



Portrait of Governor Benjamin Butler (1818-1893)

TO: Jeannine Durkin, Acting Superintendent of Schools

FROM: Robin Desmond, Assistant Superintendent Curriculum,
Instruction & Assessment *Robin Desmond*

DATE: March 1, 2019

RE: *Portrait of Governor Benjamin Butler (1818-1893)*

The following report is in response to the motion by Mayor William Samaras:

Request the Superintendent to see if the LHS Social Studies Department work with Lowell Historic Board administrator on crafting a more fitting testimonial to display with the portrait of Benjamin Butler in Lowell City Hall and request that it be sent back to the City Council for final approval.

Attached to this memorandum is a testimonial to be approved to be sent to the City Council for final approval to be displayed with the portrait of Benjamin Butler located in Lowell City Hall.

I would like to thank Robert DeLossa, Lowell High School History Department Chair, for providing this testimonial. Mr. DeLossa has received approval from Stephen Stowell, Administrator of the Lowell Historic Board, the City of Lowell's historic preservation agency.

Governor Benjamin F. Butler (1818 – 1893)

Painted by Darius Cobb

One of the great success stories – and colorful figures – to come out of Lowell, Benjamin Franklin Butler was born in New Hampshire and moved to Lowell as a youth, where his widowed mother found employment running a boarding house. Butler's experience in that environment influenced his subsequent work and politics. He was one of the first graduates of Lowell High School and later graduated from Colby College. He practiced law in Lowell, supporting progressive causes that included labor rights, and civil rights for minorities and women.

Butler's greatest and most controversial actions came as a general in the Civil War. He was instrumental in ensuring that Washington, DC was not encircled by rebel forces in 1861. He was one of the first Major Generals appointed during the war. At Fort Monroe, Virginia, he devised a legal strategy for freeing slaves who crossed Union lines by calling them Contraband of War. That formulation succeeded; tens of thousands of slaves crossed Union lines to freedom. This led to the abolition of slavery becoming a formal goal of the war for the Union side. However, Butler also was heavy handed in his military governorship of occupied New Orleans (1862). This, along with other aspects of his Civil War service, created a Confederate campaign of vilification that lasts to the present day, with epithets like "Ben the Beast Butler."

Butler went on to serve four terms in Congress and was prominent in the drafting of Reconstruction civil rights legislation. In 1883, Butler became Governor of Massachusetts. He initiated the "long walk" that governors in the Commonwealth take upon leaving office. He ran unsuccessfully for President of the United States in 1884. By the end of his life, he had risen from poverty to become one of the most wealthy and prominent Lowellians of his time.