

## **JOHN WHITE GEARY: “GIANT OF HIS TIMES”**

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### **Early Life**

Few men have ever had such an impact on the history of their times, nor contributed more to the development of their nation and state, and, was thrust into more critical and pivotal roles at the very flash point of action, nor have more often influenced the course of historic events than John White Geary in the Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Geary was born in Mount Pleasant, Westmoreland County in Pennsylvania on December 30th, 1819. He was descended from the sturdy Scotch- Irish pioneers, who had scratched out farms from the vast wilderness.<sup>1</sup> His father, Richard Geary was well educated and refined for his day. He had failed at the iron business and opened a school, teaching for the remainder of his life.<sup>2</sup> Geary’s mother, Margaret White hailed from Washington County in Western Maryland. Geary grew to be a giant in stature, reaching 6’6” tall, and weighed over 250 pounds. in his adulthood. He had a sturdy and athletic physique, a long dark beard in keeping with the style of the day, dark piercing eyes, and a dark complexion, all which gave Geary a most commanding presence.<sup>3</sup>

Geary's father educated his two surviving sons at home and sought to instill in them his love of learning, but also his intense ambitious quest for success.

Geary's older brother, Edward became a noted and influential Presbyterian minister, and an early figure in the history of the Oregon Territory, which he pioneered.

John White Geary, after a solid preparation at his father's school entered Jefferson (now Washington & Jefferson) College in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania.<sup>4</sup> After his father's death Geary withdrew from college to provide for his family by opening his own school at the age of fifteen.<sup>5</sup> With hard work, doing, among other things, a teaching stint in a school he opened, and following a thrifty lifestyle, Geary was able to return to Jefferson College and graduated with his Bachelor’s degree. After graduation, Geary passed through a period in which he experimented with a variety of professions for his life's work. He tried the mercantile trade; then, armed with his natural ability in mathematics, he taught himself Civil Engineering; and finally, convinced of the value of a background in law, he read law and was admitted to the Pennsylvania bar.

### **Engineering**

Geary obtained a position as engineer for the state of Kentucky, then working on the Green River Rail Road. Having obtained financial security through land speculation and investment in Kentucky, he was able to return home to Western Pennsylvania to pursue his engineering work.<sup>6</sup>

Now employed by the Alleghany Portage Rail Road as assistant superintendent and engineer, he successfully produced the rail path over and through the Alleghany Mountains to Pittsburgh from

Philadelphia. His ingenious designs enabled the trains and cars to be transported via inclines up and over the mountains. The same innovation will later become part from of the famed 'Horse Shoe Curve'. Geary's designs attracted worldwide attention and brought many to marvel at his achievements.<sup>7</sup>

Among his many interests was military history, which drew Geary into joining the Pennsylvania militia. He rose rapidly in rank and esteem, and devoted himself to improving the Volunteer system in the Commonwealth, even representing the Cambria and Somerset Counties' Brigade of the 12th Division of the Pennsylvania militia as the elected brigadier general at the National Military convention in Washington D.C. in 1842.<sup>8</sup>

## **Mexican War**

At the outbreak of the Mexican War in 1846, Geary quickly organized a Company of volunteers recruited from Cambria County, which he named 'American Highlanders'.<sup>9</sup> Geary's Company was incorporated into the Second Pennsylvania Regiment, then forming in Pittsburgh. (Geary will later use the same nickname for the 28<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteer Regiment which he will raise in early 1861 for the three years' service in the Civil War). Soon Geary was elected Lieutenant-Colonel of the regiment under the command of W. B. Roberts who served as Colonel.

Geary's Highlanders serving with the Second Pennsylvania Regiment departed Pittsburgh in January 1847 down the Ohio River, with flags flying amidst large crowds of enthusiastic well-wishers waving flags and cheering the men at their departure. After a long journey of eleven days and several delays for repairs, their boat reached New Orleans.<sup>10</sup>

When the weather cleared, the men boarded ship for Mexico. Geary kept a very detailed diary of his experiences at war commencing in December, 1846 at the outset of his service. His entries demonstrate an informed and instructive view of his Mexican War service, and a fascinating story of the venture, ship board, transportation, duty and sacrifice.

As their ship entered the Gulf, Geary ascended the rigging and called for three cheers from the men for 'glory, honor, and prosperity for the country', which was hard not to respond to by the men.<sup>11</sup>

Sailing many days in calm and storm, they approached the Mexican shore, when cases of small pox appeared. An epidemic was feared and their ship was diverted to a quarantine station. The U.S. troops were to rendezvous on Los Lobos Island in preparation for General Winfield Scott's invasion of Mexico via Vera Cruz.

Geary was compelled to remain on the island with three of his companies until all signs of disease had disappeared. Geary and his quarantined men finally reached Vera Cruz on April 12th, 1847. The city had already fallen to General Winfield Scott. Geary and the Second Pennsylvania Volunteers were attached to General John Quitman's Brigade. Quitman had earned much success under General Zachary Taylor in earlier actions. General-in-Chief Scott and the U.S. Army had already begun the advance to Mexico City. Geary and his men finally reached the

rest of the regiment on April 23rd outside Jalapa. The Second Pennsylvania had already seen action under Colonel Roberts at the Battle of Cerro Gordo.

After some burdensome garrison duty, Geary and his unit began the advance. Geary alternated in command of the advance guard, skirmishing and fulfilling other official duties. Chafing at inactivity, Geary hoped to be sent forward, but news of an armistice and peace treaty negotiations at the very gates of the city of Mexico soon dashed his hopes. Peace negotiations failed however, and General Scott was now forced to capture the capital. Geary, in command of his regiment, as part of Quitman's Brigade was ordered to attack at the Pass of La Hoya, and later at Chapultepec. Geary was slightly wounded in this action, being present with the storming party as the castle was captured. Later, he counted five bullet holes in his uniform.

Scott now ordered Geary's men onto the Belen Gate, where they did heroic service. The next day, the Mexicans raised the white flag of surrender, and the Second Pennsylvania was the first command to enter the city. In the sharp action at Belen, he displayed such intrepidity that, upon the fall of the city, General Quitman assigned him to the command of the great citadel. Geary could be justifiably proud of his Pennsylvanians and their courageous conduct.<sup>12</sup> Colonel Roberts died soon afterwards, and Geary was promoted Colonel to succeed him.

Thereafter, Geary and his men became occupiers of Mexico City, even experiencing a major earthquake there on October 21st 1847.

Peace was finally agreed upon early in 1848, and Geary and his men returned home triumphantly, although there was an attempt by a disgruntled rival to impugn Geary's record, which was subsequently found baseless. The officers of his regiment and his superiors all expressed high regard for Geary and his men and the exemplary record of the regiment.<sup>13</sup>

### **Postmaster of San Francisco**

After only a brief return home, Geary was appointed United States Postmaster in California by President James K. Polk, an ally Geary had duly supported so resolutely in his election bid.<sup>14</sup> This appointment seemed like a well-deserved recognition of his stellar service in the Mexican War.

Geary decided on the arduous journey via the Isthmus of Panama with his wife, Margaret Ann, daughter of James R. Logan of Westmoreland County and young son, Eddie. The story of the miraculous and adventuresome journey to California could constitute an entire work of adventure by itself. His sailing to Panama and perilous journey on to the Pacific at Panama City, and his brave and resolute battle with bandits and hostile natives, and struggle against sickness is all the stuff of legends. After an epic adventure, Geary and his family finally reached San Francisco in the middle of the legendary gold rush of 1849.<sup>15</sup>

Geary had been appointed Postmaster of San Francisco and mail agent for the Pacific Coast with authorization to establish United States post offices and name postmasters for them. In addition, he was to lay out mail routes ensuring security in the mail delivery throughout California.<sup>16</sup>

Geary undertook his duties in San Francisco with characteristic energy, efficiency and management skill which brought an order to the process, and was admired by citizens for the successful operation.

Soon however, the new Taylor administration in Washington brought a new appointee to Geary's office. In approbation of Geary's labors, he was thereafter elected to the office of 'Alcalde' <sup>17</sup> (the Mexican office of mayor and chief magistrate), the last in California history <sup>18</sup> by the people of San Francisco, and shortly thereafter was also appointed Judge of First Instance by U. S. Major-General Bennett C. Riley, military governor of the territory.<sup>19</sup>

On May First, 1850, in the first election under the American administration, Geary was elected the first Mayor of San Francisco by a large majority.

During this period, the state constitutional convention was meeting in Monterey, in which Geary could not participate, as he was already strenuously engaged in his duties in San Francisco, but he exerted enough personal influence on the delegates of that convention to insert the Free State Clause into the new constitution, essentially aligning California against slavery.<sup>20</sup>

At the age of 31, Geary now declined a petition to run for a second term as mayor, but did accept the appointment as president of the Board of Commissioners of the Funded Debt, and under his astute direction, the city debt was controlled and eventually eliminated.<sup>21</sup>

Geary's wife had never been in good health since they had departed for the West. After the birth of their second son, Willie, Margaret Geary had never fully recovered her health, and Geary finally came to the realization that it would be best to send his wife and sons home. Geary followed his wife and children home to Pennsylvania in early 1852, fully intending to return and relocate to California, his adopted state. The ensuing death of his wife, and other relatives, as well as business concerns caused Geary to change his plans, and he decided instead to remain at home in Pennsylvania and pursue farming and his business interests.<sup>22</sup> He never returned to California.

### **"Bleeding Kansas"**

After the death of his wife, Margaret Ann, Geary threw himself into farming and personal business pursuits fully intending to spend the rest of his life thus engaged.<sup>23</sup> This bucolic idyll was not destined to continue. Geary's background and ambition had earned him experiences in education, engineering, and the law, as a resolute and courageous war hero in Mexico, as well as service as a successful politician and administrator in California. All his experiences begged further useful service, especially in the gathering crises on the national scene. Geary's devotion to this country and to his Democratic Party affiliation did not go unnoticed in Washington. The administration of Democrat Franklin Pierce, a Mexican War comrade of Geary's called upon him to except the governorship of the contentious territory of Utah in 1855, which, however, Geary declined.

Next in 1856, President Pierce called Geary once again to Washington to offer him the governorship of Kansas Territory. Since adoption of the Kansas- Nebraska Act, Kansas had become a battleground between pro and anti-Slavery factions in the territory. Already two territorial governors had failed to quell unchecked sectarian violence. President Pierce prevailed upon a reluctant Geary to accept the office on patriotic grounds, and out of friendship to Pierce. Geary had nothing to gain in accepting this difficult trust. The territory was torn between factions; support by federal authorities was doubtful; the attempts by predecessors had failed miserably; there were even death threats against anyone who attempted reconciliation. Geary was happy and prosperous at home. He was needed as a single parent for his sons, and as master of his own self interests.<sup>24</sup>

Despite his reservations, Geary allowed himself to be prevailed upon to except the charge. Never daunted by the heavy odds against him or by hurdles as high as the mountains he had conquered to build the rail road in Pennsylvania, nor to scale the heights of Chapultepec in the face of fierce resistance, the troubles of Kansas seemed to him no more of a challenge.

Geary was assured of complete support by the National Government, of the military and federal judiciary, and given complete authority to govern to a single charge, i.e. "... to maintain the public peace, and to bring to punishment all acts of violence or disorder by whomever perpetrated and on whatever pretext."<sup>25</sup>

Based on the pleas of the president, the needs of the nation, his devotion to Liberty and assurance of support, Geary accepted the governorship. He arrived at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas Territory on September 9th 1856. He appeared before the territorial legislature in Lacompton soon after and pledged to govern faithfully and with impartiality under the provisions of the United States Constitution and the Laws of Kansas Territory. He promised to administer equal and exact justice to all."<sup>26</sup>

Geary could hardly imagine the firestorm into which he was now thrust. His predecessor, Gov. Shannon would say, "to govern the Kansas of 1855 and 1856, you might as well have attempted to govern the devil in hell."<sup>27</sup> In steering a strictly impartial course, the new Governor only created resentment and resistance from both factions, free and slave advocates.

The partisan groups supported by their equally partisan press did not receive the new Governor or his policies with approval or support. A campaign of vilification and slander unique even in that age of vitriol was now unleashed.<sup>28</sup> Governor Geary ordered the immediate disbandment of all armed groups roaming the territory regardless of affiliation.

When pro slavery forces from Missouri moved on the town of Lawrence yet again as had happened in the past, Geary threatened them with the use of federal troops, a sign of resolute strength that seemed to stagger the invading Missourians. Later, Geary demonstrated his impartiality and dedication to his pledge by capturing Free State marauders, who had attacked Hickory Point. Geary had to contend with an invasion by territorial militia of well-armed

Missourians under a 'General Reid' amounting to almost 3000 men. They moved to attack the Free State town of Lawrence, which braced for the attack. Geary rushed to confront the forces he found there arrayed for battle. Bravely, he strode into the very midst of the invaders and conferred with their leaders. The fearless veteran of many battles exhorted the militia to disperse. He threatened to use the 300 federal troops who were on hand under Col. Edwin Sumner (later a Union Major General during the early period of the Civil War). He accused the leaders of acting against both Kansas and United States law, and in the name of the President of the United States, he ordered them to desist and withdraw. Seeing the wisdom of the Governor's words, the force reluctantly acceded and removed itself.<sup>29</sup>

The new governor's firm policies brought the support of the Federal Army, without which he could not have restored order. Soon a relative calm descended upon Kansas. Geary could report to William L. Marcy, President Pierce's Secretary of State in Washington, "citizens are resuming their ordinary pursuits". Geary, however had serious opposition to his administration. Most of Pierce's federal government appointees in the territory were decidedly pro slavery in sentiment and policy. These officials wanted to insure Slavery in Kansas. After Geary's unequivocal and impartial stance, they began an active campaign to thwart the new Governor. They sought to end free-state immigration and resist all efforts of the Governor to enforce law-and-order.

Geary wrote to President Pierce in September of 1856 complaining of the incompetence, or worse - active undercutting of his authority. Geary asked that several federal judges be removed and a new Federal Marshall, Attorney-General, and Secretary of State be appointed in the Territory.<sup>30</sup> All entreaties to Pierce fell on deaf ears. 1856 was an election year and the Democrats had picked another candidate to campaign for president, Pennsylvanian James Buchanan, who had no record on Kansas, or its troubles. It soon became clear to Geary that instead of receiving support for his efforts in Kansas, in fact, the Pierce administration was undermining him and his policies and was actively seeking the introduction of slavery into the territory. Without that support, Geary was a mere figurehead.

Geary's impartial policies and firm enforcement of laws had brought relative peace to Kansas. The Pro-Slavery Democrats now sought to bribe Geary to favor their cause with promises of future higher office in the state government. Despite the offers, Geary remained firmly behind his previous stated policy.

Having averted a crisis by succeeding in disbanding rivals for the state legislature, Governor Geary then addressed the legitimate, albeit the Pro-Slavery Legislature in Lecompton in January 1857.

Geary, in his address to the assembly reiterated his resolute and steadfast adherence to 'equal and exact justice', and support for democratic principles. Geary also set forth a number of sound recommendations for civic improvements, remarkable for their farsighted common-sense.

The Legislature took little heed of Geary's recommendations and passed a number of measures antithetical to his policy. The Governor's vetoes of these measures were overridden forthwith.

Geary was even subjected to the indignity of an armed confrontation on the very floor of the legislature, which had immediately condemned Geary's moderate resolutions.

More unjust laws were followed by indignant vetoes, followed by legislative override. His governance was stymied. Geary now wrote the new president-elect, Buchanan in February, 1857 to appeal for the new administration's support against the underhanded machinations of the Pro-Slavery forces. Finally, he stated that, "without said support, my usefulness here must be materially diminished, and the sooner I am relieved, the better will I be satisfied".<sup>31</sup>

Finally convinced that Buchanan would do no more to support fair popular sovereignty any more than Pierce did, and frustrated by the constant battles against partisan officials and a hostile legislature, Governor Geary sent in his resignation on the very day of Buchanan's inauguration, March 4, 1857.<sup>32</sup>

Geary left Kansas hurriedly, never to return. Despite his best efforts to remain true to his principles and fulfill his charge, Geary had been thwarted. Later, he wrote, "I have learned more of the depravity of my fellow man than I ever before knew. I have thought my California experience was strong, but I believe my Kansas experience cannot be beaten".<sup>33</sup>

### **War of the Rebellion**

Geary had returned to his home to resume his private life, recoup his shattered health and observe the political disputes that threatened to erupt into open conflict. In late 1857, Geary met a young widow at a Harrisburg reception. She was Mary Church Henderson of Carlisle, Pennsylvania. After a brief courtship, they married. Soon thereafter, the couple welcomed their first child, Mary.<sup>34</sup>

1859 found Geary living in Philadelphia where he became engaged as a legal counsel in the Girard Will case, which was ultimately decided in Geary's favor. Although a long time, passionate Democrat, he opposed slavery. This is evident in his own family background, his insistence on the Free State constitution in California and his strict impartiality in his Kansas experience.

Upon hearing of the firing on Fort Sumter, April 12th, 1861, Geary hesitated not a moment but was instantly at work recruiting troops for the Union cause. He requested from the War Department and received authority to raise a regiment for federal service for a three-year enlistment, one of the first such three-year volunteer regiments in the Army. Geary journeyed to Philadelphia, second most populous city in the nation to take advantage of such fertile ground for recruiting troops. He opened recruiting stations in the city and elsewhere, and established a camp of rendezvous and training in Oxford Park in the Frankford section of the city.

Knowing of Geary's background, experience and vaunted reputation as a war hero, sixty-six separate companies from throughout the Commonwealth applied for acceptance into his regiment. Geary was authorized a fifteen-company regiment, divided into three battalions. Geary was able to pick from among the best of the organizations and quickly assembled the men, even

having enough surplus men to create a battery of artillery attached to the regiment, later known as Knap's Battery, named for a patron of the regiment, Joseph Knap, owner of a steel and iron company in Pittsburgh who donated the guns to the battery. Geary's regiment was mustered into federal service on June 28th 1861, and designated numerically the 28th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers (which Geary called his 'American Highlanders' and 'Cold Stream Guard' in remembrance of his brave men of the 2nd Pennsylvania Regiment in the Mexican War; and that respected British Army unit of renown). The regiment was quickly assigned to field service under General Banks in Western Maryland, guarding the Potomac River border with Secessionist Virginia; and securing the railroad and canal connections to the West.

In October, 1861, Colonel Geary and his men saw their first action at Bolivar Heights above Harpers Ferry. The winter was spent guarding, patrolling, and in construction projects. Early in 1862, Geary and the 28th Pennsylvania crossed the Potomac River and captured the rebel stronghold of Leesburg, Va. As a reward for his admirable service, in recognition of his experience and military skill, Geary was promoted a Brigadier General in the United States Volunteer Service on April 25, 1862. He was immediately assigned to command the First Brigade in Banks' Corps of the Eastern Army of the Potomac, containing his own former regiment.

On August 9th, 1862, Geary and his brigade were engaged at the battle of Cedar Mountain, Va. against the Confederates under 'Stonewall' Jackson. In this action, Geary was severely wounded, almost losing his right arm to amputation. After convalescence at his home, General Geary returned to the army. He was promoted to command of the Second Division of the newly designated Twelfth Corps of the Army of the Potomac under General Slocum. Geary will continuously command this famed Division through to the end of the War and establish an enviable reputation for meritorious service in many bloody conflicts. Named the 'White Star Division' after the designation of a star insignia for the Corps in the Army of the Potomac beginning in March 1863, the 'White Star' 2<sup>nd</sup> Division of the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Corps will prove itself a fine fighting force in all the battles in which it was engaged in both the Eastern and Western Theaters of operation in the War of the Rebellion.

Geary's 'White Stars' will be heavily engaged at Chancellorsville and at Gettysburg. It was at Gettysburg that Geary's men bravely held the right flank of General Meade's Army on Culp's Hill steadfastly resisting heavy assaults by the insurgent enemy.

After the costly Union defeat at Chickamauga in Northern Georgia in September, 1863, the Eleventh and Twelfth Corps of the Army of the Potomac, including Geary's White Stars were detached and sent to join General Grant and Sherman's Army, then besieged in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The army took advantage of General Geary's experience as a rail road engineer and he was entrusted with management of important aspects of the unique and monumental transfer of two entire Army Corps by rail from one theater of operations to another, unique in the history of warfare. In less than two weeks, the force had reached Tennessee. Geary was assigned the

military governorship of Murfreesboro, Tennessee for a time after arrival at that point in deference to his administrative experience.

On the evening of October 27th, 1863, General Geary with a small force, left to defend the critical Valley approach to Chattanooga. His force was attacked by superior numbers of Confederates. Called the Battle of Wauhatchie, Geary's men stood heroically and repelled the repeated assaults of a desperate enemy. In the intense fight, General Geary's own son, Eddie, an officer in Knap's Battery was killed in action, dying in his own father's arms.<sup>35</sup>

At Lookout Mountain, Geary requested of his commander, that he lead the assault. In a daring and bold attack led from the front by General Geary, the 'White Stars' fought their way up the mountain and on to the summit, securing the vital position for the Union. This action is often called 'Battle above the Clouds', as the forces passed through fog shrouded layers to reach the summit.

When Geary's battle flags waved from the top of the mountain, they were greeted by thunderous cheers from the soldiers waiting below in the Valley.

In the opening spring campaign of 1864 as part of Sherman's Army, the White Star Division, now forming part of the newly created 20th Corps marched out to cut the Confederacy in two.

General Geary and his men were engaged in almost continuous battle all the way to Atlanta, taking a leading role in every action in which they participated. At the pivotal battle of Peachtree Creek at the gates to the city of Atlanta, Geary's men found themselves in the very vortex of the Confederate attack. Their lines began to waver, when one of Geary's trusted staff officers, Capt. Thomas Elliott of the 28th Pennsylvania waded into the midst of the troops just on the verge of collapse. He seized the battle flag of his old unit, the 28<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Volunteers, and then rallied the men to stand and hold the center of the line. Elliott fell here, rendering invaluable heroic service. Geary changed front to meet the heavy assault and led his men to victory in the action.<sup>36</sup>

After the capture of Atlanta, General Sherman determined on a bold march to the sea, severing the Confederacy and opening contact to the Coast held by federal army and navy forces and to connect to supply lines. Geary marched at the head of one of the march columns as the army approached the rebel stronghold of Savannah, Georgia.

General Geary advanced at the head of his command into Savannah and was rewarded for his valor by receiving the surrender of the city. Because of his bold initiative and vigilance at Savannah, Geary was rewarded by General Sherman, who made Geary military governor of the city.

On January 12th, 1865, General Geary was promoted Major General of Volunteers "for fitness to command and promptness to execute".<sup>37</sup>

In the spring campaign of 1865, the army advanced North through the Carolinas in pursuit of the fleeing Confederate army of General Joe Johnston. Geary was in the vanguard of the Union army once again leading his "White Star" division in action at Averasboro and Bentonville in North Carolina. Geary was nearby when Johnston surrendered his army to General Sherman and his Union forces on April 26th, 1865 near Durham Station. For Geary, the Civil War was over and fairly won. The Union was preserved.

General Geary proudly marched at the head of his victorious troops in the Grand Review of the Western army in Washington D.C. on May 24th 1865. Geary's old regiment, the 28th Pennsylvania Volunteers was with him all through the war and up to disbandment in June, 1865. Geary's Regiment was one of the first to enlist; had been the first to reenlist for the duration of the war as veteran volunteers, and now basked in its well-earned glory by marching at the head of Geary's White Stars. No regiment once assigned to Geary's command ever left until duly mustered out of service at the expiration of its term.

Major General Geary lost thousands of men as casualties of war under his command, but he showed himself willing to endure the same dangers and hardships as the men. He demanded obedience; but he led from the front and suffered fatigue, wounds and the loss of his own son in defense of this country. General Geary closed out his army career by serving on a military tribunal which tried Major Henry Wirz, commandant of the notorious Andersonville prisoner of war camp for war crimes. Wirz was found guilty and hanged in Washington in December of 1865, thus closing out the war.

### **Governor of Pennsylvania**

Now returned home after four full years of war, Geary contemplated his life and future. In the spring of 1866, the politicians of the Commonwealth now turned their thoughts to the gubernatorial election and a replacement for the popular War Governor, Andrew Gregg Curtin. Soon the name of John White Geary received much attention. Geary had been a lifelong Democrat, but the 'Democracy' had fallen from favor as a result of the war, its support of rebellion and staunch desire to retain and spread the misery of slavery.

Geary now became associated with leaders of the Republican Party, such as Rep. 'Honest' John Covode and state party boss and former Secretary of War, Simon Cameron. Even though Geary was playing his own political game negotiating with the Democrats, while allowing himself to be courted by the Republican Cameron political machine.

Many doubted Geary's sincerity and loyalty to the Republican Party, but notwithstanding his long affiliation with the Democratic Party, he was nevertheless nominated to run for governor on the Republican (National Union) ticket.<sup>38</sup> Friends and associates maintained that Geary's change in party affiliation was due to his war experiences and abhorrence of slavery.<sup>39</sup> Geary finally accepted the nomination of the Republican Party and began an active, and what was to become a vitriolic campaign against his Democratic opponent. The campaign revolved around the question of treatment of the South and President Andrew Johnson's policies, as well as domestic concerns, treatment of business and the policy towards the rail roads.

Election appeals were made to the returned veterans of the Union to support the Republican ticket. Even General Grant had an opinion on the election. Grant told the Chicago Republican newspaper, "to ask any soldier to vote for such a man (Democrat Heister Clymer), of one-time known disloyalty, against another who had served through four years in the Union army with credit to himself and benefit to his country, was gross insult".<sup>40</sup>

The election was decided on October 2nd, 1866 in favor of John White Geary. He had defeated Clymer by over 17,000 votes. Geary was inaugurated governor at Harrisburg on January 15th, 1867.

During this and a successive term as governor, Geary was a firm supporter of public education, and the State University. He worked against a monopoly of the major railroads, worked for mine safety and against the abuse of pardons. Seeing inequities in the state constitution he proposed and worked for a new constitutional convention to revise and correct the deficiencies. From his proposals came a new state constitution in 1873. Another hallmark of Geary's administration was civic action on behalf of veterans' widows and orphans.

As governor, Geary enjoyed two terms of successful administration. His policies were sound and the state enjoyed prosperity and progress. He had reduced the public debt, increased revenues, and created a healthy business climate. Geary's administration provided for assistance to the less fortunate, and he helped to reform the laws to the benefit of the citizenry. Geary's place in the history of the government was now well earned.

Despite the sterling qualities and remarkable character of a truly unique individual continuously placed in the vortex of events leading to momentous changes in history, nevertheless, John White Geary was now first and foremost a politician<sup>41</sup>, beset by ambition as large as the man himself, eager for acclaim and prone to exaggerate his achievements.

Geary possessed an ego to match his great stature. He shared the traits typical of the hearty Scotch-Irish pioneers of his Western Pennsylvania home. Stubborn to a fault, self-sufficient, of fiery independence, plain spoken, and possessed of a pride that countenanced no affront; these attributes, coupled with his, at times, shameless self-promotion invited envy, bitter rivalries and personality conflicts.

Geary's military service, while motivated by sincere feelings of patriotism helped to launch his political career. In the Mexican War, Geary rose to the rank of Colonel of his regiment, but not without controversy and charges of manipulation. A fellow officer in Mexico, Richard Coulter, later served with Geary again in the Civil War and, severely criticized Geary in his letters home.<sup>42</sup> He was convinced that Geary had won promotion due to political skill, rather than earned on the battlefield. Geary was accused of manipulating an election in the Second Pennsylvania Regiment to his own benefit. It was also said that he was guilty of playing up to the common soldiers by the free use of liquor and lavishing attention upon favorites. Coulter also accused Geary of misrepresenting his conduct in action.<sup>43</sup>

In Mexico and later in the Civil War, Geary was prone to curry favor with the press in order to publicize his achievements and to magnify them. He sought credit for minor deeds and often took credit for those of others. Brigadier-General Alpheus Williams, his fellow commander of the First Division in the 12th Army Corps, commented on Geary: "We have had one Division commander (Geary) who, I judge has kept a corner in the notes of every correspondent in the army, besides keeping his staff busy at the same work."<sup>44</sup>

Ario Pardee, Jr., a field officer in Geary's regiment, the 28th Pennsylvania Volunteers wrote home in a letter: "General Geary saw eight rebels, so he says. I did not see them. In next week's paper there will no doubt be an account of a 'dash' into the enemy's lines. The 28th in the field! Flight of the enemy! Geary at work! etc."<sup>45</sup> A staff officer in the 12th Corps wrote in a letter home in November 1862 about a recent expedition near Shepherdstown W.V: "I see the correspondent at Harpers Ferry of the New York Herald puts it down to the credit of General Geary who had nothing whatever to do with it, or with us in any way."<sup>46</sup>

Geary was also excellent at writing detailed reports of his unit's participation in engagements and of filing the reports in quick and timely fashion. This trait sometimes led to Geary receiving more than his fair share of credit for successful operations. For example, at the Battle of Gettysburg, Geary's after-action report on his role in the fighting with the 12th Corps on the right flank of the army was prepared and quickly available to General Meade, army commander who included it in his overall report on the Battle. General Williams deserved much acclaim for his handling of the men in the same action, but had been overlooked by Meade. Subsequently, General Meade was convinced of the need to adjust his report to admit Williams to his just share of the credit for holding the position on the Union right flank. Later, General Williams complained in a letter home about Geary: "Save me from my friends."<sup>47</sup>

As with all non-professionals, non-West Point trained officers, it was difficult to obtain a high-rank in the Union Army, and a certain condescension was evinced by the West Point educated commanders toward the volunteer citizen soldiers. Thus, it was that Geary in command of a Division remained a Brigadier-General until late in the war, despite his best efforts to obtain a promotion to major general. In late 1863 and early 1864, Geary mounted a campaign to obtain the coveted promotion. He induced 173 of his subordinate officers to sign a petition requesting his promotion, and sent a petition on to the adjutant general along with endorsements from the Governor of Pennsylvania, and more than 50 members of the Pennsylvania congressional delegation. The effort was not immediately successful. General Geary needed the strong backing of General-in-Chief Ulysses S. Grant who favored other candidates. Finally, in January, 1865 Geary was promoted Major-General in the volunteer forces only by brevet, an honorary award.<sup>48</sup>

General Geary was recognized by his commanders for his administrative abilities, if not for his skill on the battlefield, and his executive experiences as an elected official. He had functioned as a military governor in the Mexican War; had acted as the governor of Kansas Territory before the war. After transfer to the Western army, Geary was appointed commandant at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, garrison commander at Atlanta, Georgia, and military governor of Savannah. By all accounts, he performed well in these duties. Geary was characterized in the history of

Westmoreland County, Pa. as: "a man of executive ability and of great energy rather than a man of brilliant intellectual powers."<sup>49</sup>. Though he had shortcomings, a less than amiable personality, was prone to exaggeration of his own accomplishments, and harbored an immense ego and ambition; nevertheless, Geary had excelled in every field in which he chose to work. He was a patriot who loved his country, and volunteered to fight in two wars to support his nation.

John White Geary was indeed a patriot, who served his nation to the detriment of his own personal life and fortune. He was also a dedicated member of the Democratic Party, who nevertheless wholeheartedly supported the war effort. By all evidence, he stood squarely against slavery, but was no abolitionist. As a staunch Presbyterian Christian, he came naturally to his aversion to slavery and had personally witnessed the excesses of the 'peculiar institution'.

Having been out of office as governor of Pennsylvania after two terms for only a brief period, the state and nation were shocked to learn of the sudden and unexpected death of the great man on the morning of February 8th, 1873. He was only 54 years old. After a state funeral, and formal and flowery obsequies delivered by the elite of the government of the Commonwealth, and in a large and impressive funereal ceremony, he was laid to rest in Harrisburg Cemetery overlooking the Susquehanna River. Few men had ever had such an impact on the events of their own days. Wherever trouble or a crisis seemed imminent, Geary seemed to appear and play a critical role in the outcome. John White Geary excelled in so many diverse fields and succeeded in accomplishing so much in his 54 years that one can only conclude that Geary was indeed a 'Giant of his times'.

For distinguished services rendered to states and territories where he had lived or acted as elected or appointed official, a number of sites have been named for him:

Geary Street and Boulevard in San Francisco, as well as the John W. Geary School are named for the first Mayor of the city in 1849. As a parting gift to his adopted city of San Francisco which he had served so well, he gave the city the land that later became Union Square.

Geary County, Kansas was originally named "Davis County" in 1855. For several years after the Civil War the citizens of Davis County complained about living in an area named for the President of the Confederate States of America, even though he was Secretary of War when the county was named for him. In 1889, the county's name was changed to honor John W. Geary, Governor of Kansas Territory.

Geary State Park, Kansas. West of Abilene is also named for the former territorial Governor.

Pennsylvania has dedicated two monuments to the memory of Geary as a General in the Civil War: at Gettysburg on Culp's Hill where Geary defended the ground against the enemy; and at his grave in Harrisburg Cemetery. Geary is also memorialized on the Philadelphia Official City Civil War 'Smith' Memorial in West Fairmount Park. There is also a 'Geary Street' named in his honor in South Philadelphia.

There are also commemorative markers at his homes in Mt. Pleasant, and New Cumberland, Pennsylvania.

Geary Hall is a residence hall at Pennsylvania State University in grateful recognition of Geary's tireless promotion of the state university while governor.

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9. Lives. p. 468; Giant. p. 16; Tinckom. p. 6.

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16. Lives. p. 469; Tinckom. p. 47-48.

17. Lives. p. 470; Giant. p. 65; Tinckom. p. 48.
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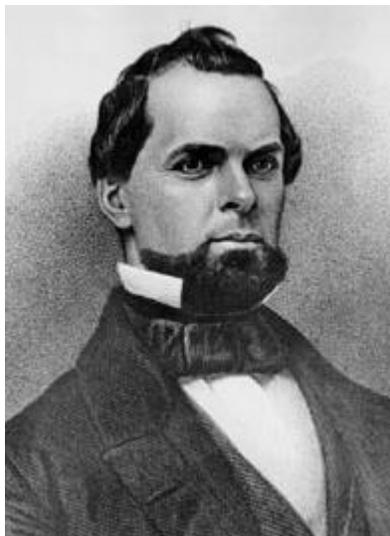
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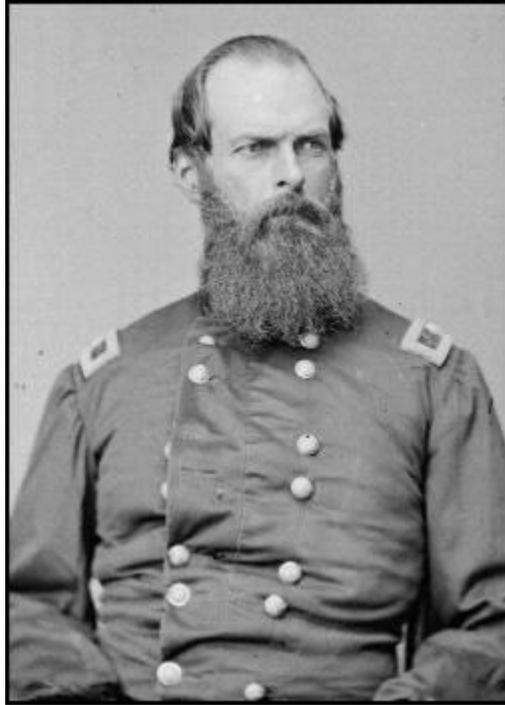
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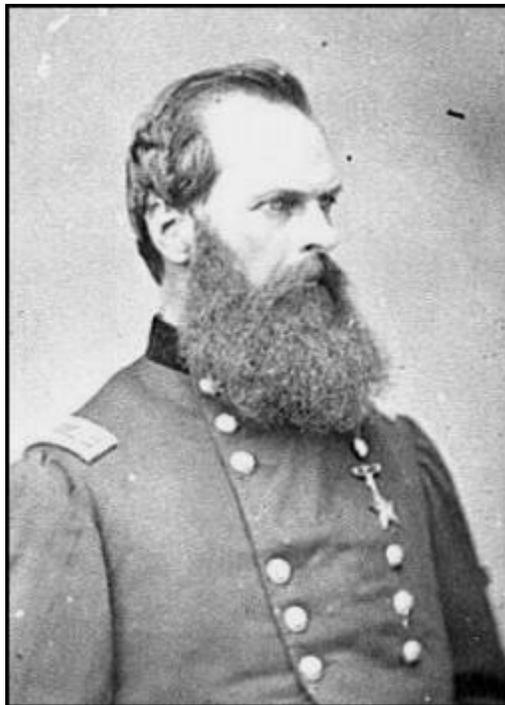
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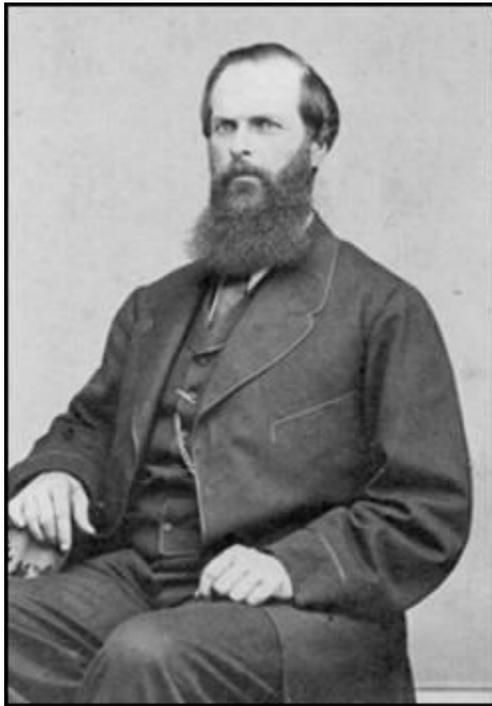
Geary as Territorial Governor of Kansas in 1857



Geary as Brigadier General 1862



Geary as Major General 1865



Geary as Governor of PA. 1872



Last Photo of General / Governor Geary