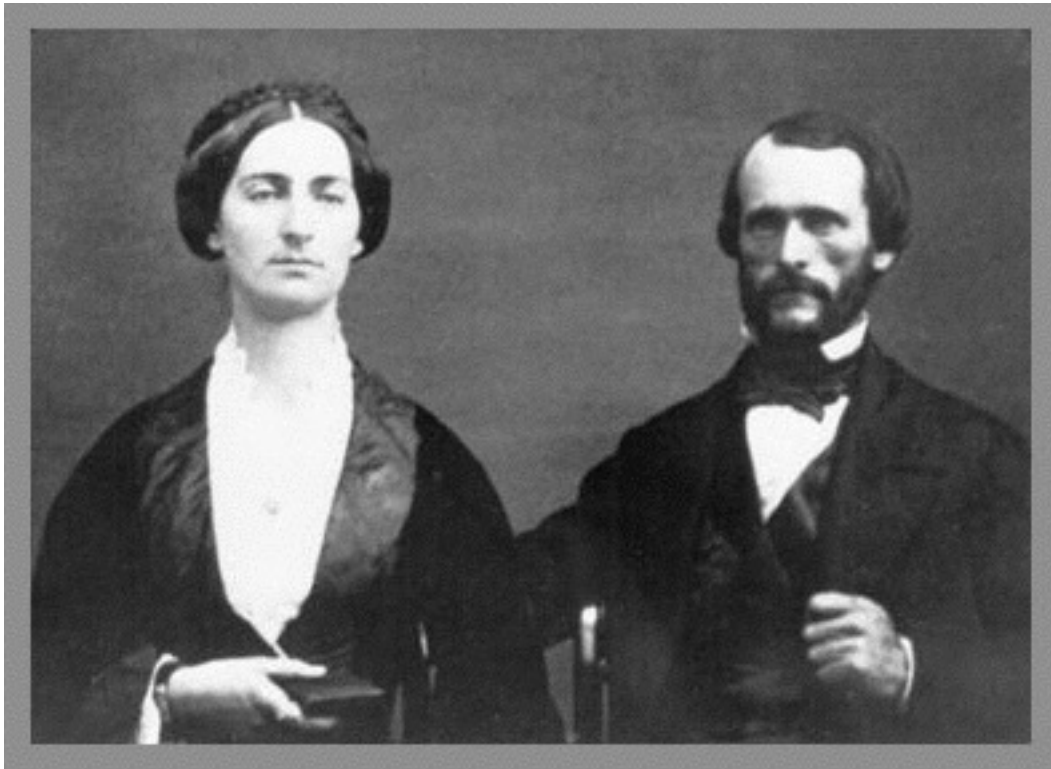


**WHY ARE GENERAL JOHN C. FREMONT AND HIS WIFE JESSIE
BURIED IN ROCKLAND CEMETERY?**



Michael Nevins

In a relatively obscure cemetery in the hamlet of Sparkill, N.Y., located on the peak of Mount Nebo far above Piermont, lie the remains of two of the most remarkable personalities of 19th century America, Major General John Charles Frémont (1813-1890) and his wife Jessie Benton Frémont (1824-1902.) But why are they there?

LORD'S CEMETERY

Rockland Cemetery was established in 1847 by Eleazar Lord (1787-1871): financier, church deacon, author and the first president of the New York and Erie Railroad. Lord had married Elizabeth Pierson, daughter of Ramapo industrialist Jeremiah H. Pierson, in 1824. After bearing nine children, she died of consumption (?and exhaustion) in 1835 and soon afterward Eleazar took a second wife and in 1836 the newlyweds moved to the small village on the Hudson then known as Taulman or Tappan Landing. Their stone mansion, known to locals as "The Castle," had a magnificent view of the Hudson River and beyond. Directly below was the bustling village that Lord named Piermont; the name being a conjunction of the mountain and the pier that he had built nearly a half mile out into the river so trains from the West could transfer produce and passengers to and from ships from lower Manhattan.

In addition to being a rail/water hub as the eastern terminus of the railroad, Lord's ambitious plans for the village included making it a final resting place for wealthy people whose remains could be transported to Piermont either by rail or ship. In 1847 when Eleazar established Rockland Cemetery just above his Castle, he hoped that it would become the largest cemetery in the country. The property included one of the highest points on the Palisades, rising more than 680- feet above the Hudson. This corresponded to the onset of a cultural phenomenon in mid-19th century America, sometimes referred to as the "rural cemetery movement. (Indeed, Nyack's Oak Hill Cemetery was incorporated in 1848.)

Eleazar Lord had begun purchasing parcels of land in Piermont as early as 1833, and on November 1, 1847 he sold 180 acres for \$7,500 on the summit and west and south slopes of Clausland Mountain (Mount Nebo) to the four Trustees of the

Rockland Cemetery Association. (Vice-President of the corporation was Dr. Willard Parker, a famous surgeon in New York City during the mid-19th century.) In May 1848 the cemetery's trustees "gratified with the great interest that has been awakened on the subject of their enterprise" prepared a circular in which they described their plans "to beautify and adorn their grounds in such a manner as to make the place in a very short time one of the most delightful and picturesque cemeteries in the world."

It must be remembered that the grounds are now in almost a wild and uncultivated state, and that a few thousand dollars expended there will open pleasant roads, turn the hills into beautiful plats, and create the most delightful place for the burial of the dead. It is therefore to the future that we point, in directing the attention of the public to this enterprise; and we believe that all who have visited the Rockland Cemetery must admit, that it possesses as much natural beauty as any other cemetery in our country. Indeed, its location and scenery are unequaled. But to compare it at present with beautiful Greenwood, Mount Auburn, Laurel Hill, or Mount Hope, upon each of which tens of thousands of dollars have been expended, would be like comparing an uncut diamond with a polished brilliant. The question must not be, "Does it shine now?" but it should be, "Has it an intrinsic value? Can it be made beautiful?"

The Trustees concluded, "What objection can there be now to going 23 miles to find a quiet, safe retreat, when within five years it may be reached in 30 minutes. And suppose, as now, it should take an hour and a half, at a cost of 25 cents to go to Piermont, what objection is that when compared with its advantages?" "Receiving tombs" would be provided in different sections of New York City for temporary deposits of remains until the weather, or the convenience of friends will permit a removal to the cemetery." Special travel arrangements with the Erie Railroad Company would charge a fare of 25 cents to Piermont, while opening, closing and sodding a grave for an adult (including the hearse) would be \$2.50, "considerably less than internments in any cemetery or vault in or about New York City." Moreover, some good lots would be set apart for those unable to pay

for them: "Affection is not peculiar to the wealthy, and the poor man may here become a freeholder, and be buried upon his own ground, with his family beside him." An elaborate opening ceremony was held, "a large concourse of people - about 1,500 of whom went up from this city" attended, and the enterprise was under way. But the grandiose plans never materialized.

Eleazar Lord was granted 500 certificates for cemetery lots, but in 1862 when the New York and Erie railroad rerouted south to New Jersey and the local economy began to fail, he started to sell off portions. (By 1867 140 deeds listed him as the seller.) In effect, Eleazar Lord became "land poor" and in order to protect his holdings from foreclosure, he turned over much of his property to his daughter Sarah and her husband William Henry Whiton (Appendix 1.)

Eleazar Lord spent the last 35 years of his life in Piermont (Appendix 2) but as the village gradually reverted to its former backwater status, his fortune dwindled during times of economic instability, natural disasters and labor riots. When Lord died on June 3, 1871 at age 83, an obituary in the *New York World* stated, "In his prime he was at once the elegant gentleman, the accomplished scholar, the upright businessman, the liberal giver, the successful projector of comprehensive schemes for the public good." After Eleazar Lord's death, the Whitons placed an ad "to let the Castle with the privilege of purchase" but since there were no takers, the Whitons moved in themselves and remained until they finally sold the property in 1890. Although Lord's family and other local notables would be buried in the cemetery, the grounds became dilapidated and sale of burial plots almost ceased.

In 1889 a new Rockland Cemetery Improvement Company was incorporated with Lord's son-in-law William Whiton serving as Secretary-Treasurer. Fifty thousand dollars was raised for internal improvements and an illustrated promotional booklet extolled "the superior advantages presented to those who desire beautiful resting places for their dead." It contained this description of the origin of Rockland Cemetery:

Many years since, it so happened that a regular rural burial-place was laid out by Act of the Legislature of New York on a beautiful mountain slope of forest-covered ground facing to the south and adjoining the Hudson River and the Sparkill, the latter coming down behind the Palisades, the place selected for such cemetery being twenty-four miles from New York City, and on the west side of the river.

But once again the Trustees ambitious plans bogged down as they became embroiled in controversy with an inefficient and dishonest general manager of the cemetery whose dismissal was followed by long and bitter litigation, and the Rockland Cemetery gradually settled back to obscurity. Before proceeding further, some background information about General John C. Frémont and his wife Jessica is in order.

THE PATHFINDER

John Charles Frémont was the illegitimate child of a Virginia aristocrat and a working-class French immigrant. He was a controversial figure whose life has been extensively chronicled. He made his name exploring the West and experienced a succession of public triumphs and humiliations. Historian Allan Nevins summarized Frémont's life as "one of the stormiest, the most erratic, and the most adventurous of American careers...abounding in almost melodramatic alterations of good and bad fortune." Jessie put it more simply but no less dramatically; when asked what was the outstanding facet of her husband's life, she replied, "From the ashes of his campfires have sprung cities."

Between 1842 and 1854 Frémont led five major expeditions to the American West exploring mountain passes and water routes to enable rail links. Guided by Kit Carson, he mapped the Oregon Trail, was among the first white men to see Lake Tahoe, described San Francisco's sea approach as "The Golden Gate" and made a fortune when gold was found on his ranch near Monterrey. In 1846 he was appointed Military Commandment of California during the war with Mexico which ended with California permanently in the possession of the United States. As Civil Governor of the territory he tended to be autocratic and arrogant and

after a dispute with other officers was relieved of his command and court-martialed for insubordination - after only three months on the job. Although reinstated by President Polk he resigned from the Army in 1848 and later served as United States Senator from California for six months in 1850-51.

Jessie Benton was the only daughter of the formidable Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri (the famous painter of the same name was a younger distant relative). He treated her like a son and she grew up in Washington DC, well educated, rebellious, vivacious, ambitious. She adored her father but also her dashing husband, eleven years older, whom she met when she was fifteen. Senator Benton had opposed the romance of his young daughter with the ill bred explorer-soldier but after they eloped and married, when she was only 17, at his ailing wife's insistence, he became reconciled to the match. Although their marriage endured for a half century, John was often away and there were rumors of his infidelities. However, she remained loyal - at least that was the public face she showed - and used her considerable writing talent to describe her husband's adventures and helped to formulate his ideas. Jessie's colorful reports of her husband's adventures in the Rocky and Sierra Mountains - including tales of starvation and possible cannibalism - captured the imagination of readers in the East and introduced them to new opportunities in the West - what came to be known as "Manifest Destiny."

THE ELECTION OF 1856

Although a political novice, Frémont was nominated as the new Republican Party's first presidential candidate. The election that year was hotly contested among three parties. The relatively moderate Democrats led by incumbent President James Buchanan were opposed by two new splinter groups. The Native American Party, popularly known as "The Know Nothings," who opposed immigration by Germans and Irish Catholics, nominated former President Millard Fillmore. The Republicans opposed slavery in new border states and selected Frémont, a staunch abolitionist who was popularly known as "The Pathfinder" in deference to the 1840 novel by that name written by James Fenimore Cooper. Combined, the two new parties attracted more votes than the Democrats but the

latter prevailed: Buchanan had 1,838,169 votes; Frémont 1,341,264 and Fillmore 873,053. Frémont might have won had he not refused the support of southern states which demanded that he endorse the institution of slavery.

In those days, it wasn't customary for presidential candidates to personally campaign and Frémont was content to remain in his Manhattan apartment while, in effect, his politically savvy wife served as his campaign manager. In the election of 1856 Senator Benton supported the Democrat Buchanan but Jessie Benton Frémont had her own loyal following; some called her "Our Jessie" or "General Jessie" and a popular campaign slogan was "Fremont and Jessie too." Indeed, sometimes John's name was left out altogether - as in "Jessie for the White House."

EMANCIPATION OF SLAVES

In September 1861 President Lincoln appointed John Frémont to command the Western Military Department. In his biography of Ulysses Grant, Ron Chernow described Frémont's penchant for fancy uniforms, how he "strutted about with monarchical airs, a Praetorian Guard of foreign mercenaries clad in pretentious uniforms, many stalked by rumors of corruption." Whereas Grant considered Frémont to be a self-promoter, Frémont was impressed that the new brigadier-general "was of unassuming character, not given to self-elation, of dogged persistence and of iron will" and appointed him to lead Union forces in southern Missouri and Illinois. Inclined to follow his own instincts without consultation, now Frémont had the authority to implement his abolitionist views and after unilaterally declaring martial law, issued a proclamation confiscating property and freeing the slaves, if any, of all owners in Missouri who refused to swear allegiance to the Union.

This was politically unwise for it would compromise the loyalty of border states, but anti-slavery elements in the North were jubilant; Frémont became a symbol, his name representing the crusade to abolish slavery. Historians suggest that he issued the proclamation merely as a war measure with little thought of its effect beyond Missouri. No doubt Lincoln was sympathetic in concept, but he was more

concerned with the political impact. When Frémont refused the President's request that he rescind the order, Lincoln overruled him and after several months of intrigue, The Log Splitter relieved The Pathfinder from his army post. But first there was a bizarre meeting between Jessie and Lincoln.

Jessie Frémont relished her active role working intimately with her husband. Even in hard times she used to say, "I am like a deeply built ship. I drive best under a stormy wind." According to a contemporary, "She had a man's power, a man's education, and she did a man's work in the world...but her wonderful charm was purely feminine." But her outspokenness didn't impress the President. After an exhausting train ride from St. Louis the bedraggled Jessie went directly to the White House but found Lincoln in no mood to be conciliatory. Struggling to be polite he coldly told her, "The General should never have dragged the Negro into the war. It is a war for a great national object and the Negro has nothing to do with it." It just was not expedient to stir up more trouble over slavery at this time and, later, Lincoln remarked to an aid that Jessie was "quite a female politician." It was not meant as admiration. Abraham Lincoln's own Emancipation Proclamation, which freed some three million slaves, came roughly two years later in January 1863.)

For her part, Jessie recalled that Lincoln had dismissed her as a woman: "I felt the sneering tone and saw there was a foregone decision against all listening." Although she sometimes corresponded with suffragette leaders such as Susan B. Anthony, Jessie was not necessarily a proto-feminist. In the winter of 1865 when she was asked to sign a petition for woman's suffrage, Jessie refused: "Oh, no. I do not believe in suffrage for women. I think women in their present position manage men better." Later, when Susan B. Anthony requested a financial contribution, she replied, "I can not see the subject as you do." Nevertheless, she enclosed money for the cause.

ITINERANTS

After John's military career ended, in 1865 the Frémonts purchased a large wooded estate in Sleepy Hollow, two miles north of Tarrytown. Jessie named it Pocaho and the couple spent some of their happiest times there. Although they maintained a winter apartment in Manhattan, she described Pocaho as their "true home." From there they could see across the river to their friends the Whiton's "Castle" high above Piermont. But in 1869 John Frémont's railroad empire collapsed, he was reduced to bankruptcy and in 1878 they were forced to sell Pocaho.

For the next two decades the Frémonts lived frugally in rented homes. For more than a year in 1882-3 they rented the Mesmer house in rural Suffern, N.Y. where Jessie puttered in the garden and tended the chickens and cow while her husband was away much of the time in Arizona and Mexico. Perhaps their friend Brigadier General John Fred Pierson who lived in Ramapo might have arranged for this brief stay in Rockland County. (General Pierson's father Henry L. Pierson was the brother of William Whiton's wife and as president of the Ramapo Manufacturing Company had provided the first iron rails for Eleazar Lord's New York & Erie Railroad.) Not only were the Whitons living nearby in Piermont, so was the Frémont's old friend the famed botanist John Torrey who summered in Palisades. Among Jessie's preserved letters are three that were written in Suffern: the first to her lawyer (April 21, 1882) - "after uprooting of my home" - itemizing certain jewelry that she wished to be added as a codicil to her will; another was written to the famous reformer Dorothea Dix who had recently retired to spend her last years at Trenton State Hospital (see Appendix 3.) Years later the home that the Frémonts rented in Suffern was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Ryan who donated it to the Sisters of Charity for the first Good Samaritan Hospital.

Jessie may have been content for a while in Suffern but confided to her daughter Nelly that she hoped to rent "a pretty flat in town" when/if one of their ventures paid off. By the summer of 1883 the Frémonts had moved to a furnished apartment at 218 West 59th Street overlooking Central Park and later that year, in order to save money, they moved again, this time to a furnished farm house at

New Brighton on Staten Island. During this low-point in their lives John frequently was absent trying to peddle mining schemes to investors. There had been a return of past glory when in 1878 President Hayes appointed him as governor of the Arizona Territory. The modest salary of \$2,000 a year was appreciated but in 1883 he resigned the position and rejoined Jessie on Staten Island. She wrote to a friend, "He tells me I am beautiful, but I tell him the truth. He looks young and rested, and as handsome as that day in '41 when I saw him swinging down the avenue in his new uniform." However, that probably was an inaccurate description. As Pamela Herr wrote in her biography of Jessie Benton Frémont:

Seventy years old in 1883, John was a beaten man. His dreams of restored fortune and fame had collapsed. He could no longer steadily support his family. Ashamed and humiliated, he retreated even more into himself. Though he depended on Jessie's love and comfort, he must have found it hard at times to face this strong, energetic, resourceful woman, who seemed to believe in him more than he did in himself.

By May 1885 the Frémonts were back in Manhattan in a brownstone at 130 East 64th Street - "a philistine place...but, nonetheless, comfortable enough" - and by the next spring they had moved to Washington, D.C. When that one year lease expired, they retreated to a modest cottage at Point Pleasant on the New Jersey shore until, at last, the railroad magnate Collis Huntington generously provided train tickets which permitted return to southern California where Frémont still was revered as "The Conqueror of California." John was reluctant to receive charity, but Huntington graciously insisted saying, "You forget our road goes over your buried campfires and climbs many a grade you jogged over on a mule; I think we rather owe you this."

On Christmas eve, 1887, the Frémonts were met at the Los Angeles train station by a crowd of well-wishers; a newspaper account described John's "firm, erect military bearing" while Jessie was "a perfect woman, whose massive coils of snow-white hair are a veritable crown." Four months later, she wrote how perfectly well they both now felt: "How can one fail to regain health here...Open

windows, sunshine, orange blossoms, clover knee-deep, that makes an earthly Paradise.” But while Jessie had returned to California for good, during John’s remaining nearly two years of life, he would spend only six weeks in California during the summer of 1889.

THE END

On July 13, 1890 John C. Frémont, on business in New York City and staying alone in a modest boarding house, suddenly took ill and within hours was dead, probably of a ruptured appendix. (He was attended by his close friend Dr. William J. Morton a prominent neurologist who soon would become famous as a pioneer in the use of X-rays. Years earlier Morton had treated Jessie’s rheumatism with electrotherapy and cod-liver oil.) The next day President Benjamin Harrison proclaimed a national day of mourning with flags displayed at half-mast until after the funeral. Harrison described Frémont’s career as having been “full of adventurous and useful discovery and of devoted and conspicuous service both in civil and military affairs. He opened the passes of the Rocky Mountains and gave value to his discoveries by aiding to create an American State on the Pacific Coast.”

When William H. Whiton heard the news he wrote the following in his journal:

For many years General and Mrs. Frémont were counted among our dearest friends. On one of his visits at my house [The Castle] which overlooks his former house on the opposite side of the Hudson he said to us that when he died he hoped to be laid out in sight of it...When I heard of his death...I at once had the board of trustees of Rockland Cemetery called together and told them about it. (For more on Whiton, see Appendix 4.)

John C. Frémont was placed in a plain pine box and clothed in an ordinary black suit, according to his request. A simple service was held at Trinity Church and then the coffin was placed in the church’s Receiving Vault. What happened next was well described in an article written by Rockland historian Isabelle K. Savell for a commemorative rededication ceremony held in 1988 at the gravesite:

When in 1890 Whiton learned of Frémont's death in New York, he wrote to Jessie, offering to make a burial site available there [Rockland Cemetery] to the Frémont family. Jessie gratefully accepted. But almost at once the strife that swirled about Frémont throughout his life recommenced. The issue was a monument. Jessie wanted either the design suggested by a young California sculptor, Gutzon Borglum, or a simple monolith with cross proposed by J. Massey Rhind. But Frémont's old friends from the days of the conquest of California wanted something grandiose. The Associated Pioneers of the Territorial Days of California mounted a fund-raising drive for \$10,000 and a competition for a suitable memorial.

Meanwhile Frémont's body, with a miniature [picture] of Jessie enfolded in his hands, lay in the Trinity Church vault at 135th Street, New York until late 1890 when it was transferred to the vault at Rockland Cemetery. Four years later it was still awaiting interment. On September 26, 1894, Jessie wrote Whiton from California, beseeching him to lay the General to rest in the plot that had been offered them. Uncertain herself as to the conditions under which the burial site had been made available, she asked in a letter whether it were 'contingent upon a monument being raised there.' 'It grieves me,' she wrote, 'to think of the neglect of his dear remains...If the ground is really given for his interment, cannot his coffin be laid to rest there? In the open air, for sun and snows to fall on his grave, as he so often unflinchingly met them in his life of toilsome duty done...If possible, I would wish to be laid beside him...my daughter and myself should lie by him for he was first with both of us in life.'

Historian Pamela Herr provided additional detail:

A campaign had begun to bring his body to California for burial at Lone Mountain overlooking the Golden Gate. The idea 'has taken hold of Mother's heart,' Lilly said, '& its accomplishment would bring her sustaining strength... We want Father in this state - for every reason but of course the decision lies in other hands than ours.' When the state legislature was asked to fund the project, a vociferous group opposed it, charging Frémont was a false hero of California. Deeply wounded, unable to face more controversy, Jessie quickly

accepted the offer of a gravesite at Rockland Cemetery across the Hudson from Pocahto, 'where we shall all join him.'

From the above, it's evident that because there wasn't enough money to bring John "home" to California in proper style, his coffin remained in storage for eight months at Trinity Church until on March 13, 1891 it was moved to Rockland Cemetery where it remained unburied in their receiving vault for another three years and eight months! When the interment ceremony finally took place on November 22, 1894, a party of dignitaries came by train from New York to Sparkill and General Nelson A. Miles gave the eulogy praising Fremont not only as a pioneer of the West but a pioneer of the Abolitionist movement as well. While his wife remained in California, their son, John Charles Frémont, Jr. [then living in Ossining] represented the family. Jessie sent some California rose bushes to be planted on her husband's grave where, as she wrote, they "will weather the highest winds that blow down that beautiful, noble Hudson River."

Eight years later in a letter to a friend (January 16, 1902) that was written less than a year before her own death, Jessie expressed concern about the condition of the grave site that she'd never seen:

I understand his grave is quite overgrown with weeds and brambles....I have no money to attend to this grave. The General would be the last person to allow me to neglect the living for the dead. But if I get repayment for my property [in San Francisco] then I intend placing there a simple slab with

The Pathfinder

Born January 21, 1813

Died June [July] 13, 1890

and fence in the enclosure which was deeded to me as a burial plot.

Jessie Benton Frémont outlived her husband by a dozen years, much of that time in near poverty. Eventually, Congress passed a special bill granting her an annual widow's pension of \$2,000 and a group of wealthy women admirers raised nearly \$10,000 to purchase a large lot and build a spacious redwood home for her and daughter Lilly. Jessie wrote to a friend, "My house is charming. To tourists it is always pointed out as 'The Frémont House' and often Kodacked."

After Jessie died in 1902, her cremated remains were shipped to Rockland Cemetery to be reinterred next to her husband. In 1906 the state of New York placed a simple inscribed monument on the Fremont's grave and two years later Governor Charles Evans Hughes appropriated \$3,000 to erect a suitable monument. The Fremont's children had been consulted and several designs were rejected until prominent sculptor Roland Hinton Perry was selected. His completed monument was installed on the cemetery's highest slope in 1911 with no fanfare - and \$199.16 of unused funds were returned to the New York State treasury. In later years the monument was vandalized several times. Two bronze Mexican War mortars that originally were mounted at the base had been stolen, but in 1960 they were replaced when funds were collected after a ceremony at which two granddaughters of the Frémont's placed wreaths.

Historian Sally Denton described the Frémonts as a couple "whose power, politics and love shaped 19th century America." Although some detractors had depicted John as "a glory-seeking fraud and Jessie as a manipulative and overly ambitious shrew," Denton contended that the Frémonts were "casualties of one of the dirtiest smear campaigns in American politics."

At a moment when the nation was defining itself for the next century and a half, they shared a quixotic political and ideological vision of what America should be. Through all the disappointment and failure, some of their own making, some at the hands of fate, they remain steadfast in their commitment to one another and to their country.

Rockland historian Isabelle Savell summarized: “Driven by idealism and inspired by his devoted, valiant and mettlesome wife, his life [JCF] became a catalogue of triumphs and disasters, a neo-Greek tragedy of epic proportions.” But perhaps it was Jessie, herself, who put it most succinctly: “I may not live see his enemies sitting in homage at the unveiling of his statue...but John C. Fremont’s name can never be erased from the most colorful chapters of American history.”

Today, John and Jessie Frémont lie beside each other on a hilltop high above the Hudson River in view of their beloved Westchester home on the other side. Although together, they are nearly forgotten - hiding in plain sight. *Sic transit gloria mundi*. Thus passes the glory of the world.



APPENDICES

1. William Whiton described in his journal how when he courted Eleazar Lord's daughter Sarah at The Castle in 1843, they would "walk and ramble on Clausland Mountain [Mt. Nebo] ...evenings [spent] at Lord's stargazing, discussing theology and singing sacred music." After their wedding ceremony in 1845, as the newlyweds walked out along Piermont Pier to board a steam ship for their honeymoon, they passed through two parallel lines formed by hundreds of railroad workers who doffed their hats and said, "God bless the Laird's (sic) daughter, God bless the bride and groom."
2. A vivid description of Piermont at mid-19th century appeared in *Harper's New York and Erie Railroad Guide*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1851, p. 17-18.

The embankment on which the station stands divides the prettily-situated village into two parts. That to the north of us is the main business street, facing the work shops and showing along its entire length neat stores, dwellings, a church, and a large hotel, that gives it an air of dignity and importance. Above rise the steep mountains, up which are scattered beautiful cottages with now and then an elegant mansion among trees. South of the station, the village is built along the Sparkle, a small creek running from the valley...[and] beyond these, scattered over the yellow marshy 'flats' are numerous shanties, the fast disappearing types of what Piermont altogether was a few years ago, when it figured in the Gazetteer as a 'fishing village, with considerable trade, supporting three sloops!' Taipan Slote was then its title - shote being, what we believe, the Dutch for ditch, and applied to the pretty stream now called Sparkill.' The population is estimated at over one thousand. The visitor will find it well worth his while to ascend the heights above the village, and enjoy the prospects they afford. The most striking of these is the map-like view across the river, Opposite is Mr. Paulding's residence in Tarrytown and Washington Irving's country seat.

3. Letter to Dorothea Dix written from Suffern, Rockland County, July 18, 1882:

My dear Miss Dix. A letter from your and my dear friend Dr. Eliot tells me he is going to Trenton to see you and it reminds him of the work of which I did (a very little) part under you two in '61. Before that you had put some of your thoughts into me. You may forget, but I do not, your coming up to see me in my room, as I was not well, the summer California came into the Union.... You told me some things I had not then thought of, and told me to use the talents of position, fortune and such means as I had to secure attention for the good of those who could not help themselves. My dear lady I have tried to do this. It had been home teaching in many forms, example as well as precept, but yours was a command to come forth and not live for self....

4. In his review of the journals and letters of William Henry Whiten, historian John Scott noted that in a letter to his son Edward, WHW once revealed the essence of his own creed: "Be something. Live for some principle in life...love God, love truth, love virtue - and you will be happy. Avoid bad habits - never permit yourself, on any account to drink intoxicating liquors, not even a glass - there is death in a cup....Always cultivate the society of intelligent persons older than yourself." John Scott added, "Nothing is said of his own habit of consuming cigars, which he ordered in lots of 1,000."

5. There are many other graves at the top tier of Rockland Cemetery including such notables as Civil War General Louis Blenker, oceanographer Maurice Ewing and gynecologist Alexander Skene. Probably the most impressive monument, and certainly the tallest, is a giant white obelisk which marks the resting place of Henry Honychurch Gorrige (b. Barbados, 1841 - d. New York 1885.) According to the inscription, he was a naval officer and engineer whose "crowning work was the removal of Cleopatra's Needle from Egypt to the United States, a feat of engineering without parallel." Etched in copper relief on the monument is a picture of the precarious lifting of the monument from the desert sand. What follows here is a description of that stupendous feat:



ScenesFromTheTrail.com

The formidable task of moving the Obelisk from Alexandria to New York was given to Henry Honychurch Goringe, a lieutenant commander on leave from the U.S. Navy. Cleopatra's Needle is a 200 ton, 69 foot, single shaft of red granite from the Assuan (formerly Syene) Quarries at the 1st Cataract off the Nile. The 200-ton granite needle was first shifted from vertical to horizontal, nearly crashing to ground in the process. In August 1879 the movement process was suspended for two months due to local protests and legal challenges. Once those were resolved the obelisk was transported seven miles to Alexandria and then put into the hold of the steamship Dessoug which set sail 12 June 1880. The Dessoug was heavily modified with a large hole cut into the starboard side of its bow. The obelisk was loaded through the ship's hull by rolling it upon cannonballs to somewhat ease this arduous task.

Despite a broken propeller, the SS Dessoug was able to make the journey to the United States. The obelisk and its 50-ton pedestal arrived at the Quarantine Station in New York in early July 1880. It took 32 horses hitched in pairs to bring it from the banks of the East River to Central Park. Railroad ramps and tracks had to be temporarily removed and the ground flattened so that the obelisk could be rolled out of the ship whose side had been cut open once again for the purpose.

The obelisk was carried through the Hudson River. The final leg of the journey was made by pushing the obelisk with a steam engine across a specially built trestle bridge from Fifth Avenue to its new home on Greywacke Knoll, just across the drive from the then recently built Metropolitan Museum of Art. Initially arriving on 20 July 1880, it had taken 112 days from Quarantine Station to arrive at the knoll. By the time the obelisk had finally entered Central Park, it was the dead of winter. Jesse B. Anthony, Grand Master of Masons in the State of New York, presided as the cornerstone for the obelisk was laid in place with full Masonic ceremony on 2 October 1880. Over nine thousand Masons paraded up Fifth Avenue from 14th Street to 82nd Street and it was estimated that over fifty thousand spectators lined the parade route. The benediction was presented by R.W. Louis C. Gerstein. The obelisk was righted by a special structure built by Henry Honychurch Goringe. The official ceremony for erecting the obelisk was 22 February 1881. (Wikipedia)

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