



Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
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With the celebration of Presidents' Day this past week, I cannot help but be reminded of the 13th President Millard Fillmore; whose name our county and city share. While naming both after him was a political move, designed to earn statehood for Utah, not much is done to celebrate our area's namesake.

People in Buffalo, New York, observe his birthday. Reportedly people there gather at his gravesite on his birthday, January 7. It's difficult to find a cultural, civic or community organization in that area that Millard Fillmore was not involved in. He assisted in creating the charter that transformed Buffalo from a village into a city and helped establish the University of Buffalo, serving as the university's chancellor from 1846 until his death in 1874. As a congressman, Fillmore secured funds to enlarge the Buffalo Harbor and expand the Erie Canal.



Word also has it that there is a special Millard Fillmore Marching Band in Worcester, Massachusetts, as well as a Fillmore Memorial Orchestra.

Millard Fillmore remains somewhat of a forgotten President. Still he has a few claims to fame.

Millard Fillmore was the last President not to be affiliated with either the Republican or the Democratic parties. He also had no vice president.

Some historians give Millard Fillmore credit for postponing the Civil War for at least ten years.

President Fillmore was also the man who was responsible for the first postage stamp in the United States. Of course, with the price of stamps these days, that might not be looked on as a good idea on his part.

His biggest claim to fame: Fillmore put the first bathtub in the White House. Before he moved in Presidents would wash in portable tubs or in the Potomac. Installing the bathtub created quite a controversy. A lot of people thought it was an unnecessary expense and thought it of as a bad example to the rest of the country.

Millard became president because Zachary Taylor got overheated while watching the laying of the Washington Monument cornerstone, on July 4, 1850. He went back to the White House and tried to cool off with a pitcher of iced lemonade and a bowl of cherries. This evidently caused an attack of gastroenteritis, and he died at about 10:00 in the morning on July 9. He told his wife, "*I have always done my duty, I am ready to die. My only regret is for the friends I leave behind me.*"

One of those friends he left behind was his vice-president, Millard Fillmore. Fillmore had Taylor's body stored in Washington's Public Vault until October 22, when it was shipped back for burial in Louisville. Rumors spread that Fillmore may have had something to do with Taylor's untimely death. Pathologist George

Nichols put these rumors to rest on June 17, 1991, when he dug up Taylor's remains and performed a forensic autopsy, more than one hundred years after his burial.

Millard Fillmore was never a popular President. In fact, after this first term, his party didn't nominate him for a second.

I recently ran across a column by Dan Valentine, written in 1976.

Mr. Valentine said that Millard Fillmore is the only U.S. President whose former home is not a national monument. He told that he suggested to the townsfolk of Fillmore, Utah that they recreate Fillmore's home and make it a memorial. He said it would make a great tourist attraction.

Also in the column he told of State Representative Elgin Hokanson, a Democrat from Midvale, who suggested to the State legislature that the Utah State Capital be moved back to Fillmore. He made the logical argument that it once was the capital and should be again as it is centrally located.

Dan Valentine noted that he had no immediate opinion on the matter except to say that Fillmore was one of his favorite cities in Utah.

On the positive side, he did say that if the capital was moved to Fillmore Fillmore's birthday might become a state holiday. He also suggested that the land where the capitol building in Salt Lake now sits could be used for a condominium with a Dee's Hamburger stand on the east end of the grounds and a McDonald's on the west. And (quoting Dan Valentine), "the rotunda of the State Capitol could be made into a 7-Eleven Store. The potential is tremendous."