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Lafayette Foster

Norwich's very own Lafayette Foster was known for his many roles in the local and national government. It is amazing to comprehend that a local man of the rose city was so close to working in the oval office. Although, Mr. Lafayette Foster is remembered for his broader association with our national government, people from Norwich value what he did locally to be apart of history.

Lafayette S. Foster was born on a small farm in Franklin, Connecticut on November 22, 1806. Mr. Foster studied law at Brown University in Rhode Island. He was provided the opportunity to work in Mr. Calvin Goddard's law firm in Norwich. He served as an intern for the former supreme court justice and congressman, before he established his own practice as a prominent Norwich attorney. Additionally, he held a part time job editing the Norwich Republican when he permanently moved to Norwich in 1834. Foster then shifted his career and entered Norwich politics alongside Governor Buckingham. During Lafayette Foster's accomplished political career he served as the mayor of Norwich, Connecticut Senator, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Pro Tempore of the Senate, and a member of the General Assembly seven times.

One issue that divided most was slavery during the Civil War, and the debate began only a year before Foster left for Washington D.C. Mr. Foster was known as a skilled debater and always expressed his views calmly, and unfortunately, the issue of slavery divided Connecticut . The issue resolved around how to limit slavery and whether or not to limit slavery to Western territories. In Norwich, Foster took a stand, he opposed the act of slavery, but he acknowledged

slave holder's rights stated in the Constitution. Foster gave a memorable speech opposing the Missouri Compromise, he also supported a bill that released slaves in Missouri. Foster did not believe however, black people could not vote without a graduation certificate. In 1864, Lafayette Foster did not impress the Connecticut people as he urged the Senate only to focus on abolishing slavery.

Although, it was difficult for Foster to gain an abundance of support at this time, Norwich was honored when Mr. Lafayette was called to the White House. when President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated in 1865, Foster, as President Pro Tempore of the Senate, was next in line for succession and became the acting Vice President of the United States. Foster was even a pall bearers for Lincoln's funeral. Although, it was Easter Sunday, in Norwich bells rang and guns were fired all day in remembrance of the president. Flags also flew at half-staff everywhere throughout the entire day.

In May of 1866, the Republican caucus refused to renominate him for a third term in 1875. Mr. Foster switched parties, trying to win for the House of Representatives as a Democrat, but he was unsuccessful.. Lafayette Foster returned home to Norwich in 1876 where he practiced private law again after mandatory retirement from the Supreme Court. Foster volunteerism included serving as President of the New London County Historical Society and teaching Sunday school at Park Congressional Church. When he died in Norwich in 1880, Foster's home was left to his wife Martha and then was bought by Norwich Free Academy in 1953 and is still being used today. NFA was named as a beneficiary in his will, he requested they hire a lawyer to teach legal studies.

Lafayette Foster's impact on our community is still present on the campus of Norwich Free Academy. His home houses a community room, board room, and connects to the Latham Library offices. Lafayette Foster will always be remembered for his national government service and the mark he left for Norwich.

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