that tiny house, one Vermont writer claimed that Arthur had been born in Canada and had therefore been an illegal President.<sup>50</sup>

In fact, the site commemorated by the State of Vermont in 1903 by the erection of a granite monument and, a half century later, by a

47. Statement from F. H. Amidon's Son to Gen. C. A. Arthur, September 1, 1875, Chester A. Arthur papers, Library of Congress.

48. The first wives of both Chester A. Arthur II and III made themselves slightly younger when placing their birthdates into the Arthur family Bible. Interview with Chester A. Arthur III, July 25, 1970.

49. *The Sun*, September 21, 1881.

50. Vrest Orton, "Journey to Vermont's Historic Sites: Chester A. Arthur's Birthplace," *Vermont Life*, XII (Winter, 1957-58), 47. Mrs. Westcot's story of Arthur's birth in Waterville was still in the air in 1954, but was handled well earlier by Doane in his "The Birthplace Of Chester A. Arthur," p. 9. One might add only that in 1940 Mrs. Westcot remembered her great-aunt as being "very odd."

replica of the house, marks the spot on which was built the new parsonage of 1830, and is not the precise location at which Malvina Arthur had her first son in 1829.<sup>51</sup> But it is clear, at last, that Chester Alan Arthur was a native of Fairfield, Vermont, the first son of the Green Mountain State to become President of the United States, and it is perhaps time that he be more readily acknowledged by Vermonters as one of their own.

51. [Charles S. Forbes], "President Chester A. Arthur," *The Vermonter*, VIII (August, 1902), 7-10. This account obviously leans heavily upon the recollections of Dr. Chauncey Case. For more on the monument of 1903 see [Charles S. Forbes], "Notable Features of Old Home Week," *Ibid.*, IX (September, 1903), 39-47; and Consuelo Northrop Bailey, "Our Horses and Chester A. Arthur," *Vermont Life*, XI (Summer, 1957), 10-11. For more on the replica dedicated in 1954, see Stan Beauregard, "State Opens Park At Arthur Home," *The Daily [St. Albans, Vermont] Messenger*, August 25, 1954.

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## General Stark's Horse was Stolen During The Battle of Bennington

*This Notice Is In The Manuscript Collection Of  
The Vermont Historical Society:*

*Twenty dollars reward*

Stole from the subscriber, from Wallumscoick in the time of action the 16th of August last, a brown Mare, five years old, had a star in her forehead. Also a doeskin seated saddle, blue houseing trimmed with white, and a curbed bridle. It is earnestly requested of all committees of Safety and others in authority, to exert themselves to recover said thief and mare, so that he may be brought to justice, and the mare brought to me; and the person, whoever he be, shall receive the above reward for both, and for the mare alone one half of that sum. How scandalous, how disgraceful and ignominious, must it appear to all friendly and generous souls, to have such sly, artful, designing, villains enter into the field in the time of action, in order to pillage, pilfer, and plunder from their brethren when engaged in battle!

John Stark B. DG

Bennington 11th Sep. 1777