John C. Fremont

1813-1890

Born in Savannah, Georgia in 1813, John C. Fremont made numerous contributions to the development of the United States. Fascinated by geography, Fremont surveyed and mapped the region between the Upper Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, as well as mapping the Oregon Trail. He served his country as a second lieutenant in the United States Topographical Corp., and later became a major general in the Union Army in charge of the Western Department. Helping to annex California, he became its governor and was later nominated to be the Republican candidate for president. Toward the end of his life, he retired to what is now Sleepy Hollow to write his memoirs. Fremont Road and Fremont’s Pond are named after him.
John Charles Fremont

John Charles Fremont, “The Pathfinder”, forged a path through life that included mapping the Oregon Trail and two presidential bids. Fremont eventually found his way to the quaint little hamlet of North Tarrytown. Indeed, Fremont chose North Tarrytown, now known as Sleepy Hollow, as the optimal location to relax and write his memoirs. John Fremont’s countless contributions to society are so extensive and integral to the national interest that he deserves a place of splendor in the Tarrytown-Sleepy Hollow Hall of Fame.

John C. Fremont was born to a poor family in Savannah, Georgia on January 21, 1813. He was five years old when his father died. His family then moved to Charleston, South Carolina where they lived a meager existence. Although interested well-to-do families helped fund his entrance into Charleston College in 1829, he was expelled in 1831 for irregular attendance. He then got a job teaching mathematics on a war ship. He became known as an expert in geology, topography and astronomy. Thus, his next job became that of a second lieutenant in the United States Topographical Corp., later to be known as the Army Corp. of Engineers. In this capacity, Fremont became a prominent member of a party led by Joseph N. Nicollet, which successfully surveyed and mapped the region between the upper Mississippi and Missouri rivers. Fremont built on this experience by surveying the Des Moines River in 1841. In 1842, John C. Fremont successfully mapped the majority of the Oregon Trail, as well as ascending to the top of the second highest peak in the Wind River Mountain Range, which now bears his name, Fremont Peak.

Fremont continued to pursue his passion for topography and exploration when, in 1843, he enlisted the aid of Kit Carson and Tom Fitzpatrick to guide him along the Cache de la Poudre River into the Laramie Mountains. He then made a historic crossing of the Rocky Mountains by hiking tirelessly through the South Pass and Green River, mapping all the way. Fremont later turned south where he explored the Great Basin. This led to a courageous and perilous crossing of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

After this long period of mapping the American West, Fremont then devoted himself to the American military. Fremont earned the rank of major in the army, played a leading role in the successful efforts to annex California and
thus was appointed Governor of California by Commodore Robert Stockton. In 1848 and 49, Fremont led an expedition to locate railway passes from the upper Rio Grande to California. During this same period, gold was discovered on his California property and he became a millionaire.

Running on an anti-slavery platform, he was elected Senator from California in 1850. Upon the outbreak of the Civil War, Fremont was appointed a major general in the Union Army and was put in charge of the newly created Western Department, based in St. Louis. In 1856, he became the youngest man to run for the office of President of the United States, when the Republican National Committee nominated him at the first Republican National Convention. Although he lost this election to James Buchanan, Fremont remained popular and in 1862, Republican president Abraham Lincoln appointed him Commander of the newly established Mountain Department. Fremont was at his political apex when an 1864 convention of Radical Republicans chose Fremont once again as their presidential candidate. Although honored by the nomination, Fremont eventually dropped out of this presidential race because, as a radical candidate he had the potential to upset Lincoln’s chances.

From this point forward, John C. Fremont began to experience a decline in his fortunes. By the end of the Civil War, he had lost most of his assets. He tried to succeed as an entrepreneur in the railroad industry, but failed miserably. Though he became territorial governor of Arizona, he regained very little income. At this point, Fremont bought a house in North Tarrytown and retired here to write his memoirs.

The Fremonts bought the estate of General James Watson Webb, called “Pokahoe”, in the area where Sleepy Hollow Manor is now located. Fremont’s Pond and Fremont Road are named for him. While he lived in this area, he was fond of a spring that was located on the east side of Broadway. In 1913, William Rockefeller built a fountain at the location of the spring in honor of Fremont’s memory. Fremont himself died of peritonitis on July 13, 1890 in a hotel in NY City. He was later buried in the Rockland Cemetery in Sparkill, NY.

John C. Fremont left a legacy throughout the United States. In addition to our own Fremont’s Pond and Fremont Road, Fremont, California, Fremont, Nebraska and Fremont, New Hampshire are among the places named after him. He was a strong fighter against slavery, and opened much of the American West. For this, he deserves a place in this prestigious Hall of Fame.
WORKS CITED


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